

**WORDS AND BLESSINGS  
BATAK CATHOLIC DISCOURSES IN NORTH SUMATERA**



**A Dissertation  
Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
of Cornell University  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

**by**

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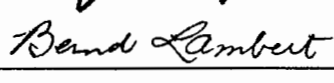
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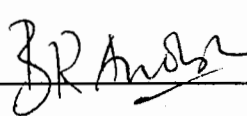
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WORDS AND BLESSINGS  
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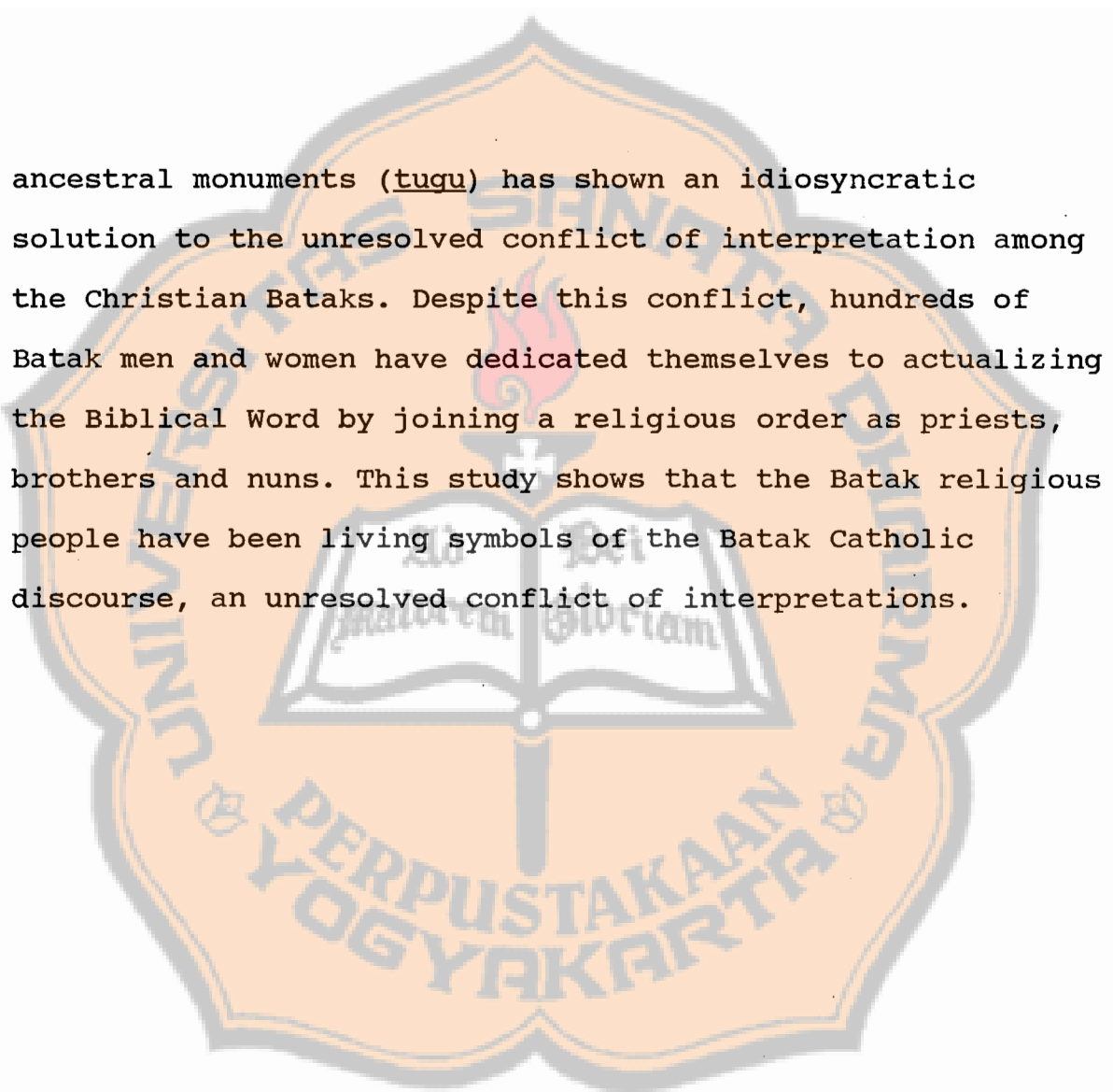
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The Catholic Church in Bataklands, North Sumatera, Indonesia, has attracted hundreds of thousands of the indigenous people through its blessings, works, charities, and educational system. However, the Church's authorized interpretation of the Biblical God's Words has been perceived as being at odds with the Catholic Bataks' traditional notion of discourse. The conflict arises because of the different notions of language used by the Catholic Church as well as by Batak adat to interpret the present day Christian Batak societies with regard to their past.

Based on sixteen months (1986-1987) of field research in Toba Batakland, this study reveals the strategies of the Catholic Church (1934-1987) in dealing with the boundaries of Toba Batak adat ("traditional") words and blessings. The strategies were aimed at dealing with the historical events that occurred in North Sumatera before, during and after Indonesian independence in 1945.

The conclusion discusses the Catholic Bataks' interpretation of the conflict. For the Catholic Church as well as for Batak adat, words convey images which yield meaningful interpretations. The practice of dedicating

ancestral monuments (tugu) has shown an idiosyncratic solution to the unresolved conflict of interpretation among the Christian Bataks. Despite this conflict, hundreds of Batak men and women have dedicated themselves to actualizing the Biblical Word by joining a religious order as priests, brothers and nuns. This study shows that the Batak religious people have been living symbols of the Batak Catholic discourse, an unresolved conflict of interpretations.



### BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Albertus Budi Susanto was born in Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia, on October 3, 1952. He studied anthropology at Universitas Indonesia, Jakarta and began graduate studies at Cornell in Anthropology in 1983.

He was ordained as a Jesuit priest in 1982 after had been educated at Driyarkara School of Philosophy, Jakarta (1974-1976), and Sanata Dharma School of Theology, Yogyakarta (1980-1982).



**For: Siapa aja Asal Pantes**



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In the archdiocese of Medan, North Sumatera, I am especially grateful to archbishop Mgr.Pius Datubara OFM Cap. and his staff who were instrumental in my gaining access to the Catholic Church's life in the Bataklands. The archdiocese's staff of Panitia Kateketik, Komisi Kitab Suci and Komisi Liturgi treated me with their tremendous hospitalities and let me participate in their various activities. I am indebted to the Capuchins, both in the Netherlands and in North Sumatera. The Capuchins of the Medan Region taught me so much about their way of life. My gratitude to many lay Batak Catholics who granted me interviews in many hurias, especially in Pangururan, Palipi and Onanrunggu. J.Ch.C.Tampubolon (Balige), J.Pandiangan and D.J.Sihombing



(Pematang Siantar) and J.M.Siregar (Medan) informed me of the (hi)stories of Batak Catholicism in its earlier stages.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Catholic Church and Toba Batak society both claim that speaking their "traditional" sacred words will give blessings to life. The Tobas believe that hula-hula (wife-giver party) is the proper speaker of the Batak sacred words and the deliverer of the sahala (power, blessings, good fortune) to their boru (wife-receiver party). Why, in the early 1930s, did thousands of rural Tobas join the Catholic Church? One of the answers is that the Tobas considered the Dutch Catholic missionaries as people with the Christian sahala. Moreover, the Dutch Capuchin priests provided Western education, which enabled the Bataks to participate in the modern world.

However, less than four decades later, as some Batak men and women joined their expatriate colleagues to observe a religious life of poverty, obedience and celibacy, a problem arose. The presence of Batak priests, brothers and nuns, who represent a life dedicated to the words of the Biblical God, has challenged the authority of the Batak words of blessing. Somehow, the Catholic Bataks have had to reconcile differences in the notions of historicity constructed in the Biblical words and in the Batak words of blessing. This study found that Catholicism has survived among the Bataks because of the efficaciousness of its discourses.

When two or more Bataks meet each other for the first time, instead of starting to "talk about the weather," martarombo (relating each other's genealogy) is inevitably their first words of conversation. Tarombo is believed to be all Batak peoples' (Angkola, Dairi, Karo, Mandailing, Simalungun and Toba) genealogy. The Bataks, the natives of North Sumateran Highlands, listed in a tarombo are patrilineal descent people.

Three questions usually will be exchanged in a given discussion of martarombo. What is your marga (clan)? Where is your home village? What is your mother's marga? According to the Batak principle of dalihan na tolu (lit: three-cornered hearthstone), the boru supposedly must revere to his hula-hula. A well known Toba Batak dalihan na tolu principle says,

somba marhula-hula,  
elek marboru,  
manat mardongan-tubu.

respect the hula-hula, persuade the boru and beware of the dongan-tubu (people with the same marga name).

The Bataks also consider the hula-hula as the seen god (debata na tarida) who has the sahala needed by their boru. Mgr. Sinaga, the bishop of Sibolga, has said that sahala is the power of the soul and its authority, which is seen as a living and effective power in real manifestation. He writes, "those who exercise sahala enjoy honor and respect from



those on whom the sahala is exercised."<sup>1</sup> Each marga is a hula-hula in relation to some other margas and a boru in relation to others. Moreover, the Bataks have long adopted an exogamous marriage rule with a preference for a cross-cousin marriage (marrying one's mother's brother's daughter).

The deliverance of the blessings for keeping away disorders (sickness, misfortune, suffering, poverty, etc.) is done by way of marhata, uttering the formulaic words of traditional Batak sayings. The sayings are categorized as umpamas (maxims) and umpasas (proverbs).<sup>2</sup> In a Batak discourse, particularly in official (adat) ceremonies, certain sayings proper to the occasion must be recited. In this regard, one of the most often quoted sayings is: "Pantun hangoluan, tois hamagoan," which means, "courteousness (pantun) is life, impudence (tois) is ruin." Midian Sirait, a Batak politician and scholar, noted that in the past, before the Christian missionaries proselytized in the Bataklands, the Bataks had already acknowledged that hata do tondi (word is soul), hata do hangoluan (word is

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<sup>1</sup>. Anicetus B. Sinaga, The Batak High God. Transcendence and Immanence. (St. Augustin: Anthropos Institute, 1983), pp.104 and 203

<sup>2</sup>. The latest publication on Batak cultural value lists only 300 traditional sayings, the oldest one listed 1190 sayings. See: Basyral Harahap & Hotman Siahaan, Nilai Nilai Budaya Batak. (Jakarta: Sanggar Willem Iskander, 1987). Also, Rhein Mission Press, Umpama. Angka na masa di Habatahon. (Pematang Siantar, 1903).



life) and hata do paimboraan (word is power). He mentioned that in the past many Bataks were masters of the traditional sayings.<sup>3</sup>

However, Sirait also mentioned that mishandling a proper saying sometimes can happen to a person. If this occurs, the proper dalihan na tolu speaker - listener status can be ruined. He said that a Batak traditional saying points out a suggestive value which can influence a listener's mind, for example, in the "pantun hangoluan, tois hamagoan." But if a speaker mishandles it and says "tois hangoluan, pantun hamagoan" ,then it ruins the proper advice proposed in the saying for a listener or receiver. My own observation has been that the Bataks also like to quote certain sayings in casual conversation. Outside its official use, in fact, some Bataks usually utter only the first line of a saying (umpama or umpasa) and let their listeners finish it in two possible ways. Some listeners will spontaneously utter the lines left out by the speaker. Others simply keep quiet ... and (I believe) complete the saying in their mind.

A proper and fair dalihan na tolu based discourse, indeed, requires from its participants certain level of mastering the Toba language and its proverbs. After living

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<sup>3</sup>. Midian K.H. Sirait, "Sekitar Arti Dan Makna Perumpamaan Batak Toba, Dahulu Dan Sekarang," in, Bona Pasogit. no.5, no date, pp.23-24.

for about a half year in the Bataklands, one afternoon I was asked to join a local Church leader to go to a coffee-shop. It was in a village in Samosir where many Catholic missionaries used to learn the Toba Batak language. There was a group of people playing chess at a table when we entered the shop. Since I could not speak Toba well, I did not speak much, though I could follow almost all of their conversation. Knowing that I was a recent visitor in their village and, perhaps, due to my broken Toba, someone from the chess table warned the crowd, "You may not fool him." In Toba, mangoto-otoi (to fool) can mean to cheat or to treat another as an idiot. This same man asked the Church leader who I was. I was introduced as a Catholic priest, a Javanese from Semarang. Then, other people asked me (in Indonesian) about my family, etc. Another man asked me later if I was a new priest assigned to the local parish. I answered him that I would stay there a couple of months to learn the language and Batak adat. Someone immediately added, "Yeah ... that is right, all priests in Indonesia know how to speak Toba."

I will cite another case on the Batak discourse in which I was involved. Several times during the course of my language training I inadvertently upset my teacher. I anticipated his answer or interrupted his explanation. One day, he started our lesson by quoting the saying: "pantun hangoluan, tois hamagoan," which he translated for me as

"never assume that you know everything, so that other people will not say that you are ginjang ni roha (haughty)." It seems that my textbook knowledge of Batak culture(s), which made it possible for me to anticipate his words, in fact startled him. It was not how the Batak discourse was supposed to work.

The two conversational cases described above show that words, particularly the words of traditional Batak sayings, are not simply the "true" meaning of what is said. The sayings are images derived and institutionalized in the Batak tarombo (and related matters). Mastering the Batak language and its rhymed sayings, then, is a basic skill needed to deal with any Batak discourse. Perhaps this is one of the reasons the man at the coffee shop warned his colleagues not to attempt to fool me because of my broken Toba. However, it is also clear that the Batak "verbal" images are potentially threatening when they are used "improperly." But the threat may also come from the possibility that the fundamental assumption of the words, the imagined tarombo, fails to work. My textbook knowledge of Batak culture(s), as well as my being a Catholic priest (an unmarried man) and a non-Batak Indonesian (a man without the tarombo) certainly conflicted with the dalihan na tolu principle that someone is a hula-hula in relation to some margas and a boru in relation to others.

What authority do the Batak sayings have? That the

uttering of the sayings creates images means that something from the past has to be reconstructed by the Bataks during the present day, as well as, perhaps, for the future. While conducting research in the Bataklands I often came across various genealogical charts of certain margas. Some of the owners displayed their charts in their living rooms. Some charts were written by hand, others were printed. Present day there are also some authorized charts schematized after a seminar or workshop participated in by the members of a particular marga. There is also a special tarombo chart which is well known by the urban Bataks in particular. It was drawn by Sihite Panderadja in 1941. I saw this tarombo chart for the first time in the living room of the Catholic seminary in Pematang Siantar. Later, I acquire two copies of it, one in a bookstore in Pematang Siantar, and another in a bookstore in Medan.

As a matter of fact, there is no perfect and complete tarombo. I noticed that almost every Batak, particularly when seeing Sihite's tarombo chart for the first time, was quite excited and commented that it was a nice work. But, after looking at it carefully, most of them usually said that there was something, this or that, which was not true or was missing. The Bataks say that any tarombo error is chiefly, due to the lack of a historical record of the Batak marga genealogy. A question of who is the older brother among margas or dongan tubu men is always the most common

disputable issue of a tarombo. An older brother always gets the better jambar (official portion or share) of money, meat, speech time, etc. as it is prescribed in the Batak adat. The fact that in the past there were practices where a Batak man marries more than one woman has made the issue of older or younger brother status more difficult - the "older brother" is not necessarily determined on one's age. Clandestine marriages, child adoptions, and slavery (in the past), for example, are other factors which make the tarombo never perfect and therefore disputable. The Dutch colonial government recorded and schematized the marga people of the Bataklands and their tarombo only in the early years of the twentieth century. Siahaan in his book "The History of The Batak Margas' Development" listed 299 Batak margas.<sup>4</sup> Every Batak knows that each Batak marga's genealogy contains a mythologized part. That is the unnumbered part closest to the center from circle number three shown in Sihite's chart below (see Illustration 1, page 13).

A certain notion of "knowledge" somehow has been intended in Sihite's chart. The present day Batak people mostly get their marga names from circle number six in the chart. But some Bataks have preferred the more distinctive marga name(s) as they are written in circles number seven, eight and the following ones. I know a Samosir man (from one

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<sup>4</sup>. N.A.I. Siahaan & H. Pardede, Sedjarah Perkembangan Marga-marga Batak. (Balige: Indra, 1956).



of the margas descended from the Radja Lontoeng) who was in his late thirties. He showed me his official Samosir genealogical chart and claimed that he is the eighteenth generation of Datoe Ronggoer (see: Radja Lontoeng's descendant in the chart's circle number seven). In terms of the chronological record, a proper historian may count how many years ago Datoe Ronggoer lived in the Bataklands. However, Sihite's chart does not give any clue of a chronological history. Rather, it simply gives an awkward system of decimal numeration, beginning with number three and stopping at number eight. The chart says likely that there is no important reason to put the numbers supposedly previous to number three nor after number eight. This is due, I think, to the space after circle number eight. There is no more division of marga names after it. The Samosir chart shown to me, for example, indicates that it has had the same Samosir names for the previous fifteen generations. Consequently, it can be said that beyond the awkward decimal numeration (from three to eight), the division of the marga name - which certainly needs space and time as it is depicted in an international map as well as in the calendrical images placed at the four corners of the chart - is not needed any more. It is not important any more. This does not mean that there are no other "unimportant" things proposed by the same chart. Only a reader who has access to the personal message left by its author (or, more precisely,

drawer) may know the "unimportant" things. Down at the right corner of the chart, O.H. Sihite Panderadja gives a clue. He says, "If there is anything more or anything less than it should be, may it be refined please. Thank you." He assumed that anyone of his dalihan na tolu colleagues who comes across the tarombo and understands his message, will find the "unimportant thing" about it. The place and date "Medan 11 Februari 1941" located down at the left corner explains Sihite's message further. The notion of time (February 11, 1941) and the notion of space (Medan) explain when and where he stopped drawing his chart. This means that the drawer and his reader(s) will look at the chart in a way similar to looking at a photograph. For the Bataks, looking at the chart is not different from looking at a photograph of a group of marga people. The marga people, the Bataks, who certainly do anything, anywhere and at anytime, and yet are still imagined as being related to each other - are the same charted people. It is left to the Bataks, one assumes, to activate their memories on the printed tarombo and to explain exactly what happened before and after "Medan 11 Februari 1941." The chart is not only archaizing the tarombo observed by the Bataks, but also evoking martarombo and its imagined related matters.

Many other events have happened in the Batak societies outside as well as before and after "Medan, February 11, 1941." Accordingly, the Catholic Bataks also have

established many other images which somehow manage to hold on the events. The Catholic Church's history and tradition as the interpretations of the Biblical Word are by no means accepted without conflicts by the Catholic Bataks who observe martarombo and marhata. The conflicts and the indigenous "solutions" of the Catholic images established in North Sumatera, in the Bataklands in particular, since the early 1930s until late 1987 will be described and analysed in the following chapters of this dissertation.

The first three chapters will describe the Batak Catholic notion of sahala. Its oddity in the hands of the expatriate missionaries, its boundaries which transcend the Indonesian nationalism before, during and after the Indonesian independence (1945), and its transformed image in the hands of the indigenous religious people will be elaborated respectively.

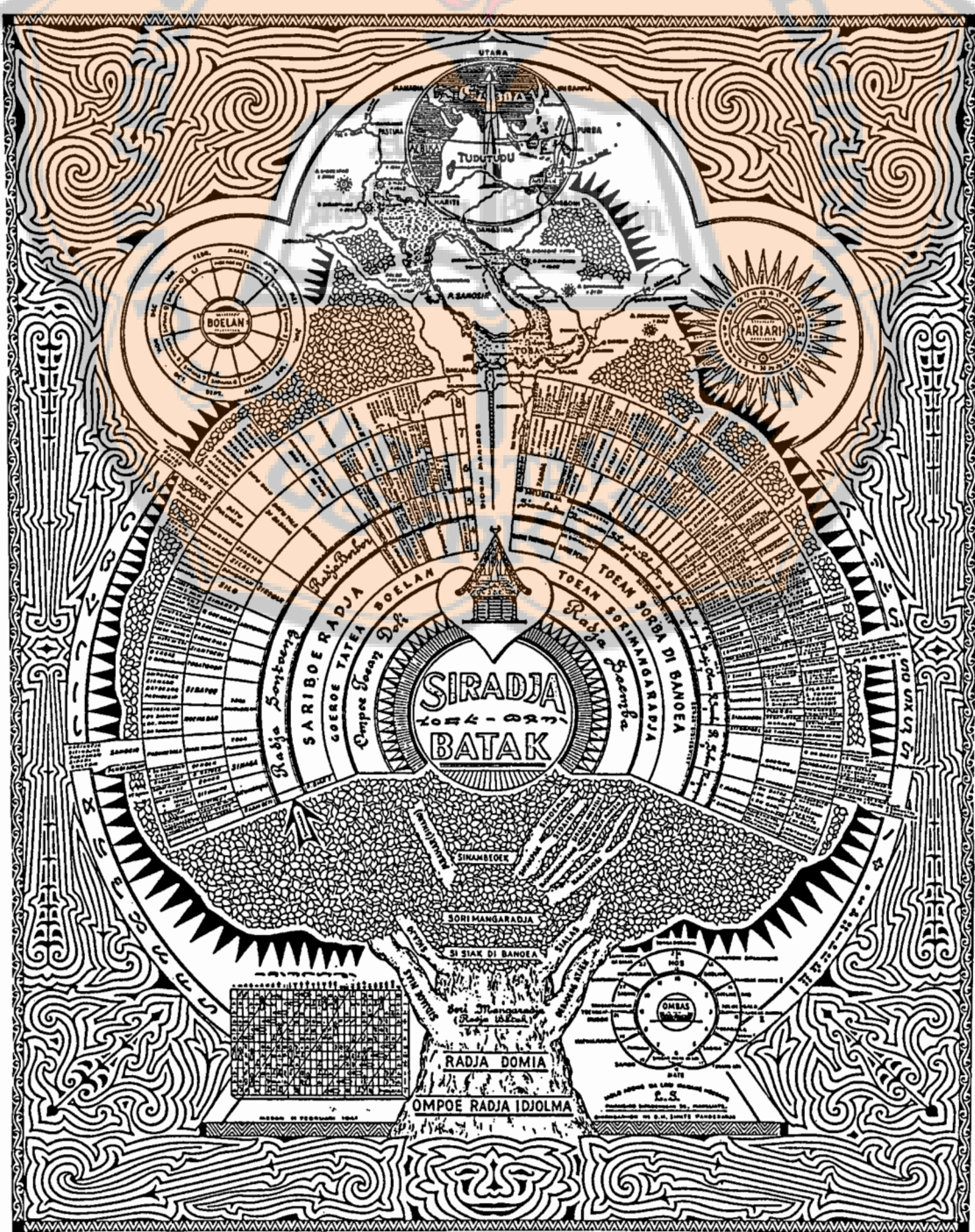
According to the teachings of the Catholic Church, the source of sahala is the Biblical God. Since the late 1970s, the Catholic Church in the archdiocese of Medan, North Sumatera, has provided various training courses for lay Catholics. The courses are designed to help the participants activate the words of the Biblical God vis-a-vis the traditional practice of exercising the blessings of the hula-hula in any given Catholic Batak discourse. Some idiosyncracies pertaining to the Biblical words, as noted in these training course, will be described in the three



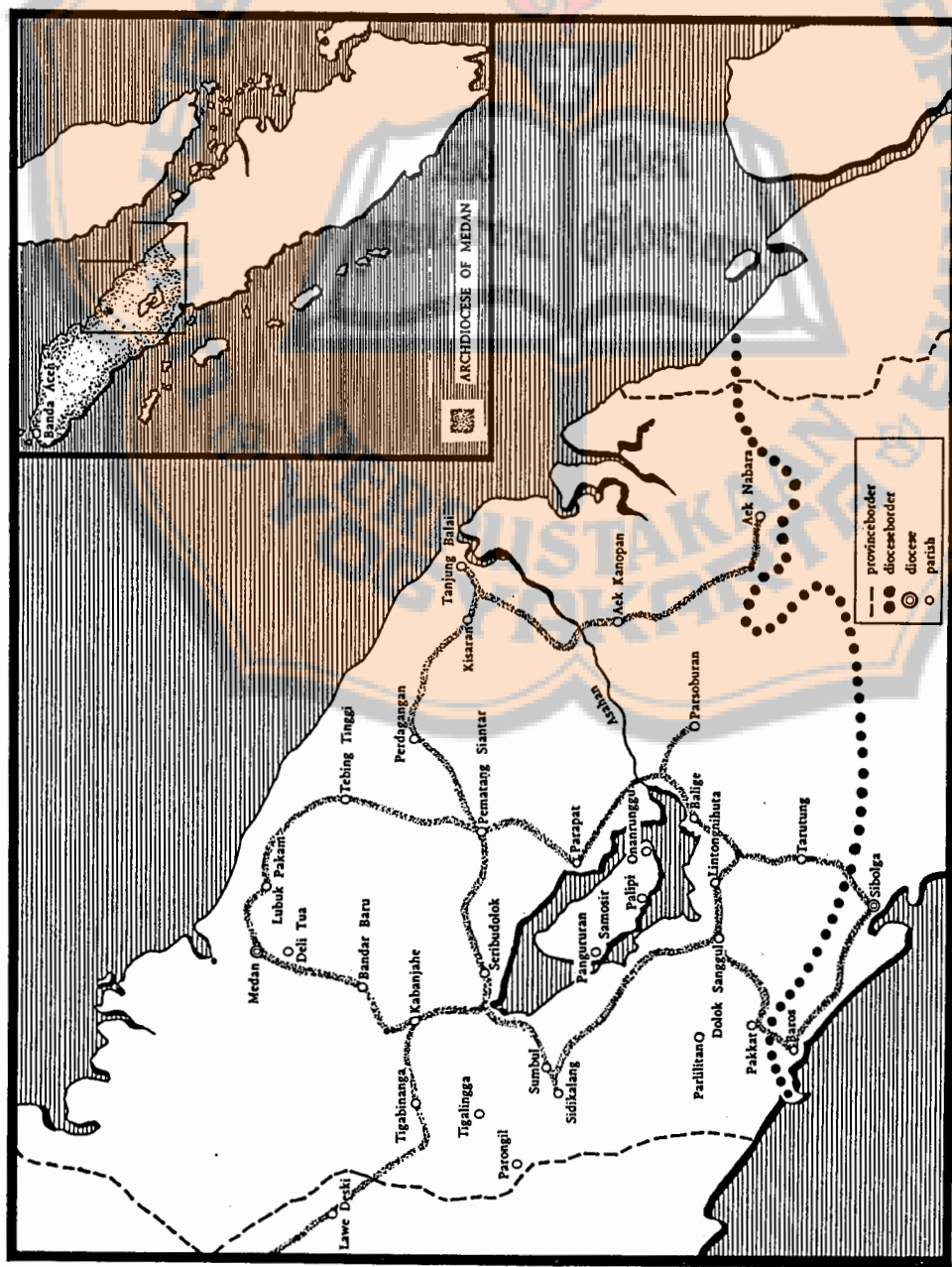
chapters of part two.

With regard to the Batak notions of marhata and martarombo, Catholicism, to some extent, is idiosyncratically interpreted by the Catholic Bataks. The interpretation actually do not alienate any Catholic Batak from his or her "Community of interpretation." Chapters Seven and Eight show two instances of the Community of interpretation from the views of the Batak religious people and of lay people respectively. My note in the concluding chapter will clearly explain how distinct the representation of the interpretative words is for the reality of the Community of Catholic Bataks.

Illustration 1.  
A Batak Tarombo (genealogical tree)  
illustrated by O.H. Sihite Panderadja, 1941.



**Illustration 2.**  
 A map of the archdiocese of Medan,  
 North Sumatera - Indonesia.<sup>5</sup>



<sup>5</sup>. Source: Pusat Penelitian Atma Jaya, Archdiocese of Medan, North Sumatera Indonesia (Jakarta, 1981), p.16.



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PART ONE

INTERPRETING SAHALA, THE BATAK NOTION OF BLESSING

Chapter One

THE ODDITY OF CATHOLIC SAHALA

In December 5, 1934, by the most merry annual celebration of Christmas, the first Catholic missionary had already settled in Balige, a small town by Toba Lake in the heartland of the Toba Bataks. He was a Dutch Capuchin Franciscan priest. Almost a half century later, Toba Bataks are the most Catholicized Batak people in North Sumatera. The 1979 statistics of the archdiocese of Medan showed a total 275,609 Catholic Bataks. There were 217,002 Tobas, 36,078 Karos, 17,035 Simalunguns, 5,433 Pakpaks, 61 Angkolas and the rest are non-Batak Catholics (5,638 Chinese, 1,309 Javanese, 143 Niasans and 754 others).<sup>1</sup> The priest's Capuchin colleagues actually had proselytized in North Sumatera since 1912. The Catholic Church mission entered the Batak lands after two important historical events occurred in North Sumatera. The Lutheran Rhenish Mission, a West German mission association, started in the Batak lands in 1861 and proselytized successfully since then. In 1863, the first plantation estate owned by foreign investors was established in Deli - "The Dollar Land of the East" - the

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<sup>1</sup>. Pusat Penelitian Atma Jaya, The Archdiocese of Medan, North Sumatera. 1981 (Jakarta, 1981), p.29.

neighboring area of the Batak lands. Since then the missionaries, the planters and the colonial government of Dutch East Indies worked together, though each one of them had their own main interest.

Similar to the earlier German Lutheran Mission, the Catholic missionaries did not overlook the utilization of common proselytization methods and infra-structures such as a school system and public health services. However, a certain Catholic theological issue and the characteristics of the Dutch Capuchin life-style have become important factors in the successful Catholic proselytization among the Bataks, the Toba Bataks in particular.

#### THE INTERESTS OF CATHOLIC MISSION IN THE NETHERLANDS

The work of the Catholic mission in the Dutch East Indies cannot be separated from the life of the Catholic Church in the Netherlands during the last century and the first half of this century. When the French occupied the Netherlands early in the last century, Dutch Catholics were no longer second class citizens within the Protestant majority society and state. Since that time religious freedom was guaranteed by the new government even it continued after the occupation. However, in 1845 there was a dispute between the NEI (Netherlands East Indies) Governor

General and Bishop Yakobus Grooff, the Catholic Church's chief in the NEI. Three Dutch Catholic priests who were accused of seeking more worldly business for their own interests rather than giving spiritual services were suspended from their office by the Bishop. Since the Catholic priests at that time were paid by the NEI government and under its authority, the Governor retaliated and ordered the bishop to leave for the Netherlands in January 19, 1846. Hearing the loss of religious freedom in the NEI, Catholics in the Netherlands were furious and appealed to the government. In 1847, an agreement (Nota der Punten) was signed between the Vatican representative and the Dutch government in the Hague. The agreement stated that the assignment of Catholic priests in the NEI would be done by the Bishop. General Governor, however, had to be consulted about the assignment in order to keep the given missionary area in peace and order. Later in 1854, a colonial law, Rules of the Netherlands East Indian Government's Policy (Reglement op het beleid der Regeering van Nederlandsch Indie) article 123 was issued as an addition to the 1847 agreement. It said that although there was a Church - State separation, to ensure a peaceful and orderly colonial society, an assignment of a Catholic priest in NEI could not be given by the Bishop without the

Governor's permit.<sup>2</sup>

By the second half of the nineteenth century the Catholic Church in the Netherlands had a great interest in mission work. This was due, among others reasons, to the Dutch Catholics' enthusiasm in acknowledging their obedience to the Roman Papacy in contrast to the dominant Protestantism of the Netherlands.<sup>3</sup> Two pontifical mission associations, namely the Association for the Propagation of Faith and the Association of the Holy Child, were established in 1840 and 1848 respectively. Until the present day these associations have the primary task of collecting contributions and donations from Catholic adults and children (through their schools) to support missionary work. For example, in the early 1930s every Dutch adult member of the Propagation of the Faith had to contribute two and a half cents weekly and each Dutch child member of the Holy Child had to give one cent weekly. At that time there were at least two million Catholics in the Netherlands. Regular dinner parties, festivals, shows and exhibitions of missionary work, etc., organized to raise money, contributed

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<sup>2</sup>. See, no author, Dutch Mission (1925?), p.8 also, Sekretariat Nasional Konggergasi Maria, Sedjarah Geredja Katolik di Indonesia (Jakarta, 1971) pp.44-45. and, J.A. Th Weitjens, De Vrijheid Der Katholieke Prediking in Nederlands-Indie van 1900 tot 1940 (Jakarta, 1969), excerpta.

<sup>3</sup>. See, Tom Jacobs, "Tugas Pengutusan Gereja dalam Masyarakat Indonesia," in Rohani (March, 1987), p.98.

directly to various Catholic mission agencies in the Netherlands. There were also the so called "missie-busje" (mission boxes) -- sealed cans, put in Catholic schools and homes of Catholic families. These boxes were there so that children (and youth) could put money into the 'mission boxes' rather than buy candy, etc. When the box was filled, it was sent to Catholic missionaries in one of the Dutch colonies.<sup>4</sup> There were Catholic missions in the three Dutch colonies. Dutch East Indies, Surinam and Curacao were in the hands of missionaries of the Jesuits (1859), Redemptorists (1865) and the Dominicans (1868) respectively.

The Catholic Party's success in winning a better position in the Netherlands government in 1901, moreover, caused Dutch Catholics to become more closely involved in mission work.<sup>5</sup> A former missionary who served in Indonesia believes that at that time involvement in mission affairs for the Dutch Catholics was one of the few opportunities for them to participate in national affairs of the Protestant dominant Netherlands, particularly with regard to the government's policies on its colonies in East Indies as well

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<sup>4</sup>. See, Geredja Katolik. XXV, (October-November 1933), p.174. Also, Borneo Almanak.1925, pp.69-70.

<sup>5</sup>. C.L.M. Penders, Colonial Education Policy and Practice in Indonesia. 1900-1942 (Ph.D. dissertation, Australian National University, 1968), p.43.



as in the West Indies.<sup>6</sup> Fund raising for missionary work was successful since participation in missionary work also gave contributors a sense of being "nationalists." In 1920 another missionary association, the pontifical Charity Work of the Holy Throne, was established in the Netherlands. Unlike the two former associations, donations collected by this association went directly to the office of the Pope in Rome and would be used primarily to support the training of indigenous seminarians in the missions. Also, it has become very common for some of the missionaries' relatives or friends to "adopt" indigenous seminarians as their "brothers," in the "Tropical Netherlands."

Moreover, modern transportation and communication has also made the "Tropics" and its exoticism better known to the Dutch people in general and to the Dutch Catholics in particular. Some Dutch Capuchins have noted that to do missionary works among the Bataks in Samosir and the areas around Toba Lake is imaginatively similar to the area in which Jesus conducted his mission around Sea Galilee in the Holy Land.<sup>7</sup> The missionary mentioned previously recounted his experiences: "Thanks to modern transportation and mass media, ... We could imagine, then, that Indonesia at that

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<sup>6</sup>. Personal interview with Rev.J.van den Bercken S.J. in 1986, Nijmegen, the Netherlands.

<sup>7</sup>. See, Borneo Almanak. 30 jr.1940. pp.92-96, and P.Gentilis Aster OFMCap. Een Volk Ontdekt Christus. De Katholieke Missie Onder de Bataks Op Sumatra (Voorhout: 1959), p.89.

time was not too different from the Netherlands, in terms of a safe place to live". He also said that he was impressed when, looking through one of the Dutch Catholic mission periodicals, he came across a photograph of his schoolmate who was already a missionary in Indonesia. Many publications and scholarly works about the "Tropical Netherlands," he said, made the mission areas in Indonesia quite familiar to the imagination of the people in the "fatherland," the Dutch, and also gave a sense of a safe, secure and pleasurable working environment.

In the case of North Sumatera, for example, early in this century, the "Dollar Land of the East" was in great need of Europeans trained in the plantation business. Modern and safer transportation enabled many Europeans to come to North Sumatera together with their spouses and children. An European, safe and pleasurable life condition, then, should be established in North Sumatera. Also, schools and hospitals for the European planters and colonial officials (some of them run by Christian missions) had to be provided.<sup>8</sup> In addition to protect the safe and secured life condition for the Europeans, improving the life of the natives actually was by no means less important. In this

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<sup>8</sup>. See, A.L. Stoler, Capitalism and Confrontation in Sumatra's Plantation Belt, 1870-1979 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), pp.17-19. She also noted that in 1884 there were only 688 Europeans, and in 1930 there were already 11,000 Europeans involved directly or indirectly in the plantation business in North Sumatera.

respect, L.E. William argues,

... schools were opened merely to provide literate clerks for the colonial bureaucracies and the foreign economic enterprises ..., hospitals and public health services were established simply to maintain the productivity of the local labour force and to prevent plagues which might threaten the safety of the colonial rulers and their families.<sup>9</sup>

It is recorded that in 1924 the Catholic Church in the Netherlands had sent to the missions in the East Indies as well as to the West Indies about 1500 priests, 765 seminarians or religious brothers and 1424 nuns. "Thus, in a population of about two and a half millions Catholics, out of every 675 Catholics there was one male or female missionary" in the Netherlands.<sup>10</sup>

#### THE DUTCH CAPUCHIN MISSIONARY STRATEGY

Many factors explain why the Dutch Capuchin priests did not enter the Bataklands until late 1934 although they had been in Sumatera since 1912. Obviously, the 1854 colonial law article 123 was one of the factors for the delay. Later in 1925, a new colonial law of the Netherlands East Indian

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<sup>9</sup>. Lea E. Williams, "The Ethical Program and The Chinese of Indonesia," in Journal of South East Asian History (1961, 2,2), p.35.

<sup>10</sup>. Nederland en de Missien. Uitgeverij door den Priester-Missiebond in Nederland bij gelegenheid van de Vaticaansche Missie tentoonstelling in het Heilig jaar 1925. (1925), p.147.

Government's Guidelines (Wet op de Staatsinrichting van Nederlandsch Indie) article 177 was issued in order to revise the 1854 law. A prohibition stating that there would be no more than one mission in a particular area was added to the 1854 law. Since 1861 the Bataklands were closed to all Christian missions except the Rhenish Mission Association pioneered by the famous German missionary, I.L. Nommensen. However, there were social, political and economic changes in North Sumatera, including the Bataklands, during the first decades of this century.

The booming of the plantation economy business in East Sumatera during the first two decades of the present century somehow accelerated Catholic missionary work in that area, in Medan in particular. A better Catholic school system and public health service provided for the European planters and their families as well as for the natives was known well in the history of North Sumatera. In the 1920s and early 1930s many Catholic churches, schools, clinics and hospitals were established in Medan (1923) and other towns in the areas neighboring to the Bataklands: Tanjung Balai (1926), Pematang Siantar (1931), Berastagi (1934) and Sibolga (1929). Early in this century, Medan, became the central city for the plantation business in North Sumatera. At first, the Catholic mission served the Western community, the Chinese community and a little group of South Indian people. Catholic nuns and brothers of various Dutch

religious congregations helped the Capuchin missionaries to proselytize "the unseen things by providing the seen things," the typical missionary strategy utilized by some Protestant missionaries as well as by the Catholic missionaries in NEI.<sup>11</sup> For example, in 1923 there were two high schools for the Europeans and one high school (with Dutch language) for the Chinese people in Medan. A modern and luxurious hospital run by Breda based Catholic nuns was established in Medan in 1930.<sup>12</sup> In Medan, a Dutch high school and its dormitory for natives (mostly Bataks) was established in 1927 and in 1932 respectively. This boarding school, named St. Francis Assisi, advertised:

This boarding school accepts boys and girls who attend the Catholic Dutch Native School as well as the Government Junior Highschool in Medan. The condition of this boarding school is MODERN (sic), the staffs are Europeans; study hours and leisure time is always under the supervision of the Europeans. The meals are advised by medical doctors. Sports for the students' health are available such as, soccer, badminton, hand-ball and athletics ... Its clinic is run by European nuns. Courses on typing and stenography are also available.<sup>13</sup>

As it was stated by some of the early Dutch Capuchin missionaries in the Batak lands whom I interviewed, the

<sup>11</sup>. See, Nn.A.L. Franzh S.H., Benih Yang Tumbuh IX. Suatu Survey Mengenai Gereja Masehi Halmahera (Jakarta: DGI-LPS, 1976), p.5.

<sup>12</sup>. Oostkust van Sumatra Instituut, Kroniek 1930. Mededeling 19.

<sup>13</sup>. Veritas, Vijf en Twintig Jaar Padang Missie (1937), p.73.



Batak pupils of this Catholic school were the best agents to promote Catholic Church services to their families and relatives in the Bataklands whenever they visited their home villages. A letter of recommendation from a local parish priest usually was required for the school's enrollment.

The world economic depression during the early 1930s also caused some changes in colonial policy in the Bataklands. The work of the Rhenish Mission, its school system in particular, so far was subsidized by the government. Due to the world economic depression, the colonial government had to reduce and to slow down its educational program and subsidy.<sup>14</sup> Private initiatives in providing educational programs, consequently, were most welcome to the government. The colonial government considered the opening of the Bataklands to other Christian missions in December 1934 as a blessing. Not only could the natives be continuously provided with the "Ethical Program" by way of the Westernized school system organized by the private agencies, but also these Westernized schools could minimize the growth of the "wild school," run by Muslim as well as by nationalist native groups.<sup>15</sup> In his January 19, 1931 letter to Governor General of NEI, B.Schrieke, the director of Department of Religion and Education stated that

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<sup>14</sup>. C.L.M. Penders 1968, op.cit.

<sup>15</sup>. Bendera Kita. a local weekly newspaper published in Tarutung. (January 19, 1935).

he did not object to the fact that some Catholic missionaries had already "visited" the Batak lands. He believed that they would not really damage the "peaceful and orderly" colonial life. He felt that Catholic missionary work would provide good education to the local societies in the NEI.<sup>16</sup>

Why did the Capuchin missionaries wish to establish schools in the hinterland of North Sumatera, in the Batak lands in particular? During the first years of their mission in the Batak lands, the Capuchins usually claimed that they primarily went to the areas of the not yet Christianized Batak villages. Mostly, those areas were inhabited by the less prosperous and less educated Bataks. One of the first Capuchin missionaries in the Bataklands reported that it was impossible to proselytize the natives without providing them Westernized schools. It was a necessity.<sup>17</sup> Among the first questions the Bataks asked of the Catholic missionary in Balige in 1934 were: "Will we have a school from you... Would you build schools like the ones in Medan?".<sup>18</sup> Some of the first Catholic missionaries said that the usual procedure in proselytizing the Bataks was: some Batak

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<sup>16</sup>. Letter of Departement van Onderwijs en Eeredienst, no.20.x/F. Geheim. 19 Januari 1931. See, ARA, Mailrapporten (1928-1940), Geheim Eeredienst: 158 geh/31.

<sup>17</sup>. Veritas 1937, op.cit. p.36.

<sup>18</sup>. Aster Gentilis 1959, op.cit. p.89.

villagers would send their representatives to the nearest local Catholic priest, hand him an official letter of invitation signed by the villagers. The priest would then visit the village and later if it was agreed upon, a multi-purpose hall would be built on a piece of land provided by one of the villagers.<sup>19</sup> A Catholic school teacher would be assigned there to teach the local children at the primary school level. This teacher also taught catechism classes and conducted religious services on Sundays. Later some graduates of this village primary school would continue to study at higher levels at (Catholic) schools in the nearby towns or cities as far as Medan or Java. Most parents wanted to send their children to this kind of "modern" school to prepare them for jobs in various governmental as well as private business offices. Some old Catholic Bataks in Samosir still remember that one priest told them that "the public services in the Bataklands would be better organized if at least there was one Catholic civil servant in every governmental office."<sup>20</sup> A missionary acknowledged that a school has been the meeting point where proselytization of

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<sup>19</sup>. The Capuchin priests: Revs. Elpidius van Duynhoven, Oscar Nuyten and Beatus Jenniskens gave that information to the author. They are some of the first Catholic missionaries in the Bataklands.

<sup>20</sup>. That priest is the late Rev. Benjamin Dijkstra OFM Cap. He said that to the Batak Catholics in Onan Runggu, one of the Catholic parishes in Samosir where the author did his research.



the older as well as of the younger could be organized. He reported, "At our simple school, the children learn to read, write, count, set a little bit familiarity with 'do - re - mi', obtain a full Malay; and religious instruction." Moreover, he stated that a little instruction in Dutch and higher education would give the Bataks a chance to get better jobs, for example, lower clerical jobs so that they could get away from starvation and poverty.<sup>21</sup>

Working among the natives of Indonesia also had a special value for the Dutch Capuchin missionaries. In addition to proselytizing among the native Dayaks (as well as among the Chinese settlers) in West Kalimantan since 1905, the Dutch Capuchin missionaries continued the mission in Sumatera left by the Jesuits in 1912. The Jesuits concentrated their mission in Java. By the second World War, the Catholic mission in Sumatera was centralized in the West Coast region. The Catholic Church worked primarily for the Europeans - government officials and military personnels. Padang, located in the dominant Muslim area and in Minangkabau territory was the residence of the Vicariate Bishop. Despite some succes in proselytizing among the Chinese in the city of Padang and in small towns on the West Coast of Sumatera, the first Capuchin missionaries had a

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<sup>21</sup>. Veritas 1937, op.cit. p.36-37.

hard time in their work among the natives of West Sumatera.<sup>22</sup> Because of the Christianization by the Lutheran Rhenish Mission since the middle of the last century, the Toba Bataklands have been known well as the dominant Protestant area. This Batak Christianization, it has been argued, has acted as a political wedge between the two rebellious Muslim areas of Aceh and Minangkabau.<sup>23</sup> There has so far been no majority Christianized ethnic group in Sumatera but the Toba Bataks. Actually, it was not until they were permitted to work in the Bataklands that the Dutch Capuchins could claim that they really "fruitfully" proselytized among the natives of Sumatera. Since Medan, then, was considered as providing a brighter future for Catholic missionary work and indeed, is located in the area next to the well known Bataklands, the office of the Vicariate Bishop of Sumatera was moved from Padang to Medan. This decision was made in 1941, but, due to the Japanese occupation, it could not be done until 1946.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>. L. Fah OFMCap. "Sejarah Gereja Katolik di Keuskupan Agung Medan", in DokPen Kantor Waligereja Indonesia. Sejarah Gereja Katolik Indonesia. vol.3A (Ende: Arnoldus, 1974), p.16.

<sup>23</sup>. See, Lance Castles, The Political Life of a Sumatran Residency, Tapanuli 1915-1940 (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1972), p.170.

<sup>24</sup>. L. Fah OFMCap. 1974, op.cit. p.27.

DEALING WITH THE CATHOLIC SAHALA AND ITS RUMORS

What was the reaction of the Toba Bataks to the coming of the Catholic mission their home land? As a matter of fact, by 1934 when the first Dutch Capuchin missionary settled in Balige, two other Catholic mission centers in Sibolga (1929) and Pematang Siantar (1931) located in the vicinity of the Bataklands had already been established. Balige was a good choice for the first center of the Catholic missionaries work within the Bataklands was a good choice. Balige has been the central and largest weekly market place for the Toba Bataks who live on the western side of Toba Lake and its Samosir island. Some of these weekly visitors certainly were the first contact persons with whom the Catholic missionaries dealt. C.J.Ch. Tampubolon, one of the first lay Catholic religious teachers, and who was born in Balige, mentioned that when a Capuchin missionary first settled in his hometown, a lot of Batak people especially from outside Balige areas visited him day and night. Questions and answers on the Catholic Church's teachings and activities as well as on trivial issues such as the skirt-like brown cassock worn by the missionary were exchanged. "It was like a storm," Tampubolon said.<sup>25</sup> News as well as rumors about the coming of the

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<sup>25</sup>. Personal interview in Balige, 1986.

Catholic Church which was considered as a competitor of the (German) Lutheran Church was quickly spread all over the Toba Bataklands.

About one month after the first Capuchin missionary had stayed in Balige, it was reported in the local newspaper that there were already 20 baptized Toba Bataks and another 40 people who were still in preparation.<sup>26</sup> The newspaper reporter even met personally with the missionary (Rev. van Rossum) and pretended that he was interested in becoming a Catholic. He wrote, "The priest, then, reacted: 'do you want money too? Well, this is what the outsiders always say about the Roman Catholic Church mission. Absolutely, it is not true. But, if the money will be utilized for food, ... of course, we will help people so that they will not starve'."<sup>27</sup> It seems that the availability of financial support made the Capuchin mission in the Bataklands somehow could attract the Bataks' curiosity about the new Christian Church.

In 1937, not more than two years after the beginning of the Catholic mission, it was recorded that there were 12 Capuchin priests working in the Bataklands. They established 6 growing central mission posts and 100 outstations and built 23 church/school halls. There were already about 3000

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<sup>26</sup>. Bendera Kita. January 19, 1935

<sup>27</sup>. Ibid.

baptized Catholic Toba Bataks and 9000 candidates. At the end of 1939, 5 years after the opening of the Bataklands to the Catholic mission, there were 14,000 Batak Catholics and 30,000 candidates for baptism. And yet, the Vicariate Bishop of North Sumatera at that time, the late Bishop Brans, still said: "There are still 956,000 Bataks to be converted, 95 % more!"<sup>28</sup>

Personal relationship between the missionary and his proselytized people has become one of the most important factors for such a successful mission in the Bataklands.

Nommensen, the well known Batak missionary wrote in 1890:

People crowded in on me from all sides. They all clamour for teachers and missionaries who represent some kind of warrant of peace and prosperity. At any rate we proceed under God's guidance. The victory of the Kingdom of God is assured.<sup>29</sup>

If a Batak chief of a district or village was Christianized, usually many of his relatives particularly within the same marga, would join him in entering the same Church. Of course some early Catholic missionaries said that they were quite uneasy about receiving and baptizing this mass of people.

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<sup>28</sup>. The Capuchins, De Hand Aan Den Ploeg. Het Missiewerk van de Capucijnen op Borneo en Sumatra (Tilburg: 1940), p.132-136. For a comparative example: after about 25 years of proselytization among the natives (1898-1923) the Catholic mission in Central Java only had 3500 baptized Javanese. See, NN. Dutch Mission.(1925), p.18.

<sup>29</sup>. Peter Beyerhaus and Henry Lefever, The Responsible Church and The Foreign Mission (London: The World Dominion Press, 1964), p.75.



They acknowledged that they only prepared and gave basic and very simple instructions on the characteristics of Catholic teachings. First of all, they had to baptize the candidates since they already had opened a personal relationship with them, at least through their representative traditional (adat) leader. These Capuchin missionaries assumed that the proper knowledge of Church teachings would be given at a later date. A former Capuchin missionary, now retired and living in the Netherlands, acknowledged that in the first months of his mission he hesitated to baptize the Batak candidates without first giving them the proper catechism. He wrote a letter to the Vicariate Bishop in Padang for guidance. The Bishop replied that he had a personal trust in the missionary's work so that he could baptize the Bataks if they could memorize and restate the following four basic Catholic teachings:

1. Belief in one God.
2. God's Son had become a man and died on the cross on behalf of our salvation.
3. God will bless us for our good deeds. and,
4. God will punish (our) vices.<sup>30</sup>

It is typical of Capuchin Franciscan spirituality that the success of their work is based primarily upon the personality of their members. A Capuchin author described:

The Capuchin worker has always been at his best when laboring as a pioneer or free-lance or when acting in a capacity in which a personal equation is of more value than impersonal means or

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<sup>30</sup>. Personal interview with Rev. Beatus Jenniskens OFM Cap. Tilburg, the Netherlands, 1986.



programme; a knight-errant of St. Francis's ideal fraternity, rather than a soldier in organized battallions of an army.<sup>31</sup>

The retired missionary mentioned previously believed that at the time he was working in the Bataklands many of his folk actually did not really know the "official" differences between Catholicism and Protestantism. He mentioned, for example, the devotional practices to the Lady Mary and praying the rosary (it used to be recited on every Saturday evening) were the clearest differences people could see between Catholicism and Protestantism. He said that (only) because of internal conflicts on political, social, economic and kinship affairs instead of religious reasons, a Batak Christian could easily leave his/her former Church for another one. Some Protestant ministers even thanked him - who was supposedly considered as their competitor - because their folk who left for the Catholic Church actually had been in unreconcilable conflict with their former Church. The Protestant minister said to him that it's better to join another Christian Church rather than just be estranged. Sometimes while in retirement (in a Capuchin convent in Tilburg, the Netherlands) he still believes that despite their lack of knowledge on the official Catholic teachings, his personal relationship with the Catholic Bataks is the

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<sup>31</sup>. Father Cuthbert OSFC, The Capuchins. A Contribution to the History of the Counter Reformation (London: Sheed & Ward, 1928), p.370.

guarantee of their Catholicism. He says,

I doubt whether the Bataks are really Catholic people. I always remember and ask (my self?) which one I have to choose: one person with 100 percent Catholicism or 100 persons with one percent Catholicism each. And I used to say to my Batak people that I like all of them, you who are in front of me. No one would be a real 100 percent Catholic. Who would bravely claim this?<sup>32</sup>

Undoubtedly, suspicion and conflict broke out between the Rhenish Mission (as the dominant Christian mission in the Bataklands) and the new-comer mission Roman Catholic Church. The Rhenish Mission Church as the first and biggest Batak Christian Church disliked the Catholic Church mission in particular because - as it was described by a 'neutral' local newspaper - this newcomer has a "very strong organization." The young Batak journalist who wrote this also mentioned that he could not understand how there could be so many Christian missions at a time of economic depression (early 1930s) who could still manage to develop their mission services.<sup>33</sup> He noted that every Christian mission was, in fact, actively organizing lectures and of course claiming that their Church was the true one and the others were wrong. He described,

All of those lectures actually were nice and no wrong heard by our ears ... shortly, during those lectures many people likely would be in doubt in their hearts and would say: which one of those religions, then, is true and suitable to their

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<sup>32</sup>. See note no.30

<sup>33</sup>. Bendera Kita (December 28, 1935)

needs and follow it.<sup>34</sup>

He added, "Someone with a strong faith certainly will have a firmer mind. Whoever has a weak faith, then, surely will be turned down" (by another Church). Finally, he concluded his article by listing four questions:

(1). What is the reason that the Bataks can easily leave their previous religion for another one?

(2). Are the Rheinisch Mission 'drivers' wrong so that many of their followers have left for and have believed in another religion?

(3a) What is the intention of other sects to come and surround our people who already secure in their religious beliefs? Is there something hidden in our people which likely will be grabbed by them?

(3b) Why have those other sects with thousand tactics came (to the Bataklands) to develop their religions, although, in terms of the Christian thinking, the Christian Bataks should not be appealed to anymore? What is their intention, will they look to another people who are still thirsty for the light of their religion, such as the Papuans; or going to the New Guinea?

(4). Which one will be stronger for a long life, and which one will be bankrupt and going out of our society?<sup>35</sup>

This journalist also mentioned that due to their well known nice schools and pleasant dormitories (in Medan) which cost hundreds of thousand guilders, the Catholic Church was greatly welcomed by the Bataks. It seemed if the Batak had gotten a lucky draw.

<sup>34</sup>. Jong Batak "M", "Quo Vadis Kristen Batak", in Bendera Kita (28 December, 1935).

<sup>35</sup>. Ibid.

In dealing with the rumors about its mission, the Catholic missionaries utilized the advantages of print media. Early in the 1930s there were already various publications consisting of polemic explanations of Christian teachings issued in the Batak lands. Most of those publications were printed in booklets and were written in typical "questions - answer" format. These booklets were intended, I believe, to be read easily and memorized by the common Christian Bataks or the candidates for Christian baptism. The Catholic mission as well as the Rheinisch Mission utilized booklets like that often in their proselytization in the Bataklands.

Since early this century the Catholic Church in Indonesia has believed that the utilization of the press is very important in mission work. Gereja Katolik, one of the first Catholic periodicals in Indonesian, in its 25th. anniversary issue quoted the words of a Catholic Bishop concerning the role of the Catholic press:

You may not forget that beside praying, the Catholic press is the best weapon to fight against our enemy. The Catholic press is the representative of the Pope. It tells us about the leadership and rules of our Pope. The Catholic press reveals to us the "how to do" of the enemy of our religion as well as shows the best way to fight against it. The Catholic press is the main "action of Catholicism."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>. Gereja Katolik. October-November, XXV, 1933. p.154. I assume this monthly 'newspaper' was also distributed among the Catholics in North Sumatera. Some photographs and activities of the Catholic mission in North Sumatera were published in some numbers of this newspaper. The

The notion of enemy mentioned above, I think, was pointed at the followers of Freemason sect and some Protestants in NEI who disliked the Catholic Church as well as, perhaps, at the Muslims. In October 1935, the Catholic Church in North Sumatera also started its "official" periodical: Porbarita Rooms Katholiek, published in Pematang Siantar. It was published mainly in the Toba vernacular language with some little use of Indonesian. The content of this periodical's first issue was intended mainly to counter-attack against some lies which had been published by a certain printing company. A Capuchin priest wrote apologetically in the periodical that thirteen rumors which accused the Catholic Church for distorting Christian biblical teachings were not true. The rumors actually were about the typical argumentative subjects between Catholicism and Protestantism, such as on the notions of Sacrament, Pope's infallibility, religious devotion and biblical utilization.<sup>37</sup> Some booklets published in Indonesian and "Toba have been very helpful in teaching the catechism utilized by the Catholic Church in its proselytization among

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Vicariate Bishop of Sumatera, the late Msgr. L.T. Brans also gave his congratulation in this 25th. anniversary issue.

<sup>37</sup>. Pastoor P.J. Kerkers, "Ndang Toetoe" (It is not True), in Porbarita Rooms Katholiek. (no.1, October, 1935), pp.1-2.



the Bataks.<sup>38</sup>

In his article "The History of the Catholic Church in the Archdiocese of Medan", L.Fah, a Swiss Capuchin priest, wrote that the impact of the Catholic mission's activities in the Bataklands was the birth of apologetic and polemic dispute published in the printed media between the Catholic Church and the Rhenish Mission Church.<sup>39</sup> The Catholic Church had to publish the booklets, I believe, not only to respond to the questions raised but also to make up for the lack of priests needed for missionary work in the Bataklands. The catechetical booklets formulated in the typical "questions - answers" forms were very helpful means of giving instructions to the candidates for Catholic baptism. At that time, a priest rarely visited his people once a month. Because of this shortage in the first years of

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<sup>38</sup>. Some of the booklets I have come accross are:  
 1932. Sacrament Panopotion Di Dosa dibagasan Hoeria Katolik (The Sacrament of Confession in the Catholic Church). Pematang Siantar.  
 1935. Pangadjarion ni Hoeria Katholiek. Boekoe I. (The Teachings of the Catholic Church, First Book). Balige.  
 1935. 100 Pertanjaan dari Agama Rooms Katholik. (One Hundred Questions on the Catholic Church). Medan.  
 1935. Beberapa Pertanjaan Boeat Orang jang Soeka Toeroet Cursus Agama Katholiek. (Some Questions For People Who Like To Take A Course In the Catholic Religion). Padang.  
 1938. Hasintongan Taringot toe Hoeria Katholiek. (The Truth About the Catholic Church). Padang.  
 1952. Katekismus Manang Poda Hakristenon. Hinaruarhon ni Keuskupan Agung Medan. (Catechism or Christian Principles, published by the Archdiocese of Medan). Medan.  
 1968. Dalan na Imbaru, 100 Sungkunsungkun. (The New Way, 100 Questions). Archdiocese of Medan, Medan.

<sup>39</sup>. L.Fah OFM Cap. 1974, op.cit. p.26.

the Catholic mission in the Bataklands, a Catholic teacher training center was established in Balige. The graduates of this center would be the teachers assigned to the Catholic schools through out the Bataklands. Since a teacher at that time also had to teach catechism and to minister at religious services to the local congregation during the weekends, the booklets were very helpful to him. A former Batak religious teacher acknowledged that those catechetical booklets often became the "authorized teacher" in the hands of the local Catholic school teacher as well as of the local congregation leader.<sup>40</sup> He also said that the main method he used was to drill the candidates on one of those booklets. There was a well known Catholic catechism booklet in Indonesian as well as in Toba called The One Hundred Questions. In contrast to the present day younger Batak Catholics, he said that the first Catholic Bataks rarely got Church instructions through sermons and lectures. Instead, he claimed that he could name four old ladies in his parish (Balige) who he was sure could still recite from memory the answers to the one hundred questions of the Catholic Church.

Publications on the dispute between the Catholic Church and the Rhenish Mission Church or later its HKBP (Huria Kristen Batak Protestan) lasted until, at least, the middle

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<sup>40</sup>. personal interview with C.J.Ch. Tampubolon, Balige, 1986.

sixties.<sup>41</sup> It seems that the disputable subjects dealt with the notion of representation of God. Christianity, Catholicism as well as Protestantism, indeed, acknowledged at that time that the misleading teachings (poda haliluon, Toba) on it could be condemned as sinful. The Protestants, particularly the Lutheran Rheinisch Mission Church, condemned the Catholic Church and said it committed sin by giving misleading teachings on Christianity. Based on the "correct Words of God" (read: the Bible) the Protestants argued that the Catholic Pope can never be treated as a holy person and by no means an infallible person too. As a human being, the Pope surely can be misled and can sin.<sup>42</sup> Also, with the exception of their priests, the Catholics usually received only the host rather than the two forms of the consecrated host and wine in the Eucharistic celebration. The Protestants argued that the Catholic Church practiced

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<sup>41</sup>. This date is based on: first, in 1959 there was a book published by the Capuchins with its controversial title Een Volk ondekt Christus, De Katholieke missie onder de Bataks op Sumatra (A People Found Christ, The Catholic Mission among the Bataks in Sumatra). A Dutch Capuchin regretted that title which likely underestimated another previous Christian missions in the Bataklands. Secondly, the Christian Batak Protestant Church (Huria Kristen Batak Protestan) Confession issued in 1951 which has had a polemic spirit, among others, against the Catholic Church, was translated in Indonesian in 1965, in an official bulletin: Bulletin Lembaga Pekabaran Injil.

<sup>42</sup>. See, Pd.E.G. Schildmann, Hasintongan ni Hata ni Debata dohot Poda Haliluon ni Ugama Roms Katholik. (The Truth of God's Word and the Misleading instruction of the Roman Catholic Religion). (1957), p.7.

discrimination among its members. This was considered a sinful action against the "Words of God." On the topic of forgiveness of sin exercised in the Catholic Church, the Protestants believe that it is merely God's mercy and can be accepted only through human faith. It cannot be gained by any human good deeds nor human effort. Consequently the Protestants cannot accept the practice of confession although the Catholic Church believes it as one of the seven Sacraments. The Protestants actually have acknowledged only two Sacraments: Baptism and the Holy Eucharist. The Catholic Church answered and defended its position in that apologetic and polemic dispute and certainly also by way of referring to the appropriate words of God.

This writing will not pursue the arguments of the true Church in giving its best "correctness" vis-a-vis other's error. Moreover, it seems that even by the late sixties an ecumenical theological discussion was hardly found among the Churches in the Bataklands. Although I will elaborate on the utilization of the Bible by the Catholic Bataks in a later chapter, it is interesting to note that the Protestants as well as the Catholics in fact, have manipulated the Words of God to support their own 'correctness' and to condemn other's sinful misleadingness as well. Fortunately, both of them have used the same (Protestant version) Toba Bible published by the turn of this century.

Since it is clear from the dispute that quoting the



Bible was primarily a matter of self-justification which was used to condemn the other's error consequently people would realize that there was not only one correct interpretation. Being clean of sinfulness, then, was another way of trying to claim an honest truthfulness. The Catholic Church somehow elaborated this notion of sinfulness in its mission among the Bataks. The catechism booklets published by the Catholic Church gave special priority to the notion of sin, mainly through the practice of confession as well as the forgiveness of sin. A special booklet was published to explain in detail the Sacrament of Confession.<sup>43</sup> The objections argued by the Protestants, the Rheinisch Mission Church in particular, centered on two basic questions. First, do we have to pay or make restitution for the forgiveness of our sins? Second, why do we have to confess to a priest? Is it not stupid to let our sins be known to others?

It seems that in the dispute about the notion of Sacrament of Confession (and the rumors about it) the Catholic Church launched a special argument. By chance the Catholic mission in the Bataklands came during the years when the idea of nationalism was intruding into the Christian Churches' life. One of the most important factors

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<sup>43</sup>. Sacrament Panopotion di Dosa dibagasan Hoeria Katholik (The Sacrament of Confessing Sin in the Catholic Church). (Pematang Siantar, 1932).



in the idea of nationalism was independence in financial affairs. In 1940, a break-off from the Rheinisch Mission Church, i.e. the "Self-supporting Batak Christian Church" (Hoeria Christen Batak Zelfstandig) stated that, "money is the soul of an association".<sup>44</sup> The Catholic Church did not cover up its controversial financial affairs. A booklet was published in 1939 to counteract the misleading statements made about the Catholic Church. The first five subjects of that booklet are about the Catholic Church's attitude on the notion about money. It is written:

- (1) Someone has said, the Catholics have to give money in order to confess their sins. Another says, the forgiveness of sin is something that has to be bought in the Catholic Church.
- (2) Someone has said, to be a Catholic you really have to contribute ten percent of your income to the Church exclusive of the weekly alms.
- (3) Someone has said, if an adult Catholic dies without any son, then all of his property has to be given to the Catholic Church.
- (4) Someone has said, if you ask a priest to visit and administer the sacrament to the sick people, you have to pay the cost of his transportation.
- (5) Someone has said, if there is a new Catholic Church, they (the local congregation) have to pay the cost of it from that time on and they also have to pay the living expenses of the priest.<sup>45</sup>

By way of denying as well as of correcting, for example, the

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<sup>44</sup>. Oemoem (September 14, 1940).

<sup>45</sup>. Hasintongan Taringot toe Hoeria Katholiek. (Padang: 1938), pp.3-14. See also, Pastoor P.J. Kerkers 1935, op.cit., pp.1-2.

five misleading statements cited (indeed, also spiced with quotations from the Bible) the Catholic Church tried to introduce the notion of Catholic universalism, its universal finances in particular. To correct those five misleading statements, a booklet was published which explained that many generous Catholic congregations all over the world had donated their money gratuitously. Because of that, the local Catholic Church and the priest in particular, could also administer their services in the same manner. Hopefully, the local mission Catholic Church will become a self-supporting Church as well as a part of the universal (supra-national) Church.<sup>46</sup>

The competition between the Catholic Church and the Lutheran Rheinisch Mission Church also caused a new problem to the notion of nationalism among the Bataks. The Muslim Bataks accused the Christian Bataks for paying a less attention to the national unity and competing among themselves on the religious matter instead. The Southern Muslim Mandailing Bataks, particularly those who had (ever) lived in Medan and Jakarta, considered themselves not belonging to the Batak people.<sup>47</sup> The Christian Toba Bataks

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<sup>46</sup>. The Dutch Capuchins believed that being a Catholic, someone somehow has to be beyond the boundaries of the notion of nationalism, supra-nationalism. See, Aster 1959. op.cit., p.144.

<sup>47</sup>. Lentera. A weekly newspaper published in Pematang Siantar. September 8, 1931. See also, Bendera Kita, May 28, 1938

were tired of listening to the claim that the pure nationalists, people who really had a strong desire for freedom (merdeka, Indonesian) were only the Muslim Indonesians. It had been written: "If it is not Islam, by no means will Indonesia ever taste the 'pill' of nationalism as it exists until the present day".<sup>48</sup> Because of this accusation, some Medan Christian Batak nationalists established an Association of Christian Bataks (Persatuan Christen Batak, 1934) for a stronger unity among themselves.<sup>49</sup> However, a new difficulty arose. When Catholic Bataks could not join this new organization, it was said that one of the Catholic priests in Medan did not allow his people to join or visit gatherings of that organization. He said that there already was a very strong union ... that is the Roman Catholic Church. The journalist who reported this case wrote that the Catholic Church, especially its "drivers" (priests), were persons who had difficulty in participating in a discussion. "The Catholic religion has equated itself with nationalism, thus, people who believe in this religion already have their Catholic 'nationalism'."<sup>50</sup> A reaction to this article came from a (Catholic?) reader

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<sup>48</sup>. "Kalau ta' Islam, sudah barang tentu Indonesia belum mampu lagi buat mengecap peil kebangsaan yang seperti sekarang." in Lentera (September 8, 1931).

<sup>49</sup>. Bendera Kita (February 2, 1935).

<sup>50</sup>. Bendera Kita. January 12, 1935

with an initial SIR who argued that the Catholic Church only wanted to stay in its own belief vis a vis the reformed Protestant Churches. SIR also mentioned that in many other places there was a Catholic Party as well as a Protestant Party so there was no need to unite.<sup>51</sup>

Regarding its notion of financial strength and its supra-nationalism the Catholic Church tried to put it in the Batak traditional notion of sahala. Some theological studies on the Batak notion of god have mentioned that ancestral worship by no means fades in the (Toba) Batak religious life.<sup>52</sup> The Batak ancestral god, Debata Ompu Mula Jadi Na Bolon (god of Great Creator), as the source of sahala somehow has been adapted by Catholic as well as Protestant Bataks for their biblical God.<sup>53</sup> I have mentioned earlier

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<sup>51</sup>. Bendera Kita (January 26, 1935 and March 16, 1935).

<sup>52</sup>. PH.L. Tobing, The Structure of The Toba-Batak Belief in The High God (Amsterdam: Jacob van Campen, 1956). P. Boldholt Pedersen, Batak Blood and Protestant Soul (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1970). Lothar Schreiner, Telah Kudengar Dari Ayahku: Perjumpaan Adat Dengan Iman Kristen di Tanah Batak (Jakarta: Gunung Mulia, 1972). Harry Parkin, Batak Fruit of Hindu Thought (Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1978). Anicetus B. Sinaga OFMCap, The Toba Batak High God, Transcendence and Immanence (St. Agustin: Antropos Institut, 1981).

<sup>53</sup>. HKBP, the Christian Batak Protestant Church has officially prohibited the use of this reverential name for Christian God in their 1951 Confession. However, their "Ephorus" (HKBP "Bishop") may be revered with a term ompu i. Similarly, based on my observation during my research in North Sumatera, the Catholic Bishop of Medan as well as his priests are often revered with that same reverential name.



in the introduction that in terms of the Batak notion of dalihan na tolu and its reciprocal system, hula-hula as the source of sahala considered as the "seen god" (debata na tarida). Boru have to revere their hulahula in order to get their favors, their sahalas. The Bataks also believe that their ancestral God has the hereditary sahala. For example, on this notion of sahala, Parkin writes,

A man is what he is, not only on account of what his tondi (soul) has chosen to become, but because of the nature and degree of sahala possessed by his tondi. A man is a king, for example, because his tondi possesses sahala harajaon = the sahala of kingship. The possession of such sahala is indicated by the ability of the person to exercise its power effectively. It may be increased through the exercise of its power, or by additional supplies of sahala-power from the hula-hula.<sup>54</sup>

During my stay in the Bataklands, even, I noticed that children of ten to twelve years old have been acknowledged by adult Bataks as exercising sahala because of their outstanding performance (singing, reciting the Bible, acting, dancing, etc.) in a Christmas celebration. The Bataks believe that the three most wished for sahalas in someone's life are: the sahala hamoraon (material wealth), sahala hagabeon (many male and female offsprings) and sahala hasangapon (being revered by others).

Does the Christian God really possess this Batak type notion of sahala? How can people ask for his favors? As it is written in one of the Catholic catechetical booklets, in

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<sup>54</sup>. Harry Parkin 1978. op.cit. p.149.



its early mission years in the Bataklands the Catholic Church described its notion of God as:

(1) Where is God? God is in heaven, in the world and everywhere.

(2) Does God really know and see everything? Yes, He does, also our mind.

(3) Does God take care of human affairs? God takes care of the human being in a fatherly way. (God, the father of the human being, desires that everyone be saved).<sup>55</sup>

Accordingly, realizing that nothing can be hidden from God, confession was the appropriate act in order to get (fatherly) God's forgiveness whenever someone did some wrong or disorderly action. A 1932 booklet published in the Toba vernacular language on the Sacrament of Confession explains the importance of restoring the damage to the fatherly God - human being relationship:

(36) Do we commit a mortal sin if we intentionally do not disclose at least one serious sin in our confession? Yes, If we intentionally do not disclose at least one serious sin in our confession due to our fear and shame, we certainly commit a mortal sin, a sacrilegious sin. Accordingly we cannot receive the forgiveness for the other sins just confessed.

(37) How can we easily turn back from our fear and shame so that we can confess? In order to turn back from our fear and shame, it is important to remember that:

1.A confessor priest has to keep secretly our sins forever. 2.A confessor priest is the vicar of Christ who regards sinning people mercifully. 3.It is better to confess our sins and secrets than to be in shame forever because of sins we have

<sup>55</sup>. 100 Pertanyaan Dari Agama Rooms Katholik (Medan: 1935), p.10.

committed.<sup>56</sup>

As I have mentioned previously a personal relationship was the key factor for the first Catholic missionaries dealing with Catholic Batak converts. A "sincere" personal relationship also maintained the appropriate fatherly God - human relationship established at the time of a Catholic person's baptism. A sincere personal relationship is one which is exactly exercised in a confessional discourse.<sup>57</sup> A sincere personal relationship which was likely thought by the first Catholic Bataks to be able to secure the passing down of the fatherly God's sahala (through His representative priests) to His believers. In the Christian missionary history in the Batak lands, in fact, the missionaries (Protestant as well as Catholic) obviously delivered their outstanding (Batak notion of) sahala, at least the sahala of hamoraon (material wealth).

Although the Catholic notion of God, in a certain sense, sounds similar to the Batak ancestral God, however, the Catholic notion of (God) sahala has somehow confused the Batak dalihan na tolu based on society's concept of sahala.

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<sup>56</sup>. Sacrament Panopotion Di Dosa Di Bagasan Hoeria Katholik (Pematang Siantar: 1932), pp.43-44.

<sup>57</sup>. Due to my comparative approach to his analysis on confession, I pay credit to Vincente L. Rafael, Decolonizing Discourse: Confession Among The Tagalogs, 17th. and Early 18th. Century. A paper submitted at The Social Science Research Council conference on "Christianity As Indigenous Religion in Southeast Asia", Cebu, The Philippines, September 1986.

The Catholic Church, particularly the Capuchin missionaries in the Bataklands, did not belong to the Batak dalihan na tolu system nor did they adapt a profitable business in their mission work. The Dutch Capuchin missionaries, although backed by strong finances, lived a life of simplicity because of their vow of poverty. For example, some of these missionaries rode expensive motorcycles to visit their congregations in distant places, and yet they dressed in their simple brown cassocks. This fact, I think, surprised the Batak people. As was written by a young Batak journalist in a local newspaper, "The Catholic mission has been greatly welcomed by the Bataks, as if the Bataks were struck by good fortune (keberuntungan, Indonesian)." But he still had a major question: "How come they (the Catholic missionaries) are so crazy as to spend a hundreds of thousands of guilders without any intention of grabbing something from us later?"<sup>58</sup> In the hands of the Capuchin missionaries this "hundreds of thousands of guilders" has become something odd in the Batak notion of sahala, the sahala hamoraon in particular.

For the Bataks, the Catholic Church's notion of the forgiveness of sin, seems difficult to adjust to their notion of reciprocity in their traditional (adat) social system. If any Batak person commits a social sin, e.g.

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<sup>58</sup>. Bendera Kita (December 28, 1935).

injures or does something wrong to others, a payment of restitution will be the main solution. This solution has to be decided after a hearing in an official court attended by the authorized representatives of the dalihan na tolu principals. It has been assumed that only after discussion can a decision solving the case be made. Whenever a (social) decision has to be made, an opportunity for a "face-to-face" talk is highly appreciated by the Bataks. An absence of this chance may cause a grudge and an unpredictable danger.<sup>59</sup>

The Catholic practice of confession probably is in accordance with the Batak way of solving a disorderly social situation. The need for confessing one's sin to a Catholic priest, then, matched the need for talking satisfyingly in the Batak juridical system, and both would be followed by proper penitence.<sup>60</sup> However, the main problem for the Bataks was that the expatriate priest at that time was not included in the Batak dalihan na tolu principle. During the first years of their mission, the Catholic priests were not considered as jambar persons, people who have the right to a certain portion of shared stuff such as slaughtered animals,

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<sup>59</sup>. A wellknown maxim (umpama) and often cited says: "Si boru puas si boru Bangkara, Molo dung puas sai so ada mara." Satisfying girl is the girl of Bangkara, if everybody is really satisfied (to spill out what is inside his/her heart) there will be no grudge.

<sup>60</sup>. See note no.43, especially pp.26-27.



money, speech time, etc.<sup>61</sup>

It was reported that even before 1940, during Bishop Brans's official visits to some Catholic congregations in the Batak lands, gondang and tortor (Batak music and dance) as well as ulos (Batak adat textile) deliverance for him were performed in the reception.<sup>62</sup> As Batak people know, it is the hulahula people who usually deliver the ulos to his boru kin people. Rather than seeing it as an awkward practice of Batak adat, both Batak Catholics and the Bishop likely valued gondang, tortor, and ulos as tokens of their (personal) relationships. Moreover, since the practice of confession was something different in terms of the Batak juridical system and its penitence, the passing down of the odd "sahala" of the Catholic Church, assumed in the practice of confession, consequently is also an oddity in Batak society and its social system. Based on this unassimilated oddity, the practice of going to the priest for confession and the forgiveness of sin could place the priest under suspicion of charging payment.

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<sup>61</sup>. The role of the Catholic priest in the early years of the Catholic mission in the Bataklands, I believe, was similar to the role of the colonial government officials, according to the Batak dalihan na tolu social system. "Hadat Batak", an article written by J.F.G. Sirait in a weekly newspaper Oemoem. June 4, 1938, mentioned that the government officials supposedly did not have the rights to the Batak jambar. They were considered merely as paid labourers.

<sup>62</sup>. See, Borneo Almanak (30 jr. 1940), pp.39-41.



Disclosing the popular accusation that the Catholics "have to pay for the forgiveness of sin," and asserting that "it is not true," I believe, had been one of the (attractive) oddities of the Catholic Church in its earlier dealing with the Batak notion of sahala. During the years following Japanese occupation, Indonesian struggle for independence and its aftermath, this sahala increasingly took on the appearance of Catholicism though its content was not necessarily affected.

## Chapter Two

### THE CATHOLIC SAHALA AT STAKES

By mid March 1942, the Japanese military government had invaded North Sumatera and had quickly assumed authority over social and political life. The "'Dollar Land" of East Sumatera with its plantation estates was one of their main targets. Toba Bataklands were first christianized and supervised by German missionaries. On the same day that the Germans occupied the Netherlands, May 10, 1940, the German missionaries of the Rhenish Mission in the Bataklands were interned by the Dutch. HKBP, the dominant and largest Christian Church in the region was taken over and controlled by Dutch missionaries.<sup>1</sup> Two years later, the Toba Bataklands were occupied by the Japanese. During 1942-1945, the Toba Bataks did not have a single opinion or attitude toward their new ruler in 1942-1945. Moreover, the successful Japanese invasion of the Toba Bataklands was actually aided by some Bataks. At the time the local newspapers reported that the Japanese military government would probably free the natives from the control of the Dutch colonial government.<sup>2</sup> According to Reid, some

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<sup>1</sup>. See, Dr. Walter Lempp, Benih Yang Tumbuh. vol.12, Suatu Survey Mengenai Gereja-Gereja Di Sumatera Utara (Jakarta: LPS-DGI, 1976), p.120.

<sup>2</sup>. Oemoem (Pematang Siantar: Penerbit Kongsu Oemoem, December 14, 1940).

nationalists as well as some Moslems had already sent men to Malaysia, which was occupied by the Japanese three months earlier, to contact the Japanese authorities.<sup>3</sup>

When the Bataklands were occupied by the Japanese, some Protestant Churches as well as the Catholic Church, which previously had been supervised mostly by the Dutch missionaries, could hardly feel happy about the new situation. Except for a couple Germans, all of the European missionaries had to go to the internment camps. The Catholic Church, which was quite new in the Bataklands, also had to face separation from its Dutch Capuchin priests who were also interned. The experiences of the Catholic Church in the Bataklands during the Japanese occupation (1942-1945) and during the following years of the national struggle for Indonesian independence (1945-1949) undoubtedly have shaped its development. The characteristics of the Toba Batak people as well as of the Dutch Capuchin missionaries in regard to the notion of sahala , sahala hamoraon (material wealth) in particular, certainly played an important role in those events.

"Step across my dead body first, you guys! Then, you can enter our rectory." These words were actually spoken in Indonesian (and not in the Toba vernacular language), by

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<sup>3</sup>. Anthony Reid, Perjuangan Rakyat. Revolusi dan Hancurnya Kerajaan di Sumatra. Translated by tim PSH (Jakarta: Pustaka Sinar Harapan, 1987), p.147.

some Catholic Bataks as they protected their priest's rectory from the robbers (penggarong) during the early days of the Japanese invasion.<sup>4</sup> This event occurred in Samosir and was one among many incidents when, in their attempt to occupy or break into Catholic buildings, the Japanese army, as well as some robbers, had to face the Catholic Bataks. But the Japanese army was finally able to occupy some Catholic mission buildings in the Bataklands and use them for their military offices and barracks. The robbers were rarely successful since the Catholic mission rectories were well protected by the local Catholics. It was reported that these robbers tried to break into the rectory because they thought that it stored gold and money.<sup>5</sup> Certainly the Catholic rectories were not the right place to store that kind of material wealth. However these mission buildings were by no means something not meaningful to the Catholic Bataks

A Dutch Protestant minister acknowledged that he had a different experience than his Catholic colleague. C.J.Ch. Tampubolon, a former lay Catholic catechist in Samosir mentioned that the Dutch Protestant minister from Nainggolan (Samosir) was quite surprised at the dedication of the Catholic Bataks to their Church and to their priest in

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<sup>4</sup>. Parbarita (1980, 24, no.9), pp.13-14.

<sup>5</sup> M. Sinaga, Mengikuti Perkembangan Gereja Katolik Setelah 50 Tahun di Tapanuli Utara (Balige, 1984), p.35.

particular. Although, by the time of the Japanese occupation, the Catholic mission had worked among the Bataks no more than eight years, the Catholic Bataks dared to protect their Church and other mission buildings. In contrast, the Protestant minister had worked for 40 years in Samosir, and yet his house and church in Nainggolan were robbed without any single person from his congregation trying to stop it.<sup>6</sup> It seems that the robbers had no other reasons, such as political issues, other than just looting the Protestant as well as the Catholic mission properties. There was rarely a report, e.g. on the occupation of a mission building or on the burning of mission records by the local "robbers" in the Bataklands during that time.<sup>7</sup>

As a matter of fact, after the outbreak of the second World War and by the time of the Japanese occupation, the Catholic mission in the Bataklands had already formulated a plan to deal with its uncertain future. Supported by his superior in Padang (Bishop Brans), Tampubolon who was a catechist (lay religious teacher) in Pangururan, Samosir, issued a long letter explaining formation of the so called "Church Committee" (Dutch: "kerkbestuur"). It would be a staff composed of local lay Catholics who would manage all

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<sup>6</sup>. Parbarita 1980, op.cit. Also personal interview with C.J.Ch. Tampubolon in Balige, 1986.

<sup>7</sup>. J.J.van de Velde, Surat-surat Dari Sumatra 1928-1949 (Jakarta: Pustaka Azet, 1987), p.93.



affairs except the religious services of the local congregation.<sup>8</sup> This Church Committee supposedly would be led by a Raja ni Huria ("king" or chief of the local congregation). Tampubolon's letter also mentioned that due to the war in the Netherlands, it was proposed that this was the right time for the Catholic Bataks to become a self-supporting Church and local congregation as well. Contributions from the local congregation should be collected and a finance committee had to be established. The establishment of this Church committee and the nomination of its leader - Raja ni Huria - could actually be based on the Batak traditional leadership such as the leadership of Parbaringin, one of the Batak indigenous religions.

The Parbaringin people used to provide a piece of land in their village as a special place for conducting their religious practices: giving their offerings to their ancestral spirits led by their datu ("priest"). In the case of the Catholic Church, Tampubolon's letter suggested that the Catholic Bataks could probably also provide a piece of land upon which a church (or/and other mission buildings) would be built. Catholic tradition has acknowledged that a priest is the authorized person to conduct the offertory services of his congregation, particularly as practiced in the Holy Eucharistic celebration. The proposed Church

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<sup>8</sup>. C.J.Ch. Tampubolon unpublished manuscript, (Oepahoda, Pangoeroeran: 1941), p.37.

Committee would have responsibility for raising money and for other financial tasks needed: to build a church as well as to look after its maintenance, to provide public education and health services and to take care of the living costs of their priest. When a certain amount had been collected, the money of the local parish or congregation should be kept centrally at the Bishop's office although the local treasurer had to keep the financial books.<sup>9</sup> It was also proposed that the staff of the Church Committee would represent the main margas (Batak clans) of the local congregation. But, in contrast to the job of a village chief or of a district chief who rightfully deserved a "chief's reward" (upa raja) such as the "meal dish" (pinggan panganan) or the "meat portion" (jambar juhut), the Church Committee staff would work voluntarily. They would not receive any reward or salary for their services. If there was a big surplus, they might ask the Bishop for a percentage of it as an incidental and small gift for their untiring services.

Before the Japanese invaded the Bataklands, the promoter of this letter (Tampubolon) said that he had visited some important parishes and local congregations to get feedback on the proposed establishment of the Church Committee. In December 1939 it was recorded that there were

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<sup>9</sup>. Ibid. p.17.

14,000 Catholics, 30,000 candidates for baptism, 6 parishes, 100 mission-stations and at least 23 various parish schools in the Bataklands.<sup>10</sup> No parishes or congregations accepted his proposal. Balige and Lintong Ni Huta, two of the most important parishes in the region, for example, could not accept it. They preferred likely a decentralized Catholic (local) congregation and argued that they would provide their own religious teachers - in cases when the priest could not be in service - and pay them properly.

In mid March 1942 the Japanese military government took control of North Sumatera, the Catholic Church had not prepared a central institutional or administrative structure for its congregations in the Bataklands. The organizers of the Catholic missions were not exempt from being sent to the internment camps and therefore were unable to prepare any leadership for their relatively new Church. Consequently there was little communication or relationships between the Catholic parishes or the local congregations. As has been described by a Batak writer:

After all priests and other religious were detained in Siringo-ringo, Asahan (one of the internment camps on the East Coast of Sumatera), the plight of the congregation in every parish was similar to that of a chick which lost its mother. It seems that the Catholic congregations were dispersed. The absence of the Holy Eucharistic celebration as one of the means of uniting the

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<sup>10</sup>. The Capuchins 1940a, op.cit. pp.133-136.

soul was deeply felt as a loss.<sup>11</sup>

About two months after the Japanese invaded the Bataklands the "Tapanuli Central Roman Catholic Committee," was established and recognized by the Japanese authorities. This committee was intended to deal with the scattered Catholic people in the Bataklands during the absence of their priests. The Central Committee staffs were selected from representatives of the former Catholic parishes' or local congregations' lay-leaders. Most of them actually were also local religious teachers (katekis) who were graduates of the Catholic teacher training school which was founded in 1937, in Balige.<sup>12</sup> One of the committee's main tasks was to seek substitute priests. They even sent a committee member to Singapore (which had much earlier come under the authority of the Japanese) to ask the Catholic Church there if they would lend priests to North Sumatera. They also wrote a letter to Tokyo and asked the authorities there to send a priest to administer the religious services in the Bataklands.<sup>13</sup> All attempts were fruitless and during 1942-1945 not a single Catholic priest served in the Bataklands. It was also reported that this committee did not work

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<sup>11</sup>. M.Sinaga 1984, op.cit., p.34.

<sup>12</sup>. Ibid., pp.34-35.

<sup>13</sup>. Ibid., p.35.

effectively and existed merely on paper.<sup>14</sup>

During the Japanese occupation (1942-1945), according to Tampubolon, there was no significant activity within Catholic Church life in the Bataklands. Many of the former Catholic religious teachers did not continue to administer religious services to their local congregation. Some of them did other jobs to earn a livelihood for their families. They did not receive any salary from the Bishop. Fortunately, as was the case with other religious teachers and ministers, these Catholic religious teachers were exempt from compulsory labor services such as building roads, air-strips, and bunkers needed by the Japanese army. Most Catholic religious teachers stayed in their former assigned positions and some, together with the local congregation, protected and maintained the Catholic mission buildings. Some of them were appointed by the Japanese as civil servants at the local offices of the ministry of religion and the Ministry of Information.<sup>15</sup>

The years between 1945-1949 which probably could create, I believe, a new horizon for the development of the Catholic Church in the Bataklands, unfortunately only became

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<sup>14</sup>. M.Booz OFMCap. "Sejarah Gereja Katolik di Wilayah Keuskupan Sibolga", in Dok.Pen. Kantor Waligereja Indonesia, Sejarah Gereja Katolik Indonesia. vol.3A (Ende: Arnoldus, 1974), p.58.

<sup>15</sup>. M.Sinaga 1984, op.cit., p.35.



its "gloomy period."<sup>16</sup> The surrender of the Japanese military government to the Allied forces, followed by the proclamation of Indonesian independence on August 17, 1945, did not facilitate the return of the Dutch missionaries. By the end of 1945, after leaving their internment camps the Dutch Capuchin missionaries had to remain in the city of Medan because the situation outside the city was too dangerous for the Dutch. In general, Dutch people in North Sumatera were objects of hostility for nationalist fighters who were struggling to get full Indonesian independence.<sup>17</sup> Yet some German sisters who were not detained by the Japanese reported that the Christian Bataks in Balige were actually looking forward to the return of the Dutch missionaries to their former mission posts.<sup>18</sup> Realizing that it was impossible for any Dutch priest to work again in the Bataklands during the turmoil years of 1945-1947 in North Sumatera, Mgr. Mathias Brans, the Bishop of West and North Sumatera asked Bishop Sugijapranata, the Javanese Bishop of the diocese of Semarang (Central Java) to send a

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<sup>16</sup>. H. Sumardjono, Buku Kenangan 50 Tahun Gereja Katolik di Pematang Siantar dan Sekitarnya (1931-1981) (Pematang Siantar, 1981), p.13.

<sup>17</sup>. Reid described that a hatred toward the Dutch and their former collaborators which dominated the hearts of various radical nationalist fighter groups brought about a "social revolution" in North Sumatera in early 1946. See: Anthony Reid 1987, op.cit., especially chapters VI and VIII.

<sup>18</sup>. J.J.van de Velde 1987, op.cit., pp.138-139.

native priest to the mission in the Bataklands.

On May 10, 1947, a Javanese Jesuit priest, Father Sutopanitro came to Medan. Since it was suggested he not enter the Dutch occupied area of the city, Bishop Brans who did visited Father Sutopanitro before he went to the Bataklands. Father Sutopanitro stayed at the house of (Indonesian Republic) Medan's Mayor, Mr.M. Jusuf for a couple of days. A couple of weeks after the first Dutch aggression in July 20, 1947, two Indonesian Republic officers: Medan's Mayor Mr.M.Jusuf and a military liaison officer Captain Asmatudin still stayed in the unoccupied area of Medan. At that time, even the offices of the police departement, post and telephone, railways and public hospital in Medan were still under the control of the Indonesian Republic authorities. The other Republic officials, such as the regional military chiefs, Governor of North Sumatera and other civil officials already moved to Pematang Siantar a year earlier in April 1946.<sup>19</sup> Father Sutopanitro was very surprised to receive a first class free pass given by the officer of the Indonesian Republic controlled railway company to go all over North Sumatera by train. Once, in dealing with an anti-nationalist Dutch army commandant, he asked the army man if there was any country in the world which would give a free first class ticket to a

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<sup>19</sup>. Biro Sejarah PRIMA, Medan Area Mengisi Proklamasi. vol.I (Medan, 1976), pp.260-261.

priest to go everywhere like this?

His main job was to visit as many of the Catholic congregations in the Bataklands as possible so that "It would be clearly seen by others that the Catholic Church still existed in the Bataklands and that it also had priests from ethnic groups other than the Dutch Capuchins."<sup>20</sup> Until July 1947, all of the Bataklands area was under the control of the Republic of Indonesia. Father Sutopanitro stayed here about three and a half months in and on every occasion he tried to neutralize the common prejudice that the Catholic Church in North Sumatera was somehow no different than the Dutch colonialists. This prejudice mainly came from the nationalist fighters. He often could be seen dressed in his white cassock with a national red and white emblem prominently stuck on it. His visits in the Bataklands were always accepted enthusiastically by the local congregations. His visit to Balige, for example, was attended not only by the Catholic Bataks and their local leaders but also by the Indonesian state officials as well as by military officers. He often had to be present at two or three receptions organized by the local congregations on the same day "since it was the first time in at least five years that the Catholic Bataks could meet a priest," he said. Father

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<sup>20</sup>. Personal interview with C.J.Ch. Tampubolon, Balige 1987. He was in charge of accompanying Father Sutopanitro during his trips in the Bataklands.

Sutopanitro acknowledged that at every reception he had to eat the prepared traditional Batak pork meat dish (saksang). Previously the Bataks thought that every Javanese would not eat pork as the Moslems usually do. At the receptions, he also had to listen to the many speeches (mandok hata) of the local congregations' representatives. He praised the Batak people for their excellent skill giving speeches. He said that they were really young Catholic congregations. He felt there was not the respectful attitude present when he celebrated the Holy Mass with them. The Batak Catholics at that time did not have any devotion to the Blessed Holy Host.<sup>21</sup>

Father Sutopanitro was in Pematang Siantar when the Dutch army launched its first aggression on the Indonesian Republic's territory and occupied that city on July 29, 1947. According to some Catholics the national red and white flag on the tower of the Catholic church was the last one to be pulled down in the city of Pematang Siantar after the Dutch invasion. Undoubtedly there was internal conflict between the Javanese priest and the two Dutch Capuchin priests who came to Pematang Siantar following and under the protection of the Dutch army. Father Sutopanitro's

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<sup>21</sup>. He was surprised also that once in Siborong-borong (one of the Catholic mission-posts in the highland of Toba) a Catholic man asked him for the Sacrament of Confession in the middle of the local market place. Personal interview with Fr. Sutopanitro in Sangkalputung, Klaten, Central Java, 1987.

nationalist views were well known. In the opinion of many Dutch people, they were not very different from the "extremist" views. Father Sutopanitro did not think this was the right time for Dutch priests to take over leadership of the Catholic Church in Pematang Siantar. He did not even let the Dutch priests stay in the rectory. They had to stay in the "Siantar Hotel" together with the Dutch military officers. He was afraid that the involvement of the two Dutch priests in the parish life of Pematang Siantar - both of whom had actually once been assigned to that parish - would ruin the nationalists' respect for the Catholic Church which he had just restored. Father Sutopanitro said that he could not understand why one of the Dutch priests came to Pematang Siantar together with the Dutch army as their chaplain. That priest dressed in a Dutch military uniform. A nationalist Catholic Batak I interviewed also acknowledged this fact, which he thought was one of the awkward things about the Catholic Church in North Sumatera at that time. Father Sutopanitro said that he was very worried about the safety of the Catholic people living in the countryside since it was still under the control of the nationalist fighters. He heard that the Catholics were easily subjected to being tortured or even killed because they were suspected



as "the Dutch colleagues."<sup>22</sup> Indeed, some Catholic Bataks had joined the nationalist fighters.

Another incident intensified the conflict. One day, after the Dutch occupied Pematang Siantar, some schools in the city announced through the local newspaper that they were resuming classes. Father Sutopanitro could not accept the announcement made by the Catholic school which, in fact, had already been opened before the Dutch occupation. He had opened the school with some Batak Catholic teachers. Since his letter of protest was not published in the newspaper, he put a blackboard in front of the school and wrote that the school had been opened by Indonesian Catholics themselves.

The uneasy situation reached its climax on August 17, 1947, the anniversary day of Indonesian Independence. That day Father Sutopanitro celebrated a high Holy Mass. Some Catholic Batak ladies helped him decorate the church with red and white flowers which symbolized the national colors. This Holy Mass was attended not only by the Catholic parishioners - some Dutch, Menadonese and Ambonese Catholic (Dutch allied) soldiers included - but also by some

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<sup>22</sup>. He said that there was a young Batak woman called Veronica, who while on her way to visit her relative in the countryside of Tapanuli, was stopped by some nationalist fighters outside the city of Pematang Siantar. She was asked about her identity. It was said that she was terribly frightened so that she misspelled her own name as "pro - nica" which caused her to be killed instantly. N.I.C.A is the acronym for Netherlands Indies Civil Administration. Personal interview, 1987.

nationalist visitors. In order to give a non-controversial sermon, Father Sutopanitro only translated an article on nationalism written by a German Catholic Bishop. The following day, he heard a false report about the August 17th celebration in the Catholic church from the Dutch military barracks and head office. The Dutch military officers in Pematang Siantar believed that there had been a nationalist red-and-white flag raising ceremony in the church yard and that a confrontation took place between Catholic soldiers of the Dutch army and some Indonesians.<sup>23</sup>

About a week after the August 17th celebration, the superior of the Capuchin priests in North Sumatera asked Fr. Sutopanitro to leave Pematang Siantar for Java since he could no longer safely visit the Catholic congregations in the countryside of the Bataklands. The Capuchin Superior thought it was unsafe for Father Sutopanitro to continue these visits into the countryside because the area was still under the control of Indonesian nationalist fighters. Father Sutopanitro was told by the Capuchin superior that he came from Medan to Pematang Siantar in order to hold a meeting of the parish Committee Staff and to get information about Father Sutopanitro as well as about parish activities. As a

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<sup>23</sup>. The first day the Dutch invaded Pematang Siantar, a Dutch military car entered the Catholic rectory yard and hit a flagpole with its red and white national flag down. Since then, Father Sutopanitro realized that the Dutch military people actually disliked his presence in Pematang Siantar. Personal interview in Klaten, 1987.

matter of fact this superior only talked individually with some of the parish staff members. He then concluded that "the parishioners of the Catholic Church in Pematang Siantar would not let Father Sutopanitro continue his visits in the countryside of the Bataklands due to the unsafe situation." Although Father Sutopanitro had a letter from the former regent of the Residency of Simalungun which guaranteed his safety while working in the Bataklands, Father Sutopanitro's appeal was rejected.<sup>24</sup>

Early one morning in the late August 1947, escorted by a Dutch military convoy Father Sutopanitro left Pematang Siantar for Medan. He had to wait a couple of days in Medan before he could leave for Jakarta by sea transportation. On the day of his departure, two Dutch Capuchin priests dressed in their military chaplain uniforms gave him a ride in a military car since the ship company could not pick him up. Some nationalist Indonesians probably saw him in that military car at Belawan, the sea-port of Medan. Four days later, the Radio of the Republic of Indonesia in Bukittinggi broadcast that Father Sutopanitro had been detained by the Dutch. In retaliation, the Dutch authority reportedly made a big mistake by broadcasting a statement that Father Sutopanitro was going back to Java of his own free will. This news was heard in Java. The Bishop of Semarang was

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<sup>24</sup>. Personal interview in 1987

upset on hearing it and sent a radiogram to Medan asking for an explanation from Bishop Brans.

One year later, again after an invitation from Bishop Brans' office in Medan, another Javanese diocesan priest, Father Pudjahandaja, came to North Sumatera. He came through the Indonesian Republic's territory, the West Coast of Sumatera, visiting almost all the Catholic parishes and mission-posts in North Sumatera, particularly in the Bataklands. When the Dutch army launched its second aggression further into the Indonesian Republic territory in North Sumatera in December 1948, Fr. Pudjahandaja was in Samosir. Since the Bataklands were again under the control of the Dutch army, Father Pudjahandaja probably felt that his presence in North Sumatera was no longer necessary.<sup>25</sup> He left North Sumatera in March 1949. It was written: "Due to the request of his Bishop, he was compelled to return to Java", and, "He felt quite sorry for the discord among the Batak Catholics themselves in dealing with the Church affairs particularly on matter of baptismal requirements for adult Batak candidates."<sup>26</sup> While he was in North Sumatera Father Pudjahandaja was able to baptize only 750 Batak

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<sup>25</sup>. J.M. Siregar, a retired Catholic teacher in Medan acknowledged that Father Pudjahandaja's visit in the Bataklands actually was permitted by the Indonesian nationalist government. Because of this, his visit was not warmly accepted by the Bishop's office in Medan. Personal interview in Medan, 1987.

<sup>26</sup>. See, Aster 1959. op.cit. p.141.

children and no adult Bataks because he thought they had not had sufficient baptismal instruction.<sup>27</sup>

After the second Dutch aggression, all the Dutch Capuchin missionaries who survived the internment years again started to work in nearly all of the Catholic parishes in the Bataklands. In fact most of the newly opened parishes were located in the same areas as the Dutch military camps. It was reported that on the feast day of Christ The King in 1949, there was a big procession of the Blessed Holy Host in Pematang Siantar. Many Dutch military people also joined that procession.<sup>28</sup> A former nationalist fighter said that he saw some Dutch priests ride in Dutch military jeeps when they visited certain Catholic outstations in the Batakland countryside. Consequently this "safe" return of the Dutch Catholic missionaries to the Bataklands, under the clear protection of the Dutch army, raised the suspicion of some nationalists about their Catholic colleagues. No wonder that, by December 1949, when the Dutch acknowledged Indonesian sovereignty, some Catholic Bataks (most were religious teachers or lay local leaders), who were suspected of being Dutch colonialist collaborators or spies had been

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27. Ibid.

28. Borneo Almanak (1951, 36 jr.), p.38.



subjected to torture or even killed by nationalist fighters.<sup>29</sup>

What happened to some Catholic mission churches, rectories or other buildings in the Bataklands during the transfer of power from one authority to another, can, in a certain sense, also explain the history of the Catholic Batak Church. During the Japanese occupation, some Catholic mission buildings could not be protected and were utilized by the Japanese. After the defeat of the Japanese, those buildings were occupied by the National Indonesian Army who thought that the buildings were enemy property.<sup>30</sup> During the 1950s these buildings were returned to the Catholic Church. More importantly, as I have mentioned earlier, some Catholic mission buildings actually were successfully protected from outsiders by "fanatic" Catholic Bataks. This fanaticism occurred, I believe, because these buildings were probably the clearest images the relatively young Batak Catholic Church could claim for its Catholic identity. The seven-year old (1934-1942) early Batak Catholic Church, which strongly promoted its notion of sahala hamoraon (power

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<sup>29</sup>. Personal interview with Rev. Elpidius van Duynhoven OFM Cap. a former first missionary in the Bataklands, particularly in the Simalungun Batak area. He mentioned the hostilities toward some Catholic Bataks. See also: Aster 1959, op.cit. p.143.

<sup>30</sup>. Panitia Perayaan, Perayaan 40 Tahun Gereja Katolik Sibolga (1932-1972) (Sibolga: 1972), p.21.

of material wealth), was suddenly shocked and ruined by the Japanese authorities as well as by the nationalist Indonesians.

During the first months of the Japanese occupation, although some Catholic Bataks still kept their religious "identity," they did not hesitate to ask the authorities - as far away as Tokyo - to send substitute priests. They also did not feel offended at being offered jobs as civil servants. They probably expected that the new authority, the Japanese military government, would activate its sahala hamoraon. Only later, when they experienced a harder life, particularly their economical life and the obligation to provide unpaid labor, Catholic Bataks, realized who the Japanese were and they became upset. It seems that the Catholic Bataks believed that to keep their religious "identity" (and its images) was not something meaningless. Moreover, during the Japanese occupation, they surely knew that their former marsahala (sahala owner) Capuchin Dutch missionaries were still in the internment camps, places located not too far from their homelands. At least they still had a hope - no matter how small - that someday the "buildings" would be utilized again by the "proper" marsahala missionaries.

The historical events during 1945-1949 in North Sumatera, in fact, hardly changed the Catholic Batak notion of marsahala missionaries from the one of the earlier years.

Generally speaking, the first Catholic Bataks were among the less fortunate native people since most of them came from the less developed Bataklands. In contrast, their Protestant fellows (who had been ministered to by the German missionaries for more than 70 years) were the leading "modernized" and educated Bataks. The notion of "priyayi" (native white-collar government official) in the colonial history of Java, can to some extent be applied to some Protestant Bataks who have dominated ( up to the present time) state bureaucratic offices as well as various important private business jobs in North Sumatera. The coming of the Capuchin Franciscan missionaries was certainly welcomed by the Batak candidates for Catholic baptism. Probably, they believed that the Capuchin marshahala priests were the right missionaries. During colonial times the Dutch bureaucrats as well as the Protestant missionaries did not offer them "modernity." In a letter to his relatives in the Netherlands, a former Dutch resident of Tapanuli Batakland wrote that after the surrender of the Japanese authorities, some (Christian Toba) Bataks actually looked forward to the return of "normal" life under their former Dutch missionaries. He also mentioned that after the Japanese defeat, they even had a plan to prepare a welcome celebration for "proper" Dutch people.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>. J.J.van Velde 1987, op.cit. pp.138-139 and 226.

Being marginal people, it seems that the first Catholic Bataks realized that by 1950 nationalism could not replace Catholicism which had significantly provided them "modernity." The presence of the two Javanese priests in the Bataklands (1947-1949) clearly showed that both of them were not the "proper" marshala missionaries. The two Javanese priests did not master the Toba Batak. The vernacular language which is important for practicing the typical Batak discourse. The two native priests from Java, moreover, approached their mission-work among the Batak people differently than did the Dutch Capuchins. The Catholic Bataks realized that these Javanese priests, unlike their former Dutch missionaries, were not familiar with Batak dalihan na tolu social discourse, for example, Father Pudjahandaja's hesitation to baptize the adult Batak candidates because of insufficient instruction. Tampubolon also remembered that Father Pudjahandaja prohibited some local Catholic leaders from giving their sermons during the Sunday service. He meant to stop the practice of allowing someone who had just been baptized one day to give a sermon the next Sunday.

Moreover, the Catholic Bataks also realized that the two Javanese priests were not the typical sahala hamoraon owner missionaries who would provide the access to modernity. They felt that those Javanese priests were by no means the right persons to provide access to modernity in

North Sumatera, as it had been reflected so far in the plantation business and in the urban life of Medan. The Batak people, Tobas in particular, due to their limited natural resources, looked for other access, namely education, to improve their lives.<sup>32</sup> They knew that after the Indonesian Independence proclamation their Bishop's office was moved from Padang (West Coast Sumatera) to Medan. That most of their former missionaries were staying within the city of Medan, which was under the control of the Dutch authorities. When the Dutch Prime Minister, Dr. Beel, the former head of Dutch Catholic Party, visited Medan in December 1947, the hierarchy of the Catholic Church in Medan also joined the Dutch authorities e.g General P. Scholten (the Dutch Army Commander in North Sumatera) in greeting the official at the airport.<sup>33</sup> It was reported that by mid-August 1950, Mgr. J. D'Ardoye who had been assigned to Jakarta (August 1947) as the Pope's representative in Indonesia, made an official visit to Medan. He had meetings with some Dutch government officials and also with T. Dr. Mansoer, the Chief Representative of the East Sumatera

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<sup>32</sup>. Ibid., pp.204 and 207.

<sup>33</sup>. They were: Fr. Aurelius OFM Cap. (the Acting Bishop of Medan), Fr. Emilius OFM Cap. (Pastor of Medan) and Fr. Pius OFM Cap. (Dutch military chaplain). At that time, Bishop Brans had been in his "vacation" in the Netherlands since June 22, 1947. See, Borneo Almanak (1949), p.19.



State.<sup>34</sup> A celebration welcoming Msgr. D'Ardoye was organized by the Catholic people of Medan.<sup>35</sup>

On December 27, 1949, when the Dutch acknowledged the sovereignty of the Indonesian government over North Sumatera, again the Bataklands became a safe area for Christian missions. In mid 1950 it was reported that all the main Catholic parishes again had their Capuchin priests. In a relatively short time, the population of Catholics in North Sumatera, mainly in the Bataklands, increased steadily. In 1956 the total Catholic population in the diocese of Medan was 77,000. It was double the population of the previous five years. This data was illustrated impressively in statistics reported by a Dutch Capuchin historian.<sup>36</sup> This Dutch Capuchin priest claimed, even, that the Catholic mission in the Bataklands was one of the most fruitful Catholic missions in the world. By the late 1950s, supported by new and younger Capuchin priests from the Netherlands, many more Catholic congregations were established in the Bataklands as well as in its neighbouring

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<sup>34</sup>. This Dutch favoured Negara Sumatera Timur (East Sumatera State) only lasted from December 1948 until August 15, 1950, when the sovereignty of the Republic of Indonesia was resumed.

<sup>35</sup>. See, Borneo Almanak (1950. 35 jr.), p.13.

<sup>36</sup>. Aster 1959, op.cit., p.150.

area, the East Coast of Sumatera.<sup>37</sup> Many older Batak Catholics I met during my stay in the archdiocese of Medan recalled that their church, school or other mission building was erected by this or that priest. Most of these new missionaries had been trained at schools in the Netherlands which especially prepared candidates for civil servant assignments in the tropical Dutch colonies.

In the early 1950s, the presence of the marshala Capuchin missionaries was challenged by the new national authority in their works in the Bataklands. In a certain sense, by the time of the Japanese occupation, these Dutch Capuchins had established a good relationship with the colonial ruling class. In 1950, they realized that they could not enjoy this privilege any longer. In December 1950, for example, the Catholic Church in Palipi and Pangururan (Samosir), in the name of the Bishop's Office in Medan, sent a claim letter to the local office of the Ministry of Religion in Sibolga. They asked for the payment for losses, damages and "rent" of some parish properties and buildings which were occupied by the Indonesian army during the years 1945-1949.<sup>38</sup> This claim gives an example of the early Batak Catholic Church's opinion and attitude (of Church - State

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37. See: Clark E. Cunningham, Postwar Migration of The Toba-Bataks to East Sumatra (Yale, Southeast Asia Studies cultural Report Series no.5, Yale University, 1958).

38. Letter of Vikariat Apostolik Medan, no. 282/50. 18 Desember 1950.

separation) toward the new national government, the Republic of Indonesia. As a matter of fact, during the 1950s, the Batak Catholic Church also had to participate in a more national and institutional Catholic Church led by the Catholic Church in Java. Msgr. Sugijapranata, the only native Bishop in Indonesia at that time, was the point of reference for Catholic Indonesians.

The growth of a stronger Indonesian nationalism under the Jakarta regime in the 1950s in North Sumatera also pushed the Catholic Bataks to become better acquainted with their "non-Batak" (read: national) colleagues. The participation of some Catholic Bataks in the Conference of All Indonesian Catholics (KUKSI = Konperensi Umat Katolik Seluruh Indonesia) and the establishment of the Catholic Party in North Sumatera were some of the Batak Catholic Church's involvement in the notion of Indonesian (Catholic) nationalism. The North Sumatera Catholic Party actually was started by a Javanese government official in Medan. The fact that the Catholic Church proselytizers (read: marsahala missionaries) were all expatriate priests, religious brothers and nuns, then, put them in a tenuous position during this era of nationalism. The Batak Catholic mission looked for some solutions. In 1949 some Batak Catholics youth were sent to seminaries in Sulawesi as well as in Flores. None of them was able to be ordained because of failing in classes or/and did not interest in priesthood

life anymore. In 1950, a minor seminary was established in Padang which actually was attended mostly by Batak and Nias youths. This seminary was moved to Pematang Siantar in 1955.

It is true that the hope of having native "missionaries" could make the Batak (or other Indonesian) Catholic Church be fairly considered to be within the mainstream of the Indonesian nationalist movement. However, based on its religious doctrine - since Christianity has acknowledged the one and all powerful God all over the world - the Catholic Church in the Bataklands also tried to introduce a notion of "supranationalism." This notion, therefore, had to be placed into an image with which the Catholic Bataks had previously been familiar.

A religious celebration held in the most Catholicized area, Samosir in 1952, exemplifies how the Catholic Church in the Bataklands used one of its devotional practices to deal with Indonesian nationalism, as well as to strengthen the Catholic Church's notion of supranationalism. In July 17, 1952, a big procession was organized by the Catholic Church in Onan Runggu, Samosir, to honor the Blessed Holy Host. A government official of the Ministry of Religion from Jakarta wrote:

The center of Catholic spiritual life has been organized around the devotion to the Blessed Holy Host, and hopefully the procession in Onan Runggu may always remind and strengthen the Catholic people's devotion to the Blessed Holy Host within which Christ himself has

been concealed.<sup>39</sup>

Three Bishops of Sumatera, respectively the Bishops of Medan, Palembang and Pangkalpinang, were invited to participate in the procession. Some officials of the Ministry of Religion as well as of the Ministry of Information in Jakarta were also invited. They came to film the event which took place at scenic Toba Lake. That documented Catholic Batak religious event could be used by the Indonesian national government as a distinct example for demonstrating to the domestic as well as to the international public the freedom to choose one's religion and to practice it properly as stated in the Indonesian constitution.<sup>40</sup> That procession lasted from morning till afternoon and was attended by thousands of Catholic Bataks from Samosir and the neighboring areas.

In a sermon given during the celebration, a Dutch Capuchin priest reminded the congregation that the procession, first of all, was conducted to honor their "lord" Jesus as the King of kings. For the Batak Toba people, the notion of "king" (raja) actually is a familiar word in their social life. The Toba Batak notion of "raja" is reserved for anyone who is an expert or who has a certain

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<sup>39</sup>. M.S. Brotodarsono, Peringatan Prosesi Sakramen Maha Kudus di Onanrunggu Samosir (Jakarta: Kementrian Agama, 1952), p.5. See also, Borneo Almanak (1954. jr.39), p.31.

<sup>40</sup>. Ibid. pp.8-9.



social (and dalihan na tolu) status and role. Here is a summary of the sermon:

Dear visitors of this procession of the Blessed Holy Host, look, here is enthroned the King of kings who takes the form of a host for Himself. Christ the king of all creatures, conceals himself in the Host, likes to leave the tabernacle and goes out from the church to greet all of you who came and have participated in this procession; especially to the brothers and sisters of Onan runggu who really have shown their love and obedience to Christ the King in the Blessed Holy Host by the way of organizing this great adoration to Him outside the church.

Christ likes to be outside the church to give His blessing and grace to all of us who follow and love him. The Sacred Heart of our Lord Jesus loves his children and always hopes to be close to them everyday. Children may be close in heart with Christ by receiving the Holy Host in the Holy Mass. Based on our love and obedience to Christ, today we have celebrated a big procession, a great festival without taking into account the difficulties as well as the cost of it. Indeed, Christ will grant us His multiplying blessing and grace. In the matter of practicing charity and kindness, Christ certainly will be no less generous than us. Thus, our good deed today should be followed by our various proper actions in accordance with the holy and eminent intentions.

My beloved brothers and sisters in the same faith, Christ in His form of the Holy Host has loved us. Christ has offered His most Sacred Heart to the world. The world has wounded His Heart, has stabbed it with a sword by way of committing shameful actions, although Christ has offered His Heart for the sake of the salvation of the world.

Look at Christ in the Blessed Holy Host enthroned in front of us. Christ has offered His most Sacred Heart to us, nothing else reserved, everything already given to us. In return, Christ hopes that our heart would be really dedicated to Him totally.

Inside the church and being enthroned at a tabernacle Christ is the King. However, he almost desperately expects the visits of His children.

Christ so far is still a King in an empty and quiet room. But now, my dear listeners, we are in front of Christ the King. Let us really offer our hearts, our loves, our good deeds to Christ our King as our token that He has ruled and conquered the world, that everything upon this world is owned by Him.

Let us now open our hearts to accept the gift from Christ who today has been enthroned below the blue sky in order to pay more attention to our will and our needs.

Let us together strengthen our belief in Christ who dwells inside the Blessed Holy Host.

Let us give our many thanks since Christ has loved us with a love which can only be activated by God because He is our God.

Dear listeners, Christ likes to leave the tabernacle, goes out from the church and shows up below the cloudy sky. May Christ's presence in Onan Runggu bring about a flow of God's graces generously so that the people of Samosir and the people around this Toba Lake quickly acknowledge the most Sacred Heart of Jesus who really has loved human beings.<sup>41</sup>

The sermon above, I believe, tried to promote the Catholic Church's devotional idea of Christ the King (of kings) to the Bataks. The idea then, was put into a "real Christ" - depicted in an imagery of the Blessed Holy Host - who cared to have a personal relationship with the "rajas" in the Bataklands. Moreover, because of the growing notion of nationalism in Indonesia in 1950s, the kingship of Christ was likely promoted also for acknowledging its "supranationalism," that the Catholic Church to some extent is independent and beyond the boundaries of any state's

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<sup>41</sup>. Ibid. pp.24-26.

authority. It was done by way of referring to Batak cultures the Capuchin missionaries had known before.

This celebration, was not conducted in a pure Catholic devotional tradition. Some Batak cultural aspects were manipulated in this celebration. For the Toba Bataks no honorable celebration is valid unless it includes their traditional music (gondang) and dance (tortor). Therefore, after the sermon, a tortor was performed by some Batak men and women to honor the Blessed Holy Host before it was returned to the parish church. The dance followed the rhythm of the gondang (Batak traditional rhymed drums orchestra). A reception followed the lunch break. To honor the three Bishops of Sumatera, the Catholic Batak people offered them Batak "religious" textiles, ulos.<sup>42</sup> These ulos were given in a tortor. According to the Batak adat only hula-hula supposedly has the right to deliver an ulos (as a token of his sahala) to his boru. However, the tortor was performed by the Catholic Bataks in a manner as if the Bishops were the hula-hula -- persons who in terms of Batak tradition deserve honor from their boru. Moreover, since many visiting Dutch priests and other religious people were very pleased with the great celebration, they also wanted to honor the local parish priest. Therefore about twenty priests and

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<sup>42</sup>. For a further reading on ulos, the one in English: S.A. Niessen, Motifs of Life in Toba Batak Texts and Textiles (Dordrecht: Foris Publications, 1985).

members of religious orders danced before of the parish priest (a Dutch Capuchin) using gestures which implied a reverence for a hula-hula person. It was noted:

When they (the Dutch missionaries) were standing in front of the priest who was ready to receive the honor, loud hand clapping applause and laughter burst out and lasted a long time.

The Batak spectators were surprised to see that the Dutch missionaries were quite familiar with the way Bataks dance.<sup>43</sup> In the early 1950s, the adaptation of Batak traditions into the Catholic Church's liturgy was something extraordinary. It would not be acceptable to the Protestant Bataks. The Protestant Batak Christian Church (H.K.B.P. = Huria Kristen Batak Protestan) in particular, officially denounced it as a heretical religious practice.<sup>44</sup>

It seems that the notion of Christ the everlasting King and the devotion to the Blessed Holy Host were the crucial issues in the Church and State relationship. These were the same issues which had to be resolved by the newly national Catholic Church in Indonesia as well as by the Batak Catholic Church in North Sumatera. Bishop Sugijapranata, an outspoken leader of the Indonesian Bishops Council and a close friend of the first Indonesian president (Sukarno), expressed his opinion on these issues. The Second Conference

<sup>43</sup>. M.S. Brotodarsono 1952, op.cit., pp.32-33.

<sup>44</sup>. Panindangion Haporseaon (Confessie) ni Huria Kristen BatakProtestant.(HKBP) (Sibolga: Pertjetakan HKBP, 1951).



of All Indonesian Catholic People (KUKSI) was held in Semarang, Central Java in 1954, a year before the first general election to choose the Indonesian Constitutional Council. Participants from the diocese of Medan also came to that conference. In his speech to the participants of the conference, Bishop Sugijapranata stated that the unity of the Indonesian Catholic People is based on the notion of Christ the King present in the celebration of the Holy Mass.<sup>45</sup> He acknowledged that the Catholic Church in Indonesia has consisted of many independent local Catholic congregations. However, the conference was intended, he said:

...to unite the will, to flame our same and strong Catholic spirit; to strengthen our knowledge, awareness and belief so that our mind and heart will really warm to acknowledge our responsibility to the Church, State and Nation which have been in an era of important and urgent years.

He continued,

Remember, we have lived among the people who do not know yet about the nature and form of the Catholic Church. The Church which actually has done something in its environment. The government and the people (rakyat) somehow has been still in doubt concerning the Catholic Church and its strange history, its outstanding organization and discipline, its odd characters, its surprising influence and its wonderful works.<sup>46</sup>

Finally, he asked that the Catholic Church in Indonesia,

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<sup>45</sup>. Speech of Msgr.A. Sugijapranata S.J. in: KUKSI, Konggres Umat Katolik Seluruh Indonesia, tgl. 27-29 Desember 1954 di Semarang (1954).

<sup>46</sup>. Ibid.



Catholic men and women as well, become "aristocrats" who come from the people, raised among the people, grow with the people and struggle for the people. The Catholic "aristocrats" who, "not because of their ethnic background nor of their birth since this is, then, just similar to winning a lottery but because of their intellect, knowledge and morality." The conference actually made the Batak Catholic Church in North Sumatera recognize the need to participate in local political affairs. Two months before the general election (December 15, 1955), the Bishop of Medan, a Dutch Capuchin who had just succeeded Bishop Brans, Msgr. van den Hurk OFM Cap. instructed his parish priests who were serving in North Sumatera to help the Catholic Party spiritually as well as financially to win the election.<sup>47</sup>

During the 1950s, the Catholic Church in Indonesia as well as in North Sumatera realized that participating in state and national affairs did not mean that the Catholic Church denied its notion of supranationalism. The promotion of the devotion to Christ the King depicted in the Blessed Holy Host, started in the early 1950s, was intended to divert the Catholic Bataks from the Indonesian nationalism. In 1955 the Indonesian Bishops Council issued an official pastoral letter stating that Indonesian Catholics should not

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<sup>47</sup>. Letter of: Vikariat Apostolik Medan, 13 Oktober 1955.

treat nationalism as their "god."<sup>48</sup> In this concern, the well-known words of Bishop Sugijapranata have been quoted quite often; and have become an adage for Indonesian Catholics. He said that a Catholic Indonesian was supposed to be "One hundred percent patriot as well as one hundred percent Catholic."<sup>49</sup> After the 1952 procession of the Blessed Holy Host in Onan Runggu, the Batak Catholic Church, its hierarchy in particular, continued to preach the theme of Christ the everlasting King to the Catholic Bataks and to encourage them to attend its most proper devotion, the Holy Mass celebration. This effort, I would like to argue, was intended not only to explain how to become "one hundred percent Catholic" but also to contextualize the notion of supra-national Catholicism within the local cultures.

During the years of 1954-1957 three Lenten Pastoral Letters (in the Toba Batak language) issued by Bishop Brans and his successor ( Bishop van den Hurk) tried to put the notion of Christ the King and related matters into Batak cultural context. These letters were issued at the beginning of each Lenten season. Bishop Brans issued his letter in 1954, the same year he celebrated the 50th anniversary of his priesthood as well as the year he resigned from office after 33 years of service in the Sumatera mission. He stated

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<sup>48</sup>. Pengumuman Bersama Dari Para Wali Geredja di Indonesia Serupa "Panca Dharma" (1955).

<sup>49</sup>. KUKSI 1954, op.cit.

that the Catholic Church inherited the leadership of the Christian people from the early Christian community. As the Bishop of Medan, he was the vicar of the Pope. He acknowledged that in his bishopric the relationship of one Catholic person to another was similar to the relationship between a Batak older brother and his younger brother. This is the typical Batak marhaha-maranggi relationship.<sup>50</sup> In order to strengthen the familial unity of this Catholic marhaha-maranggi relationship, he suggested that his people attend Holy Mass as often as possible. In terms of Batak tradition, the Catholic Holy Mass celebration, he noted, is somewhat similar to the Batak meal ritual.<sup>51</sup> The Bishop wrote:

There is again in our Church another most precious property given to us. A precious meal which will give health and strength to us. This meal actually is Jesus Himself in His form of the Holy Host. Jesus Himself has been willing to give the meal to us. It is necessary that His Spirit is attached to the Church so that all of us may eat the meal and it is good that we eat it often. I have no time to explain further about the offering Jesus has

<sup>50</sup>. In Batak traditional social organization, "seniority" has been the last important categorization among the other described dalihan na tolu status.

<sup>51</sup>. Rev. Oscar Nuyten OFM Cap., one of the first Dutch missionaries in the Batak Catholic mission said in an interview that he usually explains to the Bataks that the Holy Host in a certain sense is similar to the Batak notion of the "greeted and consecrated meal" (jambar). Every Batak person who is invited to a traditional ritual or ceremony always has the right to a certain portion of the meal (jambar) since "words" (manghataon) have already officially been said over it. The Holy Host certainly is consecrated in the Holy Mass celebration which is rightfully attended by all Catholic people.

offered to us in the form of the Holy Host. This offering in the Holy Mass certainly is more precious than gold. Please, come and get the gold within that Holy Mass.<sup>52</sup>

Unlike in the Protestant Church(es) this Holy Mass, of course, cannot be celebrated by a lay local congregation's leader. In the Catholic Church, only an ordained priest has the authority to administer the mass.

In his 1956 Lenten Letter, Bishop Ferrerius van den Hurk who was a former Capuchin superior in North Sumatera, stated that the Catholic people in his diocese by no means have been separated from their fellows all over the world.<sup>53</sup> This international unity has been based on the spiritual unity activated in the offering of the Holy Mass. The presence of Christ in the Holy Communion received in every Catholic heart has secured that international Catholic unity of love. He argued that since children are the most precious and biggest possession of each (Catholic) Batak parent, accordingly a good and appropriate religious education for them would be their most blessed life. It has been the responsibility of all parents to teach their children to pray at the proper time daily; before and after every meal and before and after sleep as well. Every parent has to

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<sup>52</sup>. 1954 Lenten Letter of Bishop Mathias L.T. Brans OFMCap. to the Catholic priests and lay people in the Apostolic Vicarage of Medan.

<sup>53</sup>. 1956 Lenten Letter of Bishop Dr.A.H.F. van den Hurk to the Catholic priests and lay people in the Apostolic Vicarage of Medan.

provide good catechetical and religious books for their children and to ask them to attend the Sunday service and the Holy Mass. In his 1957 Lenten Letter, Bishop Hurk, explicitly noted that the most common Batak social problems: gambling and drunkenness as well as envy and hatred (late and hosom) are serious threats to Christian spiritual life in particular and to the society in general. These vices, the first two in particular, would damage people's minds, diminish their strong desire to work and also, destroy peace.<sup>54</sup>

In 1950 when the Dutch Capuchin missionaries again started their mission work, they realized that the new centralized government of the Republic of Indonesia assigned some Batak Catholics to be official representatives of the Catholic Church in North Sumatera. The staff of the Catholic Party, e.g. based on the notion of Church and State relationship, became part of the society's decision makers. These Batak Catholic politicians, being part of the Indonesian National government, could provide an alternative to the Catholic Church hierarchy's point of view on the social, economic, and political life of the Catholic people in North Sumatera. However, these "nationalist" Batak Catholics, could not ignore the images of the Catholic

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<sup>54</sup>. 1957 Lenten Letter of Bishop Dr.A.H.F. van den Hurk OFM Cap. to the Catholic priests and lay people in the Apostolic Vicarage of Medan.



notion of supranationalism. Moreover, North Sumatera in the last years of the 1950s was also one of the areas of the anti-central (Jakarta) government rebellion of the Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia (P.R.R.I. = Pemerintahan Revolusioner Republik Indonesia) which emerged in 1956-1958. A Capuchin missionary said that, thanks to the Catholic notion of supranationalism, the Catholic Church in general was not harmed by either the rebels or by the "tentara pusat" (Central Army), a West-Java (Siliwangi) based army battalion. Some Catholic Batak migrants in the area around Pematang Siantar, however, mentioned that due to the rebellion they had to leave their homelands. They felt uncomfortable to stay in their homelands because the rebels (some were their own daliana na tolu "relatives") asked too much from their private possessions.

I have described that during the Japanese occupation, during the Indonesian struggle for independence and in the early years of the Indonesian Republic, various local as well as national historical events were experienced by the Catholic Church in North Sumatera. The Catholic sahala exercised by the expatriate missionaries was successfully explained and acknowledged by the Catholic Church as something which is beyond the boundaries of any indigenous society as well as of Indonesian nationalism. The success was related to the fact that the Catholic Church not only

believes in the absolute authority of the Biblical God but also in its special official teachings that in terms of human salvation, good deeds will be rewarded by God.

Obviously, the Dutch Capuchins and the other expatriate missionaries were proud and satisfied with their proselytization in the Bataklands. That the Bataklands, in fact, had been previously Christianized and dominated by the Protestants, I believe, gave a bit more accomplishment to the Dutch Catholic missionaries. The book about the Capuchin mission in the Bataklands entitled "A People Found Christ," written in 1959 by a Dutch Capuchin is an example of the pre-ecumenical inter-Christian Churches' attitude toward each other in the West and in Indonesia as well. Imagining Lake Toba as if it were the Sea of Galilee in the Holy Land, and claiming that the Catholic mission in the Bataklands was the most fruitful Catholic mission in the world, moreover, is another example of the Dutch Catholic missionaries' faithful deed.<sup>55</sup> "The Bataks really love hamajuon (progress)," are the words I heard from most Dutch Capuchins during my research in the Netherlands and in the Bataklands as well.

The effort in the 1950s to familiarize the Batak Catholics with the devotion to the Blessed Holy Host, I believe, is another way of strengthening the notion of

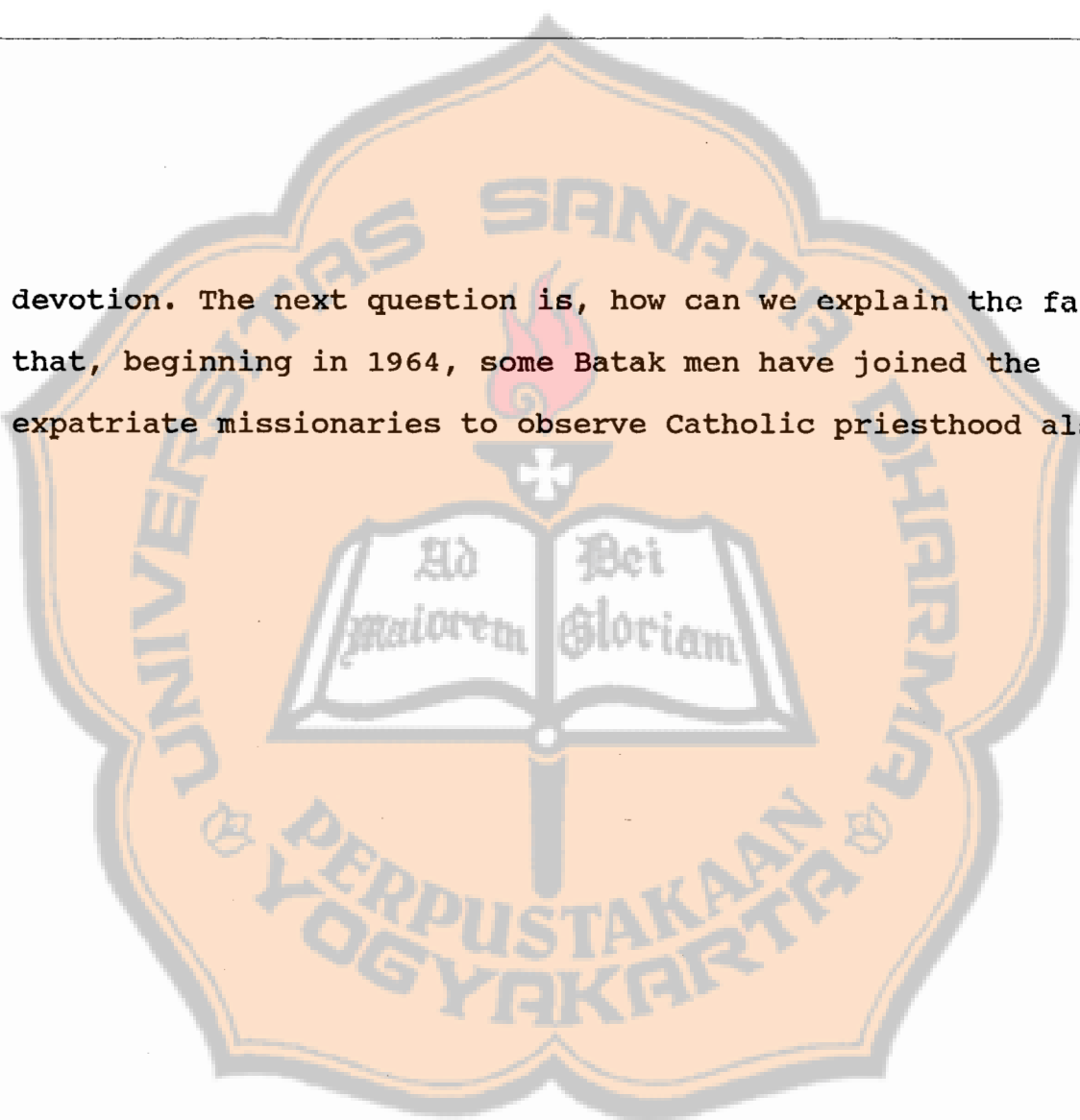
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<sup>55</sup>. See, Aster 1959, op.cit.

Catholic supranationalism. This devotion enabled the Batak Catholics to respond to the supranational Church (promoted by the Javanese Bishop of Semarang), and also to pay attention to the origins of their tradition or adat. That Jesus Christ is the everlasting King of Kings who is present "below the cloudy sky around Toba Lake" and in every Catholic who receives Communion (which is "more precious than gold") as often as possible, explains the absolute authority of the Biblical God. In a certain sense, He is the "hidden" God also, but, who is represented by His Son in the world and in history. The importance of a person to person relationship between every (Batak) Catholic with the Biblical God - of course, as the source of Catholic sahala - has further explained that the notion of supranationalism is something beyond human immanence. The Bataks' particular human weaknesses such as gambling, drunkenness, envy and hatred warned of in the Bishop's 1957 Lenten Letter pointed out the implicitness of their supposedly proper participation in the Catholic transcendental relationship with the Biblical God.

In a certain sense, the notion of historical transitory human activities, then, has been encapsulated by the supposedly everlasting blessed life secured in the notion of the presence of Christ the King in everyday life. In terms of the Catholic Church's teachings, the authorized ordained ministers, the priests, have played special roles in this

devotion. The next question is, how can we explain the fact that, beginning in 1964, some Batak men have joined the expatriate missionaries to observe Catholic priesthood also.



### Chapter Three

#### THE DOMESTICATING OF THE CATHOLIC SAHALA, REVISITED

During the late 1950s and in the following two decades, due to the political hostilities between Indonesia and the Netherlands as well as to the participation of Batak religious people in the Church's hierarchy, the so called "Indonesianisasi" (Indonesianizing) of the Catholic Church occurred in North Sumatera. This Indonesianisasi was established with plans and strategies. The participation of Batak people has made the Catholic Church more aware of the need to provide knowledges for the Church to guide the Catholic religious people in their "new life-style." It also resulted in the domestication of the notion of Catholic sahala.

Regarding the steady growth of its population during the two decades after 1950, the Catholic Church in North Sumatera worried about the amount of manpower available for its mission work. The Catholic Church in North Sumatera considered likely the eight year period from 1942 - 1950 as a stagnant era for its development, in the Bataklands in particular. The Church's statistics for 1941 - the only one available before the stagnant era - shows there were 27,943 Catholics in North Sumatera and West Sumatera.<sup>1</sup> The more

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<sup>1</sup>. Central Missie Bureau, De Katholieke Missie in Nederlands - Indie. Jaarboek 1942. (Batavia Centrum, 1942), p.60.



recent statistics, published in a booklet about the Archdiocese of Medan, shows that the growth of the Catholic population beginning in 1951 was significant.<sup>2</sup>

**Table 1.** Rate Of Increase In Number Of Baptised Catholics: 1951-1980.

Year	Number	Increase	Average Annual Increase
1951	30,730	-	-
1955	56,404	+ 25,674	1951-1955: 16.7 % per year
1960	88,190	+ 31,786	1956-1960: 11.3 % per year
1965	122,513	+ 34,323	1961-1965: 7.8 % per year
1970	194,917	+ 72,404	1966-1970: 11.8 % per year
1975	235,451	+ 40,534	1971-1975: 4.2 % per year
1980	282,711	+ 47,260	1976-1980: 4.0 % per year

The booklet also notes,

During the fifties there was a very rapid increase of about 14 % every year, in the sixties after the communist coup in 1965 an influx of former Animists amounted to 12 % per year; but the seventies have shown a tendency toward stabilization of growth at about 4 % increase per year.<sup>3</sup>

To conclude on the suggestive statistics given above, the booklet states that much of the further growth of the Catholic population in North Sumatera "will depend on whether or not the number of priests and other church personnel can be increased proportionately and whether they

<sup>2</sup>. Archdiocese Of Medan North Sumatera Indonesia. (Jakarta, 1981), p.35. This booklet was published (in English) probably to inform potential donors from abroad.

<sup>3</sup>. Ibid. p.35.

will be capable of effectively administering the local Church."<sup>4</sup> The booklet even shows a worrisome statistics of the Church personnel's growth in the archdiocese of Medan during the 1960-1980 period.<sup>5</sup> The first Batak priest was ordained in 1964.

**Table 2.**  
The Growth Rate of Church's Personnel: 1960 - 1980

Year	Priest	Clerics/ Seminarists	Brothers	Sisters	Total	%
1960	53	13	27	178	271	-
1965	71	20	27	250	368	+36%
1970	82	21	41	298	442	+20%
1975	93	36	36	346	511	+16%
1980	99	24	38	377	538	+ 5%

Early in the 1950s, the shortage of priests (and other church personnel) was already a crucial problem for the Catholic mission in Indonesia, including the Bataklands.

In the 1950s Catholic missions in Indonesia still depended not only on expatriate missionaries to minister their work, but also on foreign funds (from the Netherlands in particular). In 1952, the office of Catholic Bishops in Indonesia requested the Indonesian government to give

<sup>4</sup>. Ibid. p.36.

<sup>5</sup>. Ibid.

permits for 500 additional expatriate missionaries to work in various mission areas in Indonesia. The request was refused by the Ministry of Religion.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, beginning in 1957, because of the political tension between Indonesia and the Netherlands on the issue of West Irian, beginning in 1957 new Dutch missionaries could seldom get visas to work in Indonesia. At that time, almost all of the Catholic religious orders and congregations in Indonesia were still subordinated to their main provinces in Europe. Because missionary workers continued to be needed, one solution to the visa problem was to invite effective expatriate missionaries other than the Dutch. Another effective response, also taken by other religious orders and congregations at the time, was to establish an "independent" or "autonomous" provincial-level religious administration. To some extent, the establishment of an autonomous religious institution was mainly intended by the Catholic Church's hierarchy as well as by several religious orders and congregations to show the Indonesian people that the Catholic Church was not merely an "agent of the Dutch." The establishment of a provincial-level religious administration would acknowledge that such an order or congregation had Indonesian legal rights and that its property, for example,

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<sup>6</sup>. See, Letter of General Secretary of the Ministry of Religion, R.M. Kafrawi, June 14, 1952

was not subject to any of its expatriate members.<sup>7</sup> An attempt was made to establish the idea of an indigenous Catholic Church.

Indeed, by the early 1960s some other Catholic religious orders in Java and Flores had native clergies but there were none in North Sumatera.<sup>8</sup> Because of absence of native priests in their order, the Capuchin missionaries hesitated to follow the example of their colleagues in Java to establish an "autonomous" province. In terms of Catholic Church bureaucracy, a bishop is the highest officer and supposedly has the final authority over any policy in his (arch)diocese. A diocesan priest as well as a religious order priest (Capuchin, Jesuit, Dominican, etc.) can be elected by the Pope to be a bishop. Only the local diocesan priests are directly under their bishop's authority. The religious order priests, however, have a regional or provincial superior as their final decision-maker for their work. As I will describe in the following pages, before and

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7. In November 1957 Sukarno, the president of Indonesia officially declared that Indonesia needed West Irian back from the Netherlands. Since negotiation in the United Nations was hardly successful, in December 1957 the Indonesian government "sent back" many Dutch citizens to the Netherlands and also "seized temporarily" about 49 Dutch companies which operated in Indonesia. See, Bagian Dokumentasi Departemen Penerangan, Ichtisar Peristiwa Dalam dan Luar Negeri. (Jakarta, 1961), pp.26-30.

8. In the diocese of Semarang (Central Java), for example, by 1960 there were about 139 religious as well as diocesan native priests.

after the establishment of an autonomous Indonesian Capuchin province in 1976, special factors relating to the Dutch Capuchins as well as to the Catholic Batak people themselves shaped the identity of the Catholic Church in North Sumatera until the early 1980s.

In his 1983 Christmas letter the Capuchin superior in Indonesia noted that in early December 1976 some Capuchins of the diocese of Medan had gathered in Pematang Siantar to celebrate the establishment of their Indonesian province on January 31st of that year.<sup>9</sup> In his letter, the Capuchin superior recalled that, due to the political tensions between the Netherlands and Indonesia which began in 1957, it was the Capuchin superior in the Netherlands who had actually asked his colleagues in North Sumatera to establish an autonomous province in November 1957. This province would supposedly organize the Capuchin missionaries who worked in West Kalimantan, North Sumatera and Nias. Ten years after his suggestion, there still was no move to establish an Indonesian province. The main difficulty in implementing that proposal was the fact that, in terms of manpower and finance those three Capuchin mission areas in Indonesia depended very much on the European Capuchin provinces of the Netherlands, Switzerland and Westphalia. Following a meeting in the Netherlands, the Dutch Capuchin province officially

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<sup>9</sup>. Simpai. December 1983.



stated that the decision to establish a province was actually in the hands of their colleagues in Indonesia. They would gladly help the proposed establishment as far as possible; however, they also mentioned that if their Capuchin brothers in Indonesia officially became autonomous and more or less independent of their "mother" province, it was very possible that the Dutch Capuchin province would become less interested in the Indonesian mission and would redirect its efforts to Chile or Tanzania. The missionary finances raised in the Netherlands would most likely follow the Dutch missionaries wherever they worked.

In March 1960, a Capuchin meeting was held in Medan. It was attended by the local Capuchin superiors, the two Dutch Capuchin Bishops of Medan and Pontianak (West Kalimantan) and the Dutch Capuchin superior from the Netherlands. The participants concluded that the autonomy of the Capuchins in Indonesia had to be sought as a goal (otonomi saudara-saudara Kapusin harus dikejar sebagai cita-cita). The meeting ended with the hope that autonomy would be established by the time the first native priests were ordained. They also proposed a dual membership for the expatriate Capuchins in Indonesia, to unite the Dutch, Swiss and German Capuchin missionaries in Indonesia, and still to maintain their membership in their original provinces. After the meeting, the Dutch superior went on an official tour of North Sumatera.

This 1960 Dutch superior's visit brought many difficult issues relating to the establishment of an autonomous Indonesian Capuchin province into focus. In the course of his visit to the Capuchin novitiate as well as to the major seminary in Parapat, the superior became upset by the improper training given to the Capuchin seminarians. He thought that these seminarians, for example, did not observe the official Capuchin traditions of fasting and "associated ascetic practices." At that time the Capuchins still observed their old Constitution. But these practices - especially fasting were not highly appreciated by the Bataks, it appears. The Bataks thought that food was the source of life. They also did not keep their beards. These facts made him further doubt the wisdom of the proposed plan for an independent Indonesian province.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, supported by the two Capuchin Bishops, the Capuchins in Indonesia in general preferred to continue the training for Capuchin candidates in North Sumatera in preparation for autonomy regardless of the shortcomings of that training.

Fortunately the Second Vatican Council positively affected the office of the Capuchin religious order. Since 1968 the Capuchins have had a "new" constitution which permits adaptation of local customs and ways of life in religious training. The issue of an independent Indonesian

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<sup>10</sup>. Ibid. p.259.

province came up again. In July 1969, a Capuchin council meeting was held in the Netherlands. At that meeting the council restated the earlier decision, namely that the Dutch Capuchins would encourage their colleagues in Indonesia to decide the issue of provincial autonomy themselves. The Dutch province guaranteed help with manpower and finances. They also promised to give special attention to non-Indonesian Capuchins who would like to return to their original provinces. By 1976 there were additional meetings in Indonesia (in North Sumatera as well as in West Kalimantan) to prepare for the establishment of an Indonesian Capuchin province. A crucial question which often came up was, how to unite and effectively manage three distant Capuchin mission areas of diverse cultural backgrounds, namely: West Kalimantan, Bataklands (North Sumatera) and Nias. One Capuchin missionary, Father Martin Booz, commented that he could not understand how the province could be called "Indonesian" as most of its members were expatriate Capuchins.<sup>11</sup> Other sensitive questions raised were whether the members of the proposed province would include only Indonesian Capuchins or both Indonesians and expatriate missionaries, and whether the proposal had to be executed at once or if there could still be an alternative.

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<sup>11</sup>. Ibid. p.263.

It seems that there was fear among some expatriate Capuchins about the uncertainty of Indonesianisasi. They realized that the different customs between various Indonesian ethnics (Batak, Nias, Daya, Chinese, etc.) were as significant as the differences between Indonesians and the expatriates. Although they already had experiences in their mission work and in dealing with the Indonesians, they probably never adapted, "cara berpikir dan cara hidup Indonesia" (Indonesian ways of thinking and life). The Capuchin Bishop of Pontianak, who was the forerunner of the promotion of an independent Capuchin province, reported in 1958 that the Indonesianisasi could cause,

the influence outside Indonesia will be limited, so that the Capuchin brothers can adjust themselves to the Indonesian ways of thinking and living, an adjustment which will be very important for the training of indigenous candidates.<sup>12</sup>

He described that his colleagues' reluctance to adjust as due to "psychological reasons."

Finally, after the visit of the Capuchin general from Rome in March 24 - April 15, 1975, it was decided that a Capuchin Province in Indonesia should be established despite the aforesaid problems and concerns. This decision was enacted on January 31, 1976, almost two decades after the establishment of several other autonomous religious orders and congregations in Indonesia. Until 1987, the first two

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<sup>12</sup>. Simpai (December 1983), pp.255-256.

superiors of the Indonesian Capuchin province, have been expatriate priests.

The establishment of the Indonesian Capuchin province, moreover, has given a distinctive authority to the Capuchin provincial superior vis-a-vis the local Bishop's authority over the Capuchins who work in a certain diocese. This establishment was enacted only a year before the Medan bishopric was filled by the first Batak Capuchin priest in 1977. As I mentioned earlier, only local diocesan priests are directly under a bishop's authority. Religious order priests usually work for a diocese under a contract signed by the bishop and their religious order's superior. In the diocese of Medan, for example, though there has never been a clear-cut separation, after the establishment of the Indonesian Capuchin province, the Bishop of Medan has had greater authority over his diocese's affairs and policies. Nevertheless, he has been limited (at least hierarchically) in his ability to deal with his "employees" who, until the present day, have chiefly been Capuchin priests.

This shift in governing mission works in North Sumatera also has given the Capuchin superior in Indonesia a new responsibility. During the years the first two Capuchin bishops of Medan were in office, it is not difficult to say that both of them had mixed their diocese's affairs and their internal Capuchin affairs. It has been well known that the Capuchins have a strong tendency of working through the



"brotherhood" rather than relying upon the religious bureaucracy. During the years when the well known Bishop M.L.T. Brans OFMCap., who opened the Bataklands for Catholic mission in the early 1930s, was in office, it seems that he had absolute authority in managing his mission's affairs. What he did for the Batak mission in his diocese was generally supported spiritually as well as materially by his colleagues in the Netherlands. It was noted that Bishop Brans once acknowledged that the main job of a superior was actually "providing potatoes," taking care of his brothers' food and clothing.<sup>13</sup> His successor, Bishop van den Hurk OFMCap. who occupied the office from 1954 to 1977, was actually the former local Capuchin superior in North Sumatera. Faced with the Second Vatican Council's change in Catholic Church life, Bishop Hurk introduced a new approach to governing his diocese. According to the Capuchin superior's 1983 Christmas letter, since the Second Vatican Council there was a new word, "dialog," utilized between the Capuchins. This notion of "dialog" implies that every Capuchin involved in a particular matter has an opportunity to participate in the decision-making process led by his superior. Concerning the case of the autonomous Indonesian Capuchin province, for instance, no decision would be made without first hearing the opinion of every Capuchin brother.

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<sup>13</sup>. Ibid. p.261.

Thus discussions concerning autonomy were no longer only between Bishops. The Christmas letter, moreover, stated that the main job of a Capuchin superior was no longer "to provide potatoes" to his brothers, but to preserve the Capuchin brotherhood's identity by any means.

The desire to preserve Capuchin identity promoted in the late 1960s was not merely the internal affair of the Capuchin missionaries in North Sumatera. It was also, I believe, the way that the local Catholic Church tried to maintain the notion of supranationalism. This was done by establishing a more institutionalized image of the Catholic Church. Some significant events listed below give a historical overview of the institutionalization of the Catholic Church in North Sumatera.

- 1964: the first native Batak priest was ordained.
- 1975: the first Batak priest was installed as an auxiliary Bishop of Medan.
- 1976: the Indonesian Capuchin province was established.
- 1977: the first Batak Capuchin priest was installed as the Bishop of Medan.
- 1979: A survey on Catholic Church and Religious people was conducted.
- 1980: A pastoral letter on a self-supporting Church was issued by the Bishop.

Though the first Batak priest was ordained in 1964, the training of native candidates for the priesthood in North Sumatera began earlier. In 1949, some young Bataks were sent to Flores and Sulawesi to study at seminaries there. Unfortunately none of them were ordained. Some Dutch Capuchins thought that priesthood celibacy was the main

obstacle to their continuing in religious life, since a Batak son has a "duty" to continue his father's clan (marga) name. The present Bishop of Medan, Msgr.A.G.Pius Datubara OFMCap. was the first Batak Capuchin priest as well as the first native Bishop of Medan. After finishing his elementary education in 1951, Bishop Pius, the son of one of Batak first native catechists, entered a minor seminary in Padang. In 1953 the seminary was moved to Pematang Siantar because of an apparent lack of vocation for Catholic religious life in West Sumatera (an area which is dominated by Muslim Minangs). Moreover, the relocation of the seminary to Pematang Siantar, in the area adjacent to the Bataklands, was accompanied by a new policy which stated that the seminary would provide training only to candidates for the Capuchin priesthood.

There was a deliberate reason in restricting seminarians' training to preparation for Capuchin priesthood and not encouraging candidates to become diocesan priests. The reason was described by a former Capuchin missionary who served in the Bataklands:

It was intended that the first native priests could be guaranteed that they had good brotherhood within such a religious order or congregation; also, it was convincing that the choice could eliminate from the very beginning a belief that priesthood was one of the financial sources for someone's clans (marga).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>. Martin Booz OFMCap. 1974. op.cit. p.96.

Unlike the Capuchins who observe a vow of poverty (and have no private property), a diocesan priest officially may manage his own finances. Based on the history of the Christian Churches in North Sumatera, the Capuchin missionaries were well aware that disputes over matters of material wealth, finance, and funds which came from abroad were frequent grounds for the dissolution or division of Protestant Churches in North Sumatera, the Bataklands in particular. The lateness of establishing the Indonesian province, I believe, was due not only to the fact that financial aid from abroad was still highly in demand -- for example to exercise the Catholic sahala but also because of the uncertain (future) form of the Catholic sahala in the hands of the Batak Capuchins.

Recalling the disappointment of the Dutch Capuchin superior to the "improper" Capuchin training he saw on his 1960 Sumatera visit, it was clear that the staff of the seminary in Parapat realized that some characteristics of "original" Capuchin identities were not likely to be adopted by native candidates for the Capuchin priesthood. Following the Second Vatican Council and the enactment of the new Capuchin constitution in 1968, an indigenous approach can be utilized to better understand Capuchin identity in Indonesia. However, the Indonesianisasi of The Capuchin identity or the religious life in general, somehow, has to be put in a certain frame of mind.

In order to institutionalize (and to modernize as well) various religious orders and congregations in the archdiocese of Medan, a survey was conducted three years after the Indonesian Capuchin province was established and two years after the office of the Catholic diocese of Medan came into the hands of a native Bishop. The 1979 survey on the Catholic Church and the lives of religious people in the Archdiocese of Medan was conducted by a Dutch Capuchin priest and his staff under the auspices of the Atmajaya Research Center in Jakarta.<sup>15</sup> The staff believed that the results of the survey could help the Catholic Church in North Sumatera to deal with future problems. Respondents were sent questionnaires, and the results of the survey were tabulated and included in a report series which were published in early 1980. Three findings of the survey focus upon: (1) The Future of the Catholic Church in North Sumatera. (2) The Problem of Leaving Religious Life and Its Causal Factors. (3) The Profile of Catholic Religious People in North Sumatera: 1979.<sup>16</sup> The first two reports

<sup>15</sup>. Atma Jaya Catholic University in Jakarta is one of the Catholic universities in Indonesia which has had a strong academic as well as financial support from various non government Catholic organizations in the Netherlands. Atma Jaya Research Center has become a data bank for the Catholic Church in Indonesia.

<sup>16</sup>. Huub Boelaars OFMCap, Sahat Sihotang, Gregory Sudyono OFMCap. Masalah Masadepan Gereja Katolik Sumatera Utara. Menurut pandangan biarawan/biarawati Keuskupan Agung Medan. Seri laporan penelitian keagamaan 24. (Jakarta: Pusat Penelitian Atma Jaya, 1980a).



were based upon answers provided by 512 priests, seminarians, religious brothers and nuns in the archdiocese of Medan. The reports noted that the survey was "requested" by the Bishop of Medan. Concerning the three topics mentioned above, it was explained that the reasons for conducting the survey were respectively: that the Catholic Church hierarchy recognized that there was a disproportionate growth between the Catholic population and the number of personnel available to minister to them; that by 1979 about 50 religious people in North Sumatera had left religious life even after they had made final vows; and finally, since the Batak Catholic religious people joined their expatriate colleagues, influences of the expatriates' life styles, work methods, etc., had been observed in native religious peoples. Are the survey's results programmed by the Jakartan staff really useful for Indonesianizing the Catholic religious life once introduced by the expatriate missionaries?

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Agustinus H. Subagya OFMCap, Huub Boelaars OFMCap, Sahat Sihotang. 1980. Masalah Meningggalkan Hidup Membiara Dan Faktor Faktor Penyebabnya. Menurut pandangan biarawan/biarawati Keuskupan Agung Medan. Seri laporan penelitian keagamaan 26. (Jakarta: Pusat Penelitian Atma Jaya, 1980c).

Huub Boelaars OFMCap, Suryanti Setiana, Sahat Sihotang. Profil Biarawan Biarawati Katolik Sumatera Utara 1979: Keuskupan Agung Medan dan Prefektur Apostolik Sibolga. Seri laporan penelitian keagamaan 28. (Jakarta: Pusat Penelitian Atma Jaya, 1980b).

**Table 3.**  
Religious People in The Diocese of Medan, 1979.

	INDONESIAN					EXPATRIATES					TOTAL				
	pr	se	br	sr	tl	pr	se	br	sr	tl	pr	se	br	sr	tl
KAP	32	26	3	--	61	43	--	4	--	47	75	26	7	--	108
KON	-	3	--	--	3	7	--	--	--	7	7	3	7	--	10
KAR	3	--	--	--	3	4	--	1	--	5	7	--	1	--	8
PME	--	--	--	--	--	8	--	--	--	8	8	--	--	--	8
SXP	--	--	--	--	--	4	--	--	--	4	4	--	--	--	4
SJE	--	--	--	--	--	2	--	--	--	2	2	--	--	--	2
BBM	--	--	8	--	8	--	--	7	--	7	--	--	15	--	15
FPM	--	--	3	--	3	--	--	9	--	9	--	--	12	--	12
SFB	--	--	--	57	57	--	--	--	6	6	--	--	--	63	63
SFL	--	--	--	48	48	--	--	--	4	4	--	--	--	52	52
SFM	--	--	--	46	46	--	--	--	5	5	--	--	--	51	51
SHW	--	--	--	63	63	--	--	--	5	5	--	--	--	68	68
SFK	--	--	--	38	38	--	--	--	5	5	--	--	--	43	43
SKS	--	--	--	54	54	--	--	--	3	3	--	--	--	57	57
SBS	--	--	--	6	6	--	--	--	2	2	--	--	--	8	8
COM	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	3	3	--	--	--	3	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>312</b>	<b>390</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>--</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>345</b>	<b>512</b>

**Table 3 continued,**  
Abbreviations' explanation:

pr	= priest
se	= seminarian
br	= brother
sr	= sister
tl	= total
KAP	= Capuchin Friar Minors
KON	= Conventual Friar Minors (Delitua - Italia)
KAR	= Carmelites (Sidikalang)
PME	= Foreign Mission Society (Medan/Aceh - Canada)
SXP	= Xaverian Mission Fathers (Padang - Parma)
SJE	= Society of Jesus
BBM	= Brothers of Holy Mary of Lourdes (P.Siantar - Dongen)
FPM	= Brothers of Our Lady Mother of Mercy (Medan - Balige - Tilburg)
SFB	= Franciscan Sisters Balige (Aerdenhout)
SFL	= Franciscan Sisters Lintong (Bennenbroek)
SFM	= Franciscan Sisters of St. Elizabeth (Medan - Breda)
SHW	= Sisters of St. Joseph (Hayam Wuruk - Amersfoort)
SFK	= Franciscan Sisters (Kabanjahe - Medan - Dongen)
SKS	= Sisters of Charity (P.Siantar - Schijndel)
SBS	= Sisters of Mercy (Sibolga - Tilburg)
COM	= Secular Institute Catechists of Mary (Medan - Jepang)

Table Three above shows A Summary on Religious People in the Archdiocese of Medan 1979 as it was tabulated by the survey staff.<sup>17</sup> In this table we can see not only significant numbers in their proper columns, but also (I argue, as it is supposedly that any "literate" people can imagine it) an image of Catholic Church world map within which North Sumatera Catholic Church is just a part of it. The attached list of abbreviations of various priests, brothers and nuns with their international headquarters abroad shows the imagined "map." Participants in the

<sup>17</sup>. Huub Boelaars OFMCap. 1980b. pp.2-3.

survey, as well as anyone else who looks at the figures, will be aware that in the future the expatriate's column will eventually be eliminated. This is due to the fact that there has been a decrease in the numbers of those choosing a religious vocation in the West and because the expatriate missionaries in North Sumatera are aging. The survey also found that the average age of the expatriate religious people in the archdiocese of Medan was very significant in comparison to their Indonesian colleagues. This data is shown in the Table Four below.<sup>18</sup>

**Table 4.** The Average Age of Expatriate and Indonesian Religious People.

	Expatriates	Indonesians
Priests	50.8	35.6
Seminarians	-	26
Brothers	55.6	32
Sisters	59.3	32

As indicated in Table Five below, the survey even disclosed the ethnic backgrounds of the "Indonesian" religious people targeted for study.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup>. Ibid. p.76.

<sup>19</sup>. Ibid. p.27.

**Table 5.** Ethnic Background of Indonesian Religious Men/Women:

	Priest	Seminarian	Brother	Sister	Total	abs	%
Toba	27	20	10	251	308	68.3	
Simalungun	-	2	-	44	46	10.2	
Nias	4	4	12	17	37	8.2	
Karo	1	6	-	16	23	5.1	
Tionghoa	2	1	1	8	12	2.7	
Jawa	4	2	1	3	10	2.2	
Pakpak/Dairi	2	-	1	3	6	1.3	
Others	1	1	2	5	9	2.0	
Total	41	36	27	347	451	100	

Also detailed in the survey were the comparative educational backgrounds, the highest academic degrees, of Indonesian religious people versus their expatriate colleagues. It turns out that, in general, the expatriate religious people had more education than their Indonesian counterparts. Among the Indonesians themselves, religious people from the Archdiocese of Medan had more education than their colleagues in the diocese of Sibolga.<sup>20</sup> Of the 618 religious people registered in North Sumatera, 508 persons from the Archdiocese of Medan and 95 persons from the Apostolic Prefecture of Sibolga participated in the survey.

It was pointed out earlier that participants in this survey (natives as well as expatriates) comprised the "main

<sup>20</sup>. Ibid. p.84.



cadres" of the Catholic Church in North Sumatera. Once the Church had been founded and established by the expatriate cadres, the Indonesian cadres joined in its development. It is probable that there will be no additional expatriate cadres. The survey staff deliberately utilized two kinds of questionnaires to gather information about the two groups' backgrounds - native and expatriate - because, as they explained, "The personal background of Indonesian religious people in comparison with their expatriate colleagues is, it can be said, very different."<sup>21</sup>

Why is the Catholic Church cadres' background in North Sumatera significant? If we review data in Table Three mentioned earlier, it is evident that sooner or later the expatriate column will be eliminated. The key ideas in the data presented which make the table has been possible imagined and established, then, are not the real group of (Batak as well as non Batak) religious people. Rather, they are the (imagined) backgrounds of the first cadres (read: the expatriates) as well as of their successors. Indeed, the notion of background here is nothing but the special categorized groups of human beings listed at the horizontal and vertical columns. Accordingly, the continuity of the table's (vertical as well as horizontal) columns can be preserved only if we continue to fill them with numbers. The

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<sup>21</sup>. Ibid. p.iii.

important thing to do with the notion of number is just to keep a record of its ups and downs. It seems to me that questioning the authority for establishing the categories listed at the columns or the possibility of founding a new category is out of interest. This survey actually included a list of at least 87 tabulated figures as its results. The results were intended to reveal what the Church cadres' backgrounds in North Sumatera "looked like."<sup>22</sup>

An analysis of one aspect of the study of backgrounds, will disclose the notion of the past which formed the organization of this survey. The point at question was the reasons for native religious peoples' parents not supporting their children's decision to enter religious life. What the religious people meant by their background were memories related somehow to their past or "history." However, when someone's past has to be recalled, it is likely that, he or she will interpret, relate new interests to it or to imbue the past with new meanings. The survey noted that when parents were indifferent, disagreed, or were strongly opposed to their child's decision, the fact of their opposition could be framed as a question. Why did they object? Reasons for not supporting a son or daughter's decision to enter religious life as they were recalled by participants in the survey are shown below. I have kept the

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<sup>22</sup>. Ibid. pp.121-125.

report's form the same as it appeared in the original publication.<sup>23</sup>

**Table 6.** Reasons recited by Indonesian religious men for lack of support in entering religious life.

a. Tradition (adat):

- oldest/youngest son	15	"	"	(68.2%)
- caring for his brs/srs				
- raising children				
b. Lack of religious perspective	5	"	"	(22.7%)
c. Extinct family lineage	1	"	"	( 4.5%)
d. Develop clan's material wealth	1	"	"	( 4.5%)

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22 reasons 100 %

**Table 7.** Reasons recited by Indonesian religious women for lack of support in entering religious life.

a. Tradition (adat):

- oldest/youngest daughter	51	"	"	(58.6%)
- the only daughter				
- small family				
- replacing mother's role				
- will not bear child				
- a spouse already chosen				
- father and mother do not have any sisters				
- take care of her parents				
b. Lack of religious perspective	21	"	"	(24.1%)
c. Extinct family lineage	9	"	"	(10.3%)
d. Other:	6	"	"	( 6.4%)
- opposing father's religion				
- there are not yet any Karonese nuns				
- there are not yet any Padang nuns				
- an older sister is already a nun				
- to be a Dutch servant				
- only Westerners become nuns				

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87 reasons 100 %

<sup>23</sup>. Ibid. pp.52-55.

The religious men and women who reported (recited) their parents' negative reactions did, as a matter of fact, overcome the objections mentioned above. What they recited then, was something that perhaps mattered to them but it was not decisive. Or, to put it in other words, these reasons could possibly matter to people who want to be candidates for religious life. The "reality," then, is the recited reasons that the participants imagined, taking into account the fact that there also may have been many Indonesian Catholics in North Sumatera who could not be categorized in these ways.

Participants were also questioned about their future in religious life. A report on The Problem of Leaving Religious Life and its Causal Factors described the opinions of religious people serving in the Archdiocese of Medan on this topic. This report categorized the opinions of Indonesian participants vis-a-vis their expatriate colleagues. It also categorized participants who had already taken their final religious vows versus those who had taken only temporary vows. The survey staff assumed that the answers of a senior religious person (someone with final vows) would be different from the answers of a junior one, (someone with only temporary vows) due to the length of their involvement and their experiences in religious life. Not surprisingly, it was found that, with the exception of one person, all

expatriate religious people in North Sumatera were seniors.

A total of 561 comments were collected from the survey participants. These comments were categorized into three groups: negative (441 comments), positive (76 comments) and neutral (44 comments). The survey revealed that the majority of both Indonesian and expatriate participants gave negative opinions or comments with regard to the possibility of leaving religious life. The negative comments indicated overwhelming opposition to the idea of leaving religious life, especially after having taken final vows. The positive comments stated that they were not against the idea. They counted the positive effects of leaving, but they were by no means entirely supportive of them. The neutral comments, while disagreeing with leaving, were not totally opposed to it. Participants who responded neutrally thought that leaving was normal and natural.

The detailed results show that the Indonesian participants gave 388 negative comments (82.2%), 57 positive comments (12.1%) and 27 neutral comments (5.7%); the expatriates gave 53 negative comments (59.6%), 19 positive comments (21.3%) and 17 neutral comments (19.1%). Regardless of its statistical significance, in terms of percentages, the survey mentioned that the Indonesian participants (82.2 %) scored more than 20 % higher on negative comments than did the expatriate participants (59.6 %). Moreover, the expatriate group had a higher percentage of positive as well



as neutral comments. Based on that figure, the survey concluded that the expatriate religious people were more positive and neutral in their reactions to the idea of leaving religious life. The staff of the survey wrote, "This means that expatriates are more open and looked upon that fact as something which is normal within an organization" (underlining is mine).<sup>24</sup> The expatriates' notion of organization required would insinuate likely that certain institutional (socio-cultural, religious, psychological, etc.) factors were prerequisite for the Indonesianisasi of religious life.

Participants in this survey were also asked to describe the causal factors for leaving religious life. Three hundred and ninety Indonesian participants described 1.352 factors, and one hundred and twenty expatriates mentioned 282 factors. These factors were categorized in three groups as are shown below.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>. This conclusion was made possible by the way of identifying the expatriate group in contrast to its "neighbouring" column. See: Boelaars OFMCap. 1980c, pp.25-26.

<sup>25</sup>. Boelaars OFMCap. 1980c, pp.25-26.

**Table 8. Sosio-cultural Factors for Leaving the Religious Life.**

<u>Socio-cultural</u>	Indon's		Expat's		Total	
	abs.	%	abs.	%	abs.	%
Personal relationship between religious members	135	23.1	5	3.7	140	19.5
Social situation and condition	87	14.9	22	16.3	109	15.1
Inadequate education	71	12.2	32	23.7	103	14.3
Community's situation	76	13.0	10	7.4	86	12.0
Communication between superior - member	57	9.7	10	7.4	67	9.3
Training formation	44	7.5	13	9.6	57	7.9
Too much work/unable to do it	47	8.0	9	6.7	56	7.8
Wrong selection	31	5.3	18	13.3	49	6.8
Family/ <u>Adat</u>	32	5.5	12	8.9	44	6.1
Clan centrism	4	0.7	4	3.0	8	1.1
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>584</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>719</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<u>Personal Psychological Factors</u>						
Personal attitude on:						
- maturity	123	32.8	34	37.8	157	33.8
- freedom	60	16.0	8	8.9	68	14.6
- boredom	59	15.7	4	4.4	63	10.2
- insecurity	32	8.5	4	4.4	36	7.7
Motivation:						
-superficial	45	12.0	15	16.7	60	12.9
-status seeker	21	5.6	16	17.8	37	8.0
Too young	35	9.3	9	10.0	44	7.1
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>465</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<u>Religious Factors</u>						
Life of praying	159	40.5	23	40.4	182	40.4
Faith experience	105	26.7	26	45.6	131	29.1
Vocation experience	75	19.1	2	3.5	77	17.1
Vow experience	39	9.9	3	5.2	42	9.3
Celibacy experience	15	3.8	3	5.2	18	4.0
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>393</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>450</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1352</b>		<b>282</b>		<b>1634</b>	

The survey staff hoped that their report could be used by the Bishop of Medan as well as by superiors of the religious

orders and congregations which had participated in the survey. The report also stated that the comments or opinions of North Sumateran lay Catholics should have been included. However, it was concluded that the answers given by the religious people were "the real expression of their own sincere feelings". The report was considered worthy enough to be used as a source for reflection on the character of the North Sumateran Church and also to be utilized in the training of future Church personnel.<sup>26</sup>

By the time they returned the questionnaires to the survey staff, I think that some (most?) of the Indonesian participants, being aware about what they had to answer, then "realized" who they had been in their role as indigenous religious people. The questionnaire's design led them to imagine this "reality." The presence of their expatriate senior colleagues somehow defined what kind of religious people (as it had been portrayed in the 1979 statistical survey) they supposedly had to be. Moreover, these indigenous religious people - who had been cast as Catholic Church "cadres" - were asked about the future of their Church in North Sumatera. I believe that these Church cadres were quite well informed on Church statistics. It was recorded in 1959 that the diocese of Medan only had 101,550 Catholics. Two decades later, in early 1979, there were

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<sup>26</sup>. Ibid. p.15.

about 300,744 Catholics registered in 800 stations/outstations and 40 parishes. By this time, the archdiocese of Medan had already 616 religious persons.<sup>27</sup> Respondents were asked to point to the three biggest problems challenging the future of the Catholic Church in North Sumatera. The responses yielded 1,237 problems, which were categorized into five groups as shown below:<sup>28</sup>

**Table 9.** Problems of North Sumateran Catholic Church's future.

Problems	Indonesians		Expatriates		Total	
	abs.	%	abs	%	abs.	%
Religious vocation	387	40.6	99	34.9	506	40.9
Ministry	249	26.1	99	34.9	238	26.5
Faith	165	17.3	46	16.2	211	17.1
External relations	93	9.8	29	10.2	122	9.9
Infra-structures	59	6.2	11	3.9	70	5.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>953</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>284</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1,237</b>	<b>100</b>

Some facets of the most frequently stated "religious vocation" problem are listed below:<sup>29</sup>

Problems of Priesthood Vocation.

- The decrease of priests for ministering the fast growing Catholic population.
- The population growth of priests and Catholic congregations is unproportional.
- Lack of manpower to guide the congregation. The old

<sup>27</sup>. Msgr.A.G.Pius Datubara, Surat Gembala Uskup. (Medan, 1980), pp.54-55. In 1979, total population in North Sumatera was 8,155,928.

<sup>28</sup>. Boelaars OFMCap.cs. 1980a. op.cit. p.36.

<sup>29</sup>. Ibid. pp.12-14.

priests will leave Indonesia and yet there are only a small number of successors.

- Less manpower to continue the pastoral works.
- The expatriate priests have to hand their jobs to the indigenous priests. The congregation then, can take advantage because the indigenous priests supposedly live from the congregation's contribution while the expatriates have received financial support from their home-countries and have helped the congregation.
- If there were no expatriate priests anymore, could we maintain the present situation or could we develop better?

#### Problems of Identity Crisis of religious Life.

- The lay Catholics have undermined religious life so that many religious men/women leave their vocation.
- The society has become less trustful of the religious people, thus, shorten missionary activities.
- The Catholic Church has been under pressure because, after their marriages some former religious men/women even convert to other religions.
- Probably the religious people's leadership will be less accepted by the lay Catholics because their attitude and witness of religious life are improper.
- The elders have witnessed that the religious men/women have more freedom, their clothing in particular; the lay people in fact have more modest clothing.
- Apparently there is an inter-ethnic competition.
- Ethnocentrism.
- Lack of trustworthiness in solving the ethnic problem.

The survey staff noted that "it is not true, however, that the most often acknowledged problems are exactly the most essential problems." They also wrote, "Again, it is important to know that these problems are derived from a certain group of people. Perhaps, there are still other bigger and unpredictable problems than those already exposed."<sup>30</sup> It is an interesting information that the Batak religious people generally speaking did not concern on the

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<sup>30</sup>. Ibid. pp.11 and 24.



Church's financial affairs. There are three lists of categorized problems on the problem of "infra-structure," material means which have been utilized in proselytization.<sup>31</sup>

#### I. Financial Problems.

- Foreign aid is no longer permitted.
- As there is no more foreign aid, the populace no longer appreciates religious people.
- Lay Catholics do not care about the living expenses of religious people.
- Since most families in Sumatera have weak finances, they are quite reluctant to give donations.
- Lack of awareness and responsibility on the needs of Church and its missionaries.
- Financial resources of the diocese are too small for the wide area which has to be cared for.
- Uncertainty of financial resources.
- Whether North Sumateran Church can really become self-supporting.

#### II. Catholic School.

- Some schools pay insufficient attention to their missionary function.
- As many Catholics are poor, the high cost of tuition in Catholic schools makes the schools unlikely to offer anything to many Catholics.
- Insufficient cooperation among institutions.
- decreasing educational quality.
- Catholic schools have more difficulties than non-parochial schools.

#### III. On Self-supporting Church.

- Catholic Church is not ready to become self-supporting.
- We really need others' donations.
- We are unable to be materially self-supporting.
- There is possible trouble in financing Catholic training.
- Is the Church's economy strong enough to maintain all its schools?

The five categories of the Church's problems and each problem's details were compiled during a workshop held in

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<sup>31</sup>. Ibid. pp.23-24.

Pematang Siantar from June 4 - July 7, 1979. The workshop participants, 7 priests and 27 senior seminarians also tried to develop some "concrete proposals" about their Church's future. Here are their proposals:

I. On Religious Vocation.

1. Establish a special team to tackle religious vocation's difficulties.
2. Promote Papal works by priests, brothers and nuns.
3. Explain family's responsibilities toward their Church activities.

II. On Lay Catholics' Participation:

1. Increase the role of laity in liturgy.
2. Train lay Catholics in Church participation.
3. Be more courageous in giving authority to the laity.
4. Give sufficient stipends to lay minister.

III. On Church Ministry:

1. Fulltime catechists paid by the Bishop's Office needed.
2. Religious people's involvement in pastoral works to be upgraded.
3. Local leaders, religious and Sunday-school teachers needed better training.
4. Education for the seminarians to be upgraded.
5. Explore the possibility of recognizing lay deacons.
6. Train religious brothers and nuns for pastoral works.
7. Utilize the laity in pastoral services.
8. Organize workshops on apostolic works for religious people.<sup>32</sup>

As I have reported earlier in this chapter, why in his 1983 Christmas letter did the superior remind his colleagues about the establishment of the Indonesian Capuchin province? At the time that letter was written, the superior was in his first year of office. He was only the second superior in the provincial office. The contents of that letter mainly were a reprinted text of the first Indonesian Capuchin province

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<sup>32</sup>. Ibid. pp.43-44.

superior's speech given in 1976. It was a speech which recalled the history of the establishment of the Indonesian Capuchin province during the years 1957-1976. The reason given for publishing that 7 year-old text was that, "it included a lot of things which are worthy of use in the future."<sup>33</sup> The speech was published in the Indonesian Capuchin province's bulletin Simpai (an Indonesian word for the well known Capuchin hooded brown cassock's cincture). As described in the preceding sections, by 1983 the historical events which characterized the development of the Catholic Church in North Sumatera were primarily associated with the Capuchins. The notions of Indonesian Church hierarchy as well as of Indonesian "Church cadres" (priests, brothers and nuns), I think, were deliberately developed by those events.

The notion of Indonesianisasi in the North Sumateran Catholic Church, particularly within the 1979 survey, were framed with a particular knowledge in mind. This "Knowledge" was identified by recalling the (past) memories of Church cadres who had participated in those historical events. The complete reports of the 1979 survey can be found on most bookshelves of every Catholic rectory and convent in North Sumatera. Moreover, the Catholic Church in North Sumatera and its "Future," as it was framed or institutionalized by the 1979 survey staff, could probably

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<sup>33</sup>. Simpai (December 1983), p.253.

not be separated from some of the previous Capuchin mission reports.

Since the first year of their mission in Indonesia (Kalimantan 1905 and Sumatera 1912) the Dutch Capuchins continuously reported on the growth of their mission works. In 1917 a memoir was published about the twelve and a half years of the Capuchin mission in Indonesia. This was followed by publications commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Capuchin mission in Sumatera (1937), and the thirty-fifth anniversary of the Capuchin mission in Indonesia (1940). Special Capuchin almanacs were published on the occasion of their fortieth and fiftieth year of missionary activity in Sumatera (1952) and in Indonesia (1955) respectively. A book was written and dedicated to the twenty-fifth year of the Catholic mission among the Bataks (1959), another booklet discussed the Capuchin mission in Sumatera fifty years after its initiation (1961), and a booklet about the Capuchins in Indonesia was written in honor of their seventy five consecutive years of mission work in Indonesia (1980). This latest publication was written in Indonesian, the others in Dutch.<sup>34</sup> All of these

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<sup>34</sup>. 1917. The Capuchins, Gedenkboek van den 12 1/2 jarigen Missiearbeid den Paters Minderbroeders Capucijnen in Nederland Oost Indie. Amsterdam.  
 1937. Veritas, Vijf en Twintig Jaar Padang Missie. Padang.  
 1940. The Capuchins, De Zon Gaat Op Balige. Tilburg.  
 1952. Borneo Almanak.jr.37. "Vertig Jaar Capucijnen Missie of Sumatera."  
 1955. The Capuchins, Capuchinen Almanak.



publications typically give reports (some accompanied by impressive statistical charts and tables) about the increasing numbers of baptized natives and of the people who have been served by various Catholic missionary institutions, such as schools, clinics, hospitals, etc.

As soon as the Indonesian column showed up within the 1979 survey's frame of "Knowledge," however, another (intimidating?) perspective was considered concerning the North Sumateran Catholic Church's "Future," which contrasted with the previous reports on (expatriate) missionaries' successful work. Generally speaking, the answers of the Indonesian survey participants pointed to this perspective.

Msgr.Drs. Alfred Gonti Pius Datubara OFM<sup>Cap.</sup>, the first Batak Bishop in North Sumatera, in his 1980 pastoral letter also acknowledged the previous and successful mission work done in his diocese. He mentioned that this wonderful growth, indeed, could not be found elsewhere in contemporary modern Catholic mission history.<sup>35</sup> A profound Catholicism

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1959. Aster Gentilis, Een Volk Ontdekt Christus. De Katholieke Missie on der de Bataks of Sumatra. Voorhout, Foreholte.

1961. Aster Gentilis, Wij Hebben Andere Belangen. Vijftig jaar Kapucijnen Missie op Sumatra. Tilburg, Missieprocuur.

1980. Kerubim, Mereka Menghela Jala Ke Darat. Jakarta.

<sup>35</sup>. Msgr.A.G.P. Datubara OFM<sup>Cap.</sup>. Taon Mangarangrang Sidalanta. Surat Parmahanon ni Uskup Agung Medan. (Medan, 1980). The Indonesian text of this letter has been used as well: Surat Gembala Uskup Agung Medan 1980. This pastoral letter was published in Indonesian (15,000 copies), Toba (38,000 copies), Karo (7,000 copies) and Simalungun (2,500 copies). Recorded Bishop speech on the



was needed, he said:

However, we cannot be satisfied only with the growth of the Catholic population. Now we need to foster the development of lively people of God within which we can experience our faith. We need militant Christian communities which are able to live in the present day's various situations and conditions as well as in all villages, towns and corners. Communities which can answer the challenges of the world with Christian responses. Communities which can translate the Christian message into all aspects of life.<sup>36</sup>

Consequently community organizers or motivators were needed, and their skills had to be up-graded. The results of the 1979 socio-religious survey conducted by the Atma Jaya Research Center, he said, would help in planing priorities and strategies for a real plan for the future of his diocese. He concluded his letter by stating,

I am sure that all of you will give your help. I am also optimistic that our plans can be realized together although it will need a lot of our energy and money.<sup>37</sup> I am sure that the Catholics in our diocese will kindly give their contributions to this important movement.<sup>38</sup>

Did this indicate a real difference in perspective concerning the future of the Catholic Church in North Sumatera?

In an explicit address in his 1980 Pastoral Letter,

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letter were also available in audio cassette-tapes in the same four languages version.

<sup>36</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>. a word "wang" (money) is used in the Indonesian text. The Toba Batak text used "marharugian" (loss) instead.

<sup>38</sup>. Msgr. A.G.P. Datubara OFM Cap. 1980, op.cit.

Bishop Datubara pointed to money as one of the most important issues. This was surprising as less than one year earlier the 1979 survey had ranked the problem of infrastructure (and its details discussed earlier) as among the Church's least urgent problems. A detailed analysis of the internal financial affairs of the North Sumateran Catholic Church is beyond the scope of this chapter. Based on my familiarity with the region, however, it can generally be said that the Catholic Church in North Sumatera still depends on foreign funds for most of its work. The 1986 statistics of the Archdiocese of Medan noted that of its 40 parishes, only 14 (mostly from urban areas) could completely assume their own routine costs.<sup>39</sup> Other expenses, such as for religious people and seminarians' training, charity works, etc., are still underwritten by funds from abroad. The loss (of money) the North Sumatera Catholics anticipated in planning the new type of Catholic communities promoted in the 1980 Pastoral Letter, I believe, has to be interpreted in terms other than a desired independence from foreign funds, which were considered as one of the most important elements of the Catholic sahala.

I would like to suggest, instead, that the 1980 Bishop's Pastoral Letter actually reemphasized that the

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<sup>39</sup>. Pusat Penelitian Atmajaya, Statistik Tahunan Paroki Gereja Katolik Indonesia. Keuskupan Agung Medan. 1986, table no.24.

future of the indigenous North Sumatera Catholic Church was at stake. Undoubtedly indigenous Catholics and religious people (indigenous as well as expatriate) who read that letter realized that the Catholic Church's "mission" in North Sumatera has always had that notion of loss. At least from the perspective of the expatriate Church cadres, costly mission work or losing money had been considered a necessity. The indigenous Church cadres (as far as they stayed in the frame of mind designated in the 1979 survey), I believe, would also view the situation from the same perspective as did their expatriate colleagues and as did the Bishop. This is why in the 1979 survey, regarding the problem of infra-structure (sarana), I believe, most religious people placed it in the least urgent position. Accordingly, some participants were critical of Catholic schools or other institutions which were suspected of being profit oriented. It seems that the notion of loss mentioned in the bishop's Pastoral Letter, is an acknowledgement of an indebtedness (for money) from abroad or from somewhere else outside the boundaries of the Batak dalihan na tolu societies. This indebtedness cannot be repaid by a given local Church to the universal or supranational Catholic Church. Although the loss is more than a financial matter, however, its indebtedness (its imagined loss) has persisted. A proper "repayment," accordingly, would be a participation in the (imagined) supranationalism of the Catholic Church.

The participation was promoted by the first Batak priest (now bishop) in his 1980 Pastoral Letter's.

Moreover, as mentioned in the first paragraphs of the Bishop's letter, by the time of its release, two official letters issued by the Minister of Religion had already severely shocked the Catholic Church in Indonesia. The first one, issued in August 1978, discussed the Minister's intention to control the role of expatriate Church personnel as well as the foreign funds received by Indonesian (Christian) Churches. The letter suggested that in the near future the expatriate Church personnel would be replaced by Indonesians.<sup>40</sup> The second letter issued in early 1979, announced that the Indonesian government would only give temporary visas or working permits to individuals holding non-Indonesian passports. As a matter of fact, the two intimidating letters were only loosely implemented. "If those (letters') regulations were drastically implemented, in the next two or three year almost 60% of the priests, 11% of the nuns and 50% of the brothers in our diocese would

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<sup>40</sup>. Surat Keputusan Menteri Agama. no.77/15 Agustus/1978. The letter says that foreign aid for religious institutions in Indonesia can only be ratified after an official permit or recommendation is given by the Minister of Religion. Also, foreign workers in religious institutions have to have permits from the Minister of Religion. As the Indonesian government wanted foreign religious workers to be replaced, the training for Indonesian religious workers should be started within six months and be completed within the following two years. See also, Tempo. no.30, 23 September 1978, p. 52-56.

leave Indonesia," Bishop Datubara wrote in his 1980 Pastoral Letter. Although he mentioned that the two official letters were not the primary motivation for the release of his Pastoral Letter, it was apparent that the Bishop was worried about the future of his Church cadres. What made the Bishop worried was not the absence of the expatriate Church cadres, but, rather, that they would have to leave quickly.

I would like to point out that Bishop Datubara shared the same view of the "most urgent problem of the Church's future" as described by the 1979 survey participants, for example, the problem of religious vocations. In an 1987 interview, Msgr. Dr. Anicetus B. Sinaga OFMCap, the second Batak Bishop and a Bishop of the diocese of Sibolga, reminded the interviewer that the Catholic Church in the Bataklands is still young. He said, "However, it has flared up ... you see, its Bishops, priests and nuns are already Batak natives!." There is a problem, then, of maintaining the image tabulated by the 1979 survey in the data in Table Three shown earlier in this writing. Considering this fact, Bishop Datubara tried to solve the problem. He tried to break the Church cadres boundaries by introducing the notion of the "militant Christian community." If this meant that he wanted to go along with the image built in the 1979 survey, it is no wonder that the loss of money became an increasingly important issue. Suggestions in this regard were not too far from the "concrete proposals" recommended



by some religious people in the 1979 Pematang Siantar workshop. They proposed, for example, that some lay Catholics would be asked to participate in (certain aspects of) the religious people's ministry. As I have noted in the earlier sections, the entering of several Batak men and women in the (institutionalized) Catholic religious orders and congregations also caused the proper domestication of the Catholic sahala. The notion of "loss" generated from this domestication has become one of the most important reasons for the religious as well as lay Batak Catholics to participate in the Catholic Church's life. Regarding Catholic Church teachings and tradition, the participation has to be understood in terms of how appropriately the Batak Catholics, the laity in particular, would interpret the (hi)story of an (expatriate) man called Jesus.

**PART TWO****MARKURSUS,  
PARTICIPATING IN THE "AUTHORIZED INTERPRETATION"**

In a kursus (training course) for Catholic lay leaders organized by PANKAT (Panitia Kateketik = the Committee of Catechism) of the archdiocese of Medan in 1987, one of the participants mentioned that he had been quite uneasy serving as a local leader. His congregation demanded that he should first actualize whatever he had spoken from the pulpit. It seems that the discourse based on the Christian Message, the Bible, has had some difficulties being fully implemented by that participant as well as by his congregation. Yet both of them, somehow, still observe their martarombo or dalihan na tolu based discourse. One of the main difficulties is: on what authority has the "imported" twenty century old Catholic (Church) Message, the Bible in particular, asked of its readers or listeners, how to observe its content in their present-day social, economic and cultural lives. In other words, certain faithful interpreters are needed who will be authorized by the Church and accepted by their fellow members. Since 1979, various courses have been organized by PANKAT to prepare the participants to become skilled lay leaders in their local congregations. A local congregation's leader who would be - as was mentioned in the 1980 Medan Bishop's pastoral letter - "capable interpreting the Christian Message into various aspects of life." How far

the Batak Catholics have interpreted the Message into their daily lives will be described in the following pages.

Since Christianity, Catholicism in particular, has been known as a Message then, it is important to prepare the people who will proclaim the Message. Forest mentioned that in the Catholic Church's history, "this message should be shouted out in space and time, be concretized in the formation of a clergy, whose interest and strategies continue to shout out the message."<sup>1</sup> He also specified the distinguishing features of the message as:

It announces a deliverance. It is addressed to individuals. It decrees an ethic which enables the individual receiving the message to assure his own deliverance.<sup>2</sup>

It is quite clear that in the case of the Catholic Church in North Sumatera, since 1980 the clergy have not been the only persons to shout the message. The 1979 survey as well as the Bishop's 1980 Pastoral Letter have recommended that lay Catholics also be trained to participate in shouting out the Message.

Since late 1979 various training courses and workshops have been offered to local lay leaders in the archdiocese of Medan. "Markursus" is the Toba Batak word for "to join a

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<sup>1</sup>. Alain Forest, But God Wasn't Siamese. A paper submitted at the Social Science Research Council Conference on "Christianity As Indigenous Religion in Southeast Asia," Cebu, The Philippines, September 1986. pp. 31-32.

<sup>2</sup>. Ibid.

training course." Within the markursus, I believe, the Catholic Church as well as the Batak Catholics have tried to determine the best methods to use in their efforts to interpret the Message. During my 15 months' research in North Sumatera I attended twelve various training courses and workshops which lasted between three to ten days each. Half of them were organized by PANKAT. Four serial biblical courses were organized by the Commission of Holy Scriptures and the rest were workshops on indigenous liturgy organized by the Commission of Liturgy. There was no official order for the courses and workshops organized by the Committees and Commissions. For example, it was only suggested that a participant in a basic biblical course already have taken a basic course offered by PANKAT.

In order to show how the Catholic Message has been interpreted by indigenous Catholicism, I will show that the courses and workshops organized by PANKAT, the Committee of Biblical Studies and the Committee of Liturgy have been related to each other. Undoubtedly the Catholic Message has been the ultimate value which is observed by the interpreters. The Batak participants in the courses, well-known as people who still strongly observe the martarombo and its related matter, I believe, have questioned their own notion of the past and its meaning for their present-day lives. All the Batak ancestors as well as the "founders" of Christianity, are believed to have bequeathed their messages

to their descendants or believers. The messages delivered through their histories have to be interpreted by the Batak Catholics into their present-day lives. The following three chapters are based on my notes made while I attended the training courses. In Chapter Four, I will explain why a certain knowledge of Christian notion of personality and leadership is required to become a good Catholic interpreter in dealing with Biblical words. In Chapter Five I will describe why the biblical training courses have been intended most likely to set up the interpretation's boundaries. The workshops on liturgy, particularly the workshop on the Toba Batak marriage ritual noted in Chapter Six, exemplify an attempt of interpreting Catholicism in North Sumatera. All of the training courses and workshops were held in PPU (Pusat Pembinaan Umat = Center for Lay Training), a building complex about six kilometers north of Pematang Siantar. Before analysing the courses and workshop, a brief description about the training center, hopefully, will help us to better understand how the process of interpretation has been organized by the Catholic Church in the archdiocese of Medan.

P.P.U. (PUSAT PEMBINAAN UMAT)  
Center for Lay Training

One need in organizing a training course for lay local leaders is special facilities. A proper place to gather the



trainees is needed primarily because of the characteristics of the training program itself. The program usually requires its participants to be away from their ordinary activities all day. By 1979 the parish priests in the diocese of Medan used to give sermons (instructions) two or three times a year to the leaders of their local congregations. This sermon usually lasted only a half day and people gathered in the local church or chapel. The parish priest usually gave instructions on the Church doctrines relating to the problems faced by the local congregation at that time. In 1979, initiated by a young Batak Capuchin priest who was the chairman of the PANKAT (Panitia Kateketik = Committee of Catechism, the new style courses (markursus), were designed and offered to replace the old style sermons. The new courses have utilized techniques and programs familiarized in typical group dynamic encounters.<sup>3</sup> These new courses actually offer sequential sessions which last two to ten days. In order to get more effective results, the training staff usually prefer that the participants gather and stay at the same place during the training. Some parishes have used their parish-hall (wisma) for certain basic training courses. For the advanced courses which are usually attended by participants of different parishes in the archdiocese of

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<sup>3</sup>. This former priest was trained in the East Asian Pastoral Institute, Manila, the Philippines as well as in Center of Catechism, Yogyakarta, Central Java, Indonesia.

Medan, a house within the city of Pematang Siantar was used until 1982. In this modest house the trainees slept on the matted floor since there was no better and larger reasonable accomodation available to them.

On March 17, 1982, the PPU building complex erected on three hectares of land was officially opened. The governor of Sumatera Utara was invited to that event. The complex is located near the highway from Pematang Siantar to Medan. The buildings, which can accommodate up to 60 persons, were funded mostly by foreign donations. Religious orders and congregations which work in the archdiocese of Medan had to contribute funds to establish as well as to operate the training center.<sup>4</sup> In his speech at PPU's opening ceremony, a Dutch Capuchin priest, who is the director of PPU, said that he worried about the fact that the spirit of the Gospel did not dwell yet in the hearts of most North Sumateran Catholics. He also pointed out some difficulties which might arise in the near future because of the establishment of the training center. The urgent need to train local lay leaders, consequently, might limit the regular services which the Church used to offer at that time. Another difficulty mentioned was financing PPU. He worried that donations from the universal Church could not be expected to continue. They (North Sumateran Catholics)

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<sup>4</sup>. Menjemaat (1984, no.5), p.133.

somehow had to finance the center willingly and to be ready to sacrifice.<sup>5</sup>

The ways PPU as well as the trainees to calculate the living cost spent during the course are also noteworthy. In 1986 - 1987 the regular (lowest) service charge for board and lodging (3 meals and one snack daily) was seventeen hundred and fifty rupiah (US\$ 1 = 1,660 rupiahs). At that time, the same rice dish served in PPU would cost about five hundred rupiahs in Pematang Siantar. It was said that the charge actually paid only about half of the real cost. PPU, then, has to cover the rest. The PPU director usually tells the trainees that the support has been available because of the kindness of some donors from abroad. As far as I know, most of the trainees who came to PPU did not pay for all the expenses. Their parish priests usually cover all or half of the expenses. However, I noticed there were some trainees who calculated it in different ways. Although they acknowledged that a sum of money was spent by PPU for their training, some trainees believed that they actually suffered a loss. They claimed that by attending the training course, they could not get the money they would have earned because they were absent from their regular jobs. The "loss," they claimed, was a sacrifice for being members of the (local) congregation leaders.

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<sup>5</sup>. Menjemaat (1982, no.4), pp.140-143.

Participating in a course and staying at PPU also gave the trainees special experiences. The official language used in the training sessions at PPU is Indonesian although the vernacular languages, Toba in particular, dominate the discourse among the trainees themselves who are mostly Toba Bataks. A general daily schedule for the courses offered at PPU is listed below:

07:00 breakfast  
 07:45 morning prayer  
       class/session I  
 10:00 coffee-break  
 10:30 class/session II  
 12:30 lunch  
       afternoon break  
 03:30 afternoon prayer  
       class/session III  
 06:00 Eucharistic celebration  
 07:00 dinner  
 08:00 class/session IV  
       evaluation  
 09:45 recreation, etc.

I met several local lay leaders who were quite excited about ever staying at PPU for markursus and shared the experiences with their village congregations back at home. They usually were impressed by the cleanliness and neatness of the PPU's garden and rooms. Indeed, these are in contrast to the usual environment in most Batak villages. One of the PPU's policies is to ask the participants to sweep the conference room and dormitories and to do the dishes. PPU janitors,

however, take care of the bathrooms. Sometimes, the training staff surprised the participants by serving drinks and snacks to them. This service, in fact, is unfamiliar to the Bataks regarding their custom of honoring revered persons.

Although I do not have statistics on the participants who were trained at PPU, I believe at least half of them came from the non-urban areas. Some of them, I noticed, had quite a hard time following the lecture classes or sessions. It was not that they were unaccustomed to listening to long verbal discourses. Batak traditional ceremonies are well known for their long list of mandok hata (delivering umpamas and umpasas) speakers. Some participants who were smokers went through more packs of cigarettes than they usually smoked in their regular daily life. They mentioned that smoking helped them to "eliminate" their "fantasies" about things left back home (wives, children, daily business, etc) which often came to their mind during the training. A smoker said that he could not pay attention to the staff's lecture unless he kept smoking.

A simple sketch of PPU, I think, will help to locate where all of the course activities took place. For people who have never been to PPU before, it will be easiest for them to first stop at the sisters' residence since it is the nearest PPU building to the PPU's only entrance. The sisters and their co-workers take care of PPU's board and lodging services. Passing the dining hall at their right and the

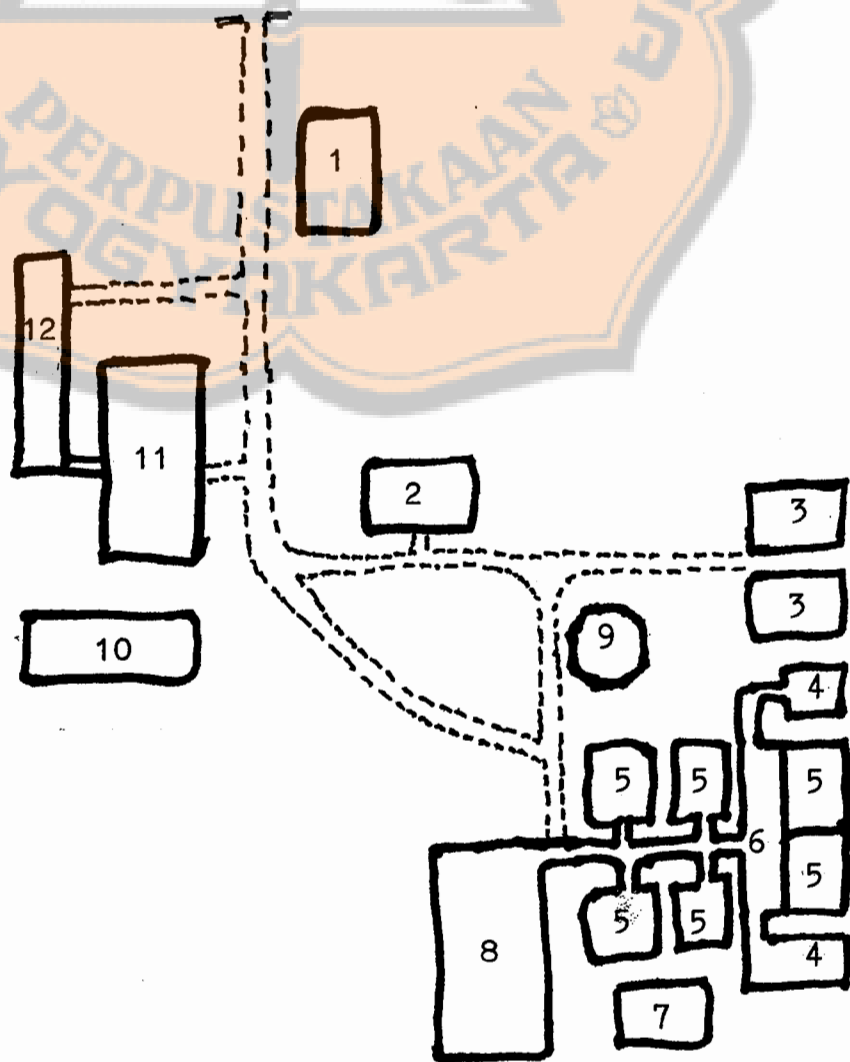


office of PANKAT at their left, the newcomers would most likely be impressed by the shape of PPU's chapel. The chapel has a massive concrete cupola. It stands apart from the dorm and conference annexed halls. Some people said that the chapel and the gym-type conference hall dominate PPU's landscape. Some Batak Capuchins told me that the chapel as well as the hallway which connect the dormitory and conference hall should not have been constructed with cast concrete. It could have saved money. The architect of PPU, a Dutch Capuchin brother, however, argued that he preferred to build something a little bit more expensive that would last longer and be cheaper to maintain.

There is always a question from some visitors about the location of the chapel and dining hall. Why do the two buildings stand separate from the dormitory as well as from the conference hall? During the rainy season (September - March) it is certainly inconvenient for the trainees to walk in the rain to go to the chapel and dininghall. People said that the answer (assumably coming from the architect) is that space is needed for a beautiful garden in a tropical area such as North Sumatera. In the case of rain, well, there are always umbrellas, aren't there?

**Illustration 3.**  
P.P.U. (Center of Lay Training), Pematang Siantar.

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|---------------------|---|
| 1. Sisters' convent | 7. New Facilitator's room   |
| 2. PANKAT office    | 8. Conference hall  |
| 3. Rectory          | 9. Chapel   |
| 4. Bathrooms        | 10. New offices for PPU,<br>Committee of Liturgy and<br>Committee of Biblical Studies |
| 5. Dormitories      | 11. Dining hall   |
| 6. Living-room      | 12. Kitchen   |



#### Chapter Four

##### THE CATHOLICIZING OF BATAK WORDS The PANKAT Training Courses

In its document "The Promotion of Local Congregation Leaders' Participation in the Archdiocese of Medan" published in late 1986, PANKAT clearly stated that the unordained Church ministers or the local lay leaders would play decisive roles in developing an independent Church, which would be more capable of responding to the signs of the time. This document was prepared and submitted at the meeting of the Priest Council of the Archdiocese of Medan in April 1987. It was written in the document that the program of promoting the role of the unordained ministers in local congregations, "... once again , it is not because of a lack of priests, but because of vocation, charism and baptismal duty received by every (Catholic) person."<sup>6</sup>

The document noted that, in terms of their numbers and roles, those local lay leaders were important, since the archdiocese of Medan in 1986 had 40 parishes with 1197 registered Catholic local congregations (huria). These 1197 local leaders and their staff have somehow had to deal with the activities taking place in their congregations. So, whatever the main reason, since the 1980 Pastoral Letter

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<sup>6</sup>. PANKAT KAM, Peningkatan Peranserta Para Pemuka Jemaat di KAM (Pematang Siantar: 1986), p.7.

there has been a constant demand that the local (unordained) congregation leaders be trained properly.

The training courses which have been designed by PANKAT and given to the local lay leaders usually have three goals, namely: (1). to develop human relationship skills (2). to improve leadership skills, and (3). to proclaim the Words (of God) by way of interpreting the Holy Scripture and practicing giving a sermon.<sup>7</sup> The first two goals usually can be accommodated in the so-called basic course. The third goal usually is given in the advanced training courses. The basic course, as I mentioned before, has utilized a lot of games and role-playing of the typical group dynamic encounters. In its annual report in November 1980, PANKAT mentioned that they already had organized 17 basic courses.<sup>8</sup> Some people who had already taken the basic course - as it was expected - then could organize the same course for their fellow Catholics in the local congregation. Some of the local trainers, in fact, were not quite clear yet about the goal of the basic course. After the course was finished, indeed, some of them reported that more people of their congregations came for the Sunday services. Others were "capable" of leading the religious services in the church and/or of giving a sermon. However, these were not the main

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7. Menjemaat. no.3, 1979

8. LAPORAN Panitia Kateketik. Coetus 26-28 Nopember 1980.

goals of a basic course, which was intended primarily to provide basic leadership skills in preparing the trainees to participate at the more advanced courses.

The 1980 PANKAT report reminded the reader that there were three steps in a basic course. First, there were the exercises to express trainees' opinions and emotions in their group. The exercises were geared toward achieving a certain openness among the group members. This openness likely would bring a sense of brotherhood and companionship so that all the trainees could feel close to each other, harmonious and united. In the second step, the trainees were made aware that there were differences in their ways of listening and seeing, as well as in their ways of thinking or making up their minds. Differences based on someone's personal history, daily job, etc. could not be ignored. They had to be accepted as part of our humanity, to be used to enrich each other rather than being a source of separation. One of the best ways to deal with them was to become familiar with the so called "two ways traffic communication." The third step in a basic course was to practice some games and exercises on cooperation, problem solving, companionship, and mutual planning. Every game or exercise in this step was supposed to be concluded with a personal reflection before God concerning their vocation and role as local leaders. They would realize that God involves



himself in their vocation.<sup>9</sup> The former director of PANKAT mentioned that if a local congregation leader was already trained in the basic Christian leadership skills, then, a deeper knowledge and reflection about the people or congregation to whom he/she had to minister would be offered in the more advanced courses.

The PANKAT courses I attended at PPU in 1986-1987 mostly were the advanced ones. I noted that, although leadership skills learned in the basic course were helpful means for the local leaders to manage their congregations, certain problems still remained to be solved within the Batak discourse. The staff of PANKAT, as well as the trainees, indeed tried their best to deal with idiosyncrasies of the Batak martarombo discourse vis-a-vis the Christian biblical oriented discourse.

One of the most crucial problems in Batak discourse, I believe, has been its notion of hata (word). Regarding their custom, every Batak person supposedly must speak the adat words according to his (or her) jambar hata (speech portion). Whenever a Batak person has a formal encounter (wedding ceremony, funeral, ancestral apotheosis, etc.) a certain portion of meat (jambar juhut) is given to him based on his dalihan na tolu status. The jambar juhut he receives will indicate what kind of jambar hata he supposedly has to

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<sup>9</sup>. Rafael Hutabarat, "Kursus Dasar Apa?" in Tapak. Maret 1983, pp. 23-25.

give. Every Batak who is invited to a certain formal encounter based on his tarombo knowledge will know what part of dalihan na tolu (hula-hula, boru, or dongan tubu) he belongs to in reference to the host's marga. A hula-hula person, for example, usually gets the head of the slaughtered feast animal as his jambar juhut. As a hula-hula person, after the meal is over he has to deliver words (mandok hata) of blessing or/and advice to the host who supposedly is his boru. The host's boru persons will get the animal's neck-piece since they are considered as the mediators between hula-hula and dongan tubu. The host himself will receive the tail and buttock which mark the identity of an animal in contrast to a human being. The tail shows who is the owner of an animal.<sup>10</sup> This Batak notion of jambar hata has caused problems in the discourse practiced by the Christian Churches in North Sumatera, in the Bataklands in particular.

A.A. Sitompul, the president of HKBP School of Theology in Pematang Siantar acknowledged that the Batak notion of dalihan na tolu by no means has been separated from some Batak Protestants' lives. He wrote,

In important decisions the vote of the hula-hula carries most weight. The host of a feast has to wait for the hula-hula to open the ceremony or meeting. At the end of the celebration or meeting it is the hula-hula who is asked to say the prayer. It follows that every hula-hula family

<sup>10</sup>. see, Drs. Nalom Siahaan, Adat Dalihan Na Tolu. Prinsip dan Pelaksanaannya. (Jakarta: Grafina, 1982), p. 62.

must learn Christian prayer. They must act as mediators between the families in dalihan na tolu, as well as other guests who are invited to a feast/meeting, and the biblical God.<sup>11</sup>

Since the Protestants do not have unmarried priests, it is easier for them than for the Catholics to adapt a priestly role to the hula-hula. Sitompul added,

The hula-hula are lay people. The universal priesthood in this case is demonstrated by the public ministry of the word (but not the sacrament). The hula-hula as individual Christians have been entrusted with their neighbors. The hula-hula have authority - if they are good and loyal Christians - to speak the word of God, to comfort and advice, based on the Gospel.<sup>12</sup>

However, as was noted by Sitompul, some people have thought that the blessings of sahala (power) of hamoraon (wealth), of hagabeon (many children) and of hasangapon (being respected) are not from the biblical God, but from the hula-hula themselves. Concerning this problem, Sitompul simply stated that "this is obviously against the gospel."<sup>13</sup>

The effective blessings expected in a Christian discourse undoubtedly will be considered as something coming from the biblical God. However, as I mentioned earlier in this section, the uneasiness of an unordained lay local leader concerning the discourse he had to perform from the

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<sup>11</sup>. A.A. Sitompul and Arne Sovik (eds.), HORAS HKBP, Essays For A 125-Year-Old Church (Pematang Siantar: STT-HKBP, 1986), pp.53-54.

<sup>12</sup>. *ibid.* p.54.

<sup>13</sup>. *ibid.* p. 54.

pulpit came from the uncertainty of the realization of the blessings promised by the biblical God upon people who participate in the biblical discourse. In the Batak dalihan na tolu logic, a hula-hula speaker's authorized blessings have been unquestionable. There is no doubt as to the source of the dalihan na tolu blessings since they surely come from the blood-ties (tarombo), although their historicity has been mythologized. Indeed, in the Batak dalihan na tolu tradition the blessings expected from the hula-hula are also not totally guaranteed. That is why, when they are confronted by destitution, childless, or other troubles, the Bataks organize a feast and invite their hula-hula. The host will ask his hula-hula's blessings, the needed sahalas. However, due to their patrilineal exogamous society, each Batak family is hula-hula in relation to some families and boru in relation to others. Concerning this dalihan na tolu logic, Sitompul explained,

In the structure of Batak society wife-receivers have a special task in the adat feast. They have to serve as waiters or cooks. They may not sit down as guests. They may not speak in decision making. If any problem or conflict appears among the families, the wife-receivers have to ask forgiveness of their hula-hula, even if the hula-hula is in the wrong. Every family becomes a hula-hula, boru (wife-receivers) and dongan tubu (own clan or marga). So the position of the family group changes depending on the host who gives a feast.<sup>14</sup>

In dalihan na tolu, then, the notion of hula-hula, often

<sup>14</sup>. Sitompul 1986. op.cit. p.55.



described as the "seen god" (debata na tarida), is something interchangeable because everyone has a turn at belonging to a wife-giving group.

By the Catholic Church's renewal declared in the 1963 Second Vatican Council, as well as by the ordination of the first Batak Capuchin priest in 1964, the Dutch Capuchin missionaries in a certain sense were acknowledged as the official mediators between God and the (Batak) Catholics: the mediators who somehow acted in the mode of the Batak notion of a hula-hula sahala giver. The presence of Batak Catholic priests - who kept their marga names as well as participating in various traditional encounters - during the last two decades, in fact, has hardly put the adaptation of hula-hula to the biblical God in a definite perspective. The Batak priests in general have been thought to have the sahala hamoraon, but as the members of the Capuchin brotherhood they are subjected to the vow of poverty. The position of a Catholic priest then also appears as something odd whenever the Batak notions of jambar juhut and jambar hata are recalled.

Moreover, since 1980 at least three official letters and documents issued by the hierarchy of the archdiocese of Medan have stated that the establishment of a self-supporting (local) Church was not due to the lack of the



ordained leaders, the priests.<sup>15</sup> The problem of adapting the notion of hula-hula, especially in terms of the marshahala (expatriate) Catholic religious people, then, was considered less urgent in regard to the Catholic Church's effort to be a self-supporting Church in North Sumatera. The 1986 document proposed by PANKAT which was approved a year later by the Bishop Office stated:

By all means it has been a challenge for all of us to realize the notion of a self-supporting Church by doing dialectic (sic) to history and the Bible.<sup>16</sup>

I do not think that by referring to this notion of dialectics, the Batak Catholic Church then was simply ignoring the problem of jambar and related matters, such as were faced by the Protestants. Rather, it seems that the Catholic Church saw that within Christianity, the Bible in particular, there is an alternative notion of hata which it has utilized to try to deal with the Batak notion of jambar hata. In Chapter Five, an analysis of the biblical training courses will elaborate on this issue too.

The discourse based on Christian Bible does not have the same basis assumed by the traditional Batak dalihan na tolu discourse. In Christianity it is clear that the Words

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<sup>15</sup>. (1). Surat Gembala Uskup 1980. (2). Rapat Diosesan II, 1982. (3). Pertemuan Imam-imam sekeuskupan Agung Medan, 1987.

<sup>16</sup>. PANKAT KAM Peningkatan Peranserta Para Pemuka Jemaat di KAM (Pematang Siantar: 1986), p.7.

of God in the Holy Scriptures are always considered as the Truth and have to be referred to. The Batak traditional sayings of umpama and umpasa have been the main phrases utilized in the official discourses. Words and sentences utilized in the umpama and umpasa are something idiosyncratic in Batak discourse. A conflict of different uses of words (among the Catholic Bataks) in observing Catholicism is supposedly expected.

My archival research on the Batak umpama and umpasa has found that Christianity as well as Western and other "knowledges" have structured the Batak umpamas and umpasas (See Appendix 2). The earliest printing of Batak traditional sayings dates only to early in this century (1903). A Dutch scholar who served the colonial government in Tapanuli Residency, J.C. Vergouwen, believed that umpamas talked about legal issues, and accordingly were adapted in the government court ("Groote Rapat"). The Batak umpamas were compiled, categorized and published for various public (adat) uses. The Protestant Church and government (colonial as well as national) officials also recommended Batak students to learn the umpamas and umpasas.

Despite the fact that some Bataks have used the term umpama for umpasa and umpama proper, D.M. Aruan, a Batak scholar, noted that actually there is a difference between the two terms. He mentioned that umpama usually utilizes metaphors from nature (plants, animals, etc.) in its first

two lines, followed by the proverbial sentences. The content of an umpama can be: a model of life, an expression of someone's feeling, a criticism, an opinion, a social order and a law reference. The Batak umpasa always consists of pasu-pasu (blessings) and whenever an umpasa is uttered the public has to respond loudly with the words i ma tutu (so be it).<sup>17</sup>

J.C. Vergouwen, the Dutch scholar mentioned earlier, referred to a lot of traditional sayings (umpamas) in his description of the social organization and customary law of the Toba Bataks. He mentioned that his report was based on notes and archival research during his three years of official duty as well as on his dealing with Batak discourses. He said that the Bataks attached good and bad "effects" to words. "A word can bring benediction or calamity. Words can summon powers that bring ruin and good fortune." On the efficacy of speech he referred to the Batak umpama: "Sineat ni bibir juhut daonna" (When one has been struck with words from the lips, meat is the medicine). The meat mentioned here clearly referred to the notion of jambar juhut. Moreover, he argued that the use of umpama,

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17. D.M. Aruan, Fungsi "umpama" dan "Umpasa" Sebagai Tatakrama Masyarakat Batak Toba. Konferensi Bahasa Daerah, Jakarta 24-29 Januari 1977. (Jakarta: Pusat Pembinaan dan Pengembangan Bahasa, Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1977), p.11. Some authors and scholars simply use the term umpama for both umpama proper and umpasa. During my research, however, I noted that most Batak people used umpasa for both terms.

is undoubtedly connected with the need to give impressiveness and authority by the spoken word to principles which have been handed down and that are generally acknowledged and by which the life of the community must be guided if that life is to be good.

However, in practice he acknowledged that (some) Batak umpamas have by no means absolute meaning. He wrote,

the terminology I use will sometimes be found to be vague as well as variable, and that it will appear that I have sometimes deliberately blurred a definition which I have previously formulated.<sup>18</sup>

In his book Jambar Hata, Dongan tu Ulaon Adat (Speech Portion, A Guide to Adat Rituals) Sihombing mentioned that in the past only the hula-hula, parents and older brothers could recite umpasas for their boru, children and younger brothers respectively. Later, due to Christianization, a boru person may also recite umpasas for his hula-hula if he states first that the blessings are asked from "God the Father himself" (Amanta Debata).<sup>19</sup> The reason that the Batak people have utilized umpama and umpasa, Sihombing argues, is that they will give more impressive and effective results to the listeners. He gives, as an example, that instead of just saying straight-forwardly "we have to think smartly first and say it later," an umpama will say:

<sup>18</sup>. J.C. Vergouwen, The Social Organization and Customary Law of The Toba-Batak of Northern Sumatra. translated by Jeune Scott-Kemball, with a preface by J. Keuning (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964/1933), See pp.: 95, 139 and 144.

<sup>19</sup>. T.M. Sihombing, Jambar Hata, Dongan tu Ulaon Adat. (Jakarta: Tulus jaya, no date), p.18.



Niarit lili, bahen pambaba.  
Jolo nidilat bibir, asa nidok hata.

Carve the coconut-tree leaf's little stick,  
use it as a weaving stick.  
Lick your lips first and say your words later.

In contrast to an umpama, Sihombing noted that an umpasa recently also can be rephrased. There are even some modern umpasas such as:

Manggoreng di balanga, mardisir mardosor.  
Sai tubu ma angka boru na gabe sarjana,  
dohot angka anak na gabe professor.

Fry in a frying-pan, "mardisir mardosor".  
Wishing you to have many daughters who will be  
scholars, and many sons who will be  
professors.

Sibarani, another umpama "editor," mentioned that by reciting the traditional Batak sayings the speaker acknowledges the authority of his ancestors, "the so and so who have said that."<sup>20</sup>

How have the Christian Churches in the Bataklands responded to these umpama and umpasa? Rev. Dr. Harry Parkin who was one of the faculty members at the HKBP Nommensen School of Theology in Pematang Siantar wrote an article about "God of the Umpama." This article was written in an anthology for the 125th anniversary of HKBP (1986) in North Sumatera. He argued that "Words have special significance for the Batak. The spoken word is not only the means of communicating thought but also activates the power behind

<sup>20</sup>. See Sibarani's work mentioned in the earlier page.



the thought."<sup>21</sup> After confirming his argument on the importance of the umpama and umpasa to the seminal work on Toba-Batak traditional laws written by Vergouwen<sup>22</sup>, Parkin then stated:

It is very doubtful if the Batak belief in the magical power of the spoken word persists but there is an innate and intuitive response to it which goes beyond the mere linguistic and/or grammatical meaning.<sup>23</sup>

Although he acknowledged that he was not carrying out a purely academic exercise, he in fact discussed the matter "beyond the mere linguistic and/or grammatical meaning" primarily as a theological subject. He pointed out that the Batak notion of "the Supreme Creator Grandfather" (Ompunta Mula Jadi na Bolon) utilized in some umpama and umpasa is somehow also the same god in terms of Christian belief. But, once again, as Sitompul warned earlier, the notion of god in Batak traditional sayings can be understood as no different from the notion of hula-hula.

Some Batak Toba Christian (Protestants and Catholics) theologians found and argued that the notion of Ompunta Mulajadi na Bolon at least has pointed to the biblical God in Christianity. Ph.O.L. Tobing, a Protestant theologian, after research on the Batak archival texts compiled mostly

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<sup>21</sup>. Harry Parkin, "God of The Umpama", in Sitompul 1986. op.cit. p.7.

<sup>22</sup>. J.C. Vergouwen 1964. \*op.cit.

<sup>23</sup>. Harry Parkin 1986, op.cit. p.8.

during the colonial period (1861 - 1945) and on interviews conducted in the Bataklands, concluded that the High God of the Toba Batak is not a transcendent God, who is above nature, above the whole creation. Obviously He can intervene in the cosmic order. He added, *Bei*

He is not the creator of the universe in the "absolute" sense of the word, but he is the cosmos itself. In this cosmic totality man is comprised as a microcosmos.<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, Tobing also acknowledged that the Toba High God's intervention in the cosmos is represented in the notion of hula-hula. He also quoted from the "earlier" report described by Vergouwen,

The hula-hula is sometimes said to be the wakil ni debata, the representative of the High God in this sublunary world to his ianakkon, his daughter's children; he is the pangidoan dohot panjaloan pasoe-pasoe di boroena, i.e. he is the one in particular from whom the boroe must ask for pasoe-pasoe, i.e. for a blessing, when they are in distress, and which they are bound to get.<sup>25</sup>

Although Tobing put the notion of God in the Batak dalihan na tolu's context, particularly in the hula-hula, unfortunately he did not pay much attention to the authorized phrases, the umpasa. He often recalled, the matched adat umpama/sas to authorize his arguments throughout his book. Actually he did not elaborate enough on

<sup>24</sup>. Ph.O.L. Tobing, The Structure of The Toba-Batak Belief in The High God (Macassar: South and South-East Celebes Institute for Culture, 1956), p.195.

<sup>25</sup>. Ibid. pp. 86-87.

the notions of umpama and umpasa except for noting, in a short statement, about the sources used in his book:

... we have been able to collect much material: myths, throwing light upon those already known and many tonggo-tonggo, set forms of ritual prayers to be addressed to the deities of upper-, middle-, and underworld, each ending with an "umpama." An umpama is a small verse of four line, of which the two last lines contain a wish or moral lesson.<sup>26</sup>

Msgr. Anicetus Bongsu Sinaga OFM Cap., the Bishop of Sibolga, North Sumatera, argued in his published Ph.D. dissertation that the Toba Batak High God is simultaneously transcendence and immanence.<sup>27</sup> He rejected Tobing's identification of the representative hula-hula as representing the Batak High God himself. He argued that the prayers which mostly are in the form of umpasa always ask for something to be given, something to be shared. He stated that the worshipper, the person who says the umpasa, "... never conceives of becoming the worshipped."<sup>28</sup> To explain why the Bataks have utilized umpasa so much in their ceremonial discourse, he explained: "The Batak use the traditional umpama which have been spoken by the forefathers as they are considered to have been nearer to and taught by

<sup>26</sup>. Ibid. p.24.

<sup>27</sup>. A.B.Sinaga, The Toba-Batak High God: Transendence and Immanence (St.Augustin, West Germany: Anthropos Institute, 1981). Bishop Sinaga graduated from Academia Alfonsa, Rome (M.A. 1970-1972) and Catholic University Louvain, Belgium (Ph.D. 1972-1975).

<sup>28</sup>. Sinaga 1981, op.cit. p.161.

God in the golden time."<sup>29</sup> Concerning the traditional sayings, he commented,

The power of the spoken words in Batak society - indicated in the efficacy attributed to spoken prayer - would seem to lend itself readily to development into the Christian notion of the word of God.<sup>30</sup>

It is not clear what Bishop Sinaga meant by stating that the powerful words (umpasa) authorized by the Batak ancestors of "the golden time" would seem "to lend itself" to the word of the (biblical) God.

In 1987, when I interviewed him, Bishop Sinaga suggested that his colleagues should be more careful in utilizing some Batak traditions and symbols such as the responsorial sentence i ma tutu (for the umpasa), gondang music, etc. in Catholic rituals conducted in church. He did not like the church to become noisy, with people talking to each other during the service. During my research in the Bataklands, I attended several Batak Catholic wedding ceremonies held in a church or a chapel. Some priests utilized umpasas in their sermons. I noted that the congregations responded with the i ma tutu as was expected. But, as far as I remember, the congregations were always quite amused after giving the response. Especially if the speaker was not a Batak priest, some people in the

<sup>29</sup>. Sinaga 1981, op.cit. p.159.

<sup>30</sup>. Sinaga 1981, op.cit. p.187.

congregation smiled and said "Gosh, he knows too!" Bishop Sinaga's suggestion, I think, is due to the uncertain historicity of "the golden time." This historical issue, then, I believe, points to the most crucial Batak issues of tarombo and its dalihan na tolu vis-a-vis the notion of history in Christianity.

Here is another comment on the difficulty of utilizing the popular Batak umpama and umpasa in Christian discourses. A Batak priest, who is a lecturer in biblical studies, said that he actually did not like to utilize umpama and umpasa because they just repeated things of the past. Instead, he preferred to look for something in the future. He acknowledged, though, that since junior high school years he has collected books on umpama and umpasa. He has some of the old collections dated as far back as early in this century. He got some of them from his father and his older brother. He said,

If somebody starts to recite an umpasa, well ... usually I already know what will be the next words he is going to utter ... but, to memorize and utilize it by myself, no way!

He also mentioned that mastering (memorizing?) some umpama or umpasa is important to the extent that it will be useful in giving the official speech (mandok hata) in the Batak traditional encounters and discourses. He indicated that a Batak person has to do the mandok hata because the person has thought that "it is said" that he deserves the speech



right (jambar hata) since "it is said by so-and-so" (supposedly one of the Batak ancestors) that there has been the so called Batak tarombo. Accordingly, based on that "imagination," the tarombo, he has the dalihan na tolu affiliation with the host as well as with the other guests in the given encounter and discourse. He also noted that often in a party someone would manipulate and maximize his tarombo regarding the host's marga in order to get a better jambar juhut and jambar hata provided for the party's attendants. This priest, who graduated from higher education in Rome probably thought that it did not make sense to conduct a discourse on an "imagined" basis.

A Batak host also has a typical solution for dealing with jambar manipulation. Sihombing gives an example of this in his book Filsafat Batak (Batak Philosophy). The jambar juhut for "friends of the same clan" usually are the thigh bones of the slaughtered water-buffalo. In the case of more than four "friends" claiming the jambar, the host (or his representative who usually is a master of umpama/sa) usually just gives some little pieces of meat in addition to the four thigh bones. The host, however, has to show the imitation jambar juhut and makes sure to shout loudly to the public that the piece is the thigh bone reserved for his friend who claimed it. The receiver supposedly will not be upset with the substitution since he also has to think in the same Batak philosophy: "Words which actually determine

(hata i do situtuna) as it is said in a Batak umpama!"<sup>31</sup> My observation of several jambar events confirms Sihombing's example.

A "certain sense," I think, made the priest mentioned above not to follow the "common sense" of his fellow Batak people in utilizing umpama/sa. He certainly has had access to the umpama/sa. He has kept the umpama/sa collections inherited from his father and older brother. However, he did not want, or did not have the interest, to utter the words which he surely knew (as people said) to have been utilized since the "golden time" of the tarombo oriented people. In order to maintain the dalihan na tolu social order accordingly the Bataks have believed that they have to keep activating martarombo (relating each other's genealogy). This priest, however, preferred not to utter the umpama/sa because he realized that it had been frozen imaginatively in his collection. In other words, if his Batak fellows wanted to utter it, he thought, they can only repeat the imagined orderly things since they cannot recall anything that originated farther back than what "it has been said" and imagined in his collection. He thought that the manipulation of umpama/sa is likely something "nonsense" in Catholicism.

Stewart has rightly noted that, although a context has to be accounted for in a given discourse, "we cannot assume

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<sup>31</sup>. T.M. Sihombing, Filsafat Batak (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1986), p.133.

that we have a unified, occasionless notion of context."<sup>32</sup>

She writes,

Context envelopes speech. Context becomes foregrounded. And because of this dependence upon context, the content and field of realism will always be subject to social process.<sup>33</sup>

Following Stewart's notion of context, I would like to say that the priest thought that the utilization of umpama/sa did not make sense because its words were presented only on behalf of the imagined tarombo, which he knew was quite easily manipulated. It is true that every Batak knows that even the content of an umpama/sa is hardly actualized in the reality of daily life. It seems that the reality which has been created out of the Batak umpama/sa-based discourse would be better regarded in the notion of context mentioned in Stewart's argument. In her perspective, the Batak umpama/sa

are like those "scripts" from verbal art, such as personal experience narratives and gossip, which depend so much upon the collaboration of participants for the manufacture of their meaning, or like proverbs that rely so heavily upon situational and social contextual constraints.<sup>34</sup>

Undoubtedly Christianity and its biblical discourse have raised a question on the realism implied in the Batak umpama

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<sup>32</sup>. Susan Stewart, Nonsense. Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), p.10.

<sup>33</sup>. Ibid. p.19.

<sup>34</sup>. Ibid.

and umpasa based discourse.

A former German Protestant missionary in the Bataklands also reported that he was quite confused when trying to understand the Batak discourse which was highly spiced with umpama/sa. He reported that he could not understand why the Bataks considered the art of lying as something synonymous with cleverness. He wrote,

The Battas(sic) cannot understand that lies are dishonourable. If you convict a Batak of a lie, which is really a very difficult thing, because he is so adroit, he will laugh heartily and think "you are more crafty than I."<sup>35</sup>

He acknowledged that his presence and that of Westerners in general in the Bataklands were appreciated very much by the indigenous people because, as they usually said, "there is nothing you whites cannot do." He noted that the most effective method in proselytizing the Bataks was not so much by preaching the Christian teachings but by showing the moral personality of the preacher. "Missionary's love and compassion is a completely new thing to the animistic heathen."<sup>36</sup> After two years ministering mission works among the Bataks in Samosir, he described what they did in a farewell party for him: "They confess, my father was not, my

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<sup>35</sup>. JOH Warneck, The Living Christ and Dying Heathenism. The Experiences of a Missionary in Animistic Heathendom. translated from the third German edition by Neil Buchanan. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House), p.93.

<sup>36</sup>. Ibid. p.167.

mother was not, what thou hast been to me."<sup>37</sup> This German missionary's report shows that on the one hand he was upset when he had to deal with the discourse which was conducted in the tradition of Batak umpama/sa; on the other hand, it seems that he was heartily touched by the personal relationship he had built up with some people in his congregation - at least at the very time of the farewell celebration.

The German missionary's case, more or less, is similar to my early description (Chapter One) that personal relationship between the Dutch Capuchin missionaries and the first Batak Catholic converts were prevalent at the time. Several Dutch Capuchins who were still working in the Bataklands when I did my research, confirmed the experiences told by the German missionary above. My own experience in dealing with Batak discourses made me realize that the notion of a lie noted by the German missionary should not be taken out of its context of the dalihan na tolu's realism, a realism which implies that every marga person is a hula-hula in relation to some margas and a boru in relation to others. One Batak nun told me that I could be a proper missionary, - one who is regarded as a hula-hula, a sahala owner, in the Bataklands - "if only you have plenty of tactics" ("asa godang taktik muna") in dealing with the people.

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<sup>37</sup>. *ibid.* p.167.



Generally speaking, the Christian Churches, the Catholic Church in particular, have not objected to the fact that the Batak Catholics continue practicing their umpama/umpasa based discourses. The suggestions given by Bishop Sinaga and the other Batak priest did not imply, I think, that the use of umpama/umpasa is against discourses based on the Christian Bible. That Bishop Sinaga did not like a noisy church (which is assumed especially by the Catholic Church to be God's dwelling place) and that the Batak priest implicitly mentioned that the Christian Bible by no means consists of frozen words, indicate that there is another "real" discourse between every Batak Catholic and his/her biblical God. Despite its idiosyncrasies, the Christian notion of realism has in fact, encapsulated another realism dealt with by the Catholic Bataks. In terms of the historical perspective, Christianity clearly gives the Catholic Bataks a realism which is based on a "text" dedicated to a man called Jesus. In this "realism," indeed, all Christians supposedly know when he was born, where he went and other historical realism(s) which have been associated with him.

Since the early 1980s, how has the Catholic Church in the archdiocese of Medan dealt with the Batak tarombo based historicity and shaped it with its own biblical notion of history? A training program called Cerita dan Cita (Story and Idea) has been utilized by the Catholic Church, PANKAT

in particular, to help the indigenous Catholics interpret the biblical Message. I will describe the course for Sunday-school teachers given in one of the training courses I attended in 1986 - 1987 in PPU, Pematang Siantar. It was a ten-day-long training course (the longest of the typical courses offered by PANKAT in 1986-1987) and was attended by 32 participants, who came from many parishes in the archdiocese of Medan. These participants mostly were in charge of giving religious education instruction on Sunday mornings to 5-12 year old Catholic children in their parishes or local congregations.

The first exercise given at the Sunday-school teachers training was called "Childhood Dining Table." The trainees were asked to recall their experiences of dining with their families when they were twelve years old. Did they dine at the table or, as Batak people usually do, just sit on a matted floor in their homes? They would then draw who was sitting next to whom at that time. They colored the "persons": father, mother, brothers and sisters or other relatives, and themselves depicted in the sketch. The facilitator explained that a red-colored person, for example, could show a courageous and tough personality. After every participant finished his/her personal assignment, they gathered in groups of five or six and shared their results.

After the participants told each other's Dining Table

stories in their own small group, a plenary session was held. Some participants from each group were asked to tell voluntarily their childhood experiences at the "dining table." Here are some of the comments. A man mentioned that his family at that time was not in a good situation, but that he was consoled (in the small group session) when he realized that there were families which were in a worse situation than his. A young woman told that she was so happy because in her (small) group she felt that there were no secrets anymore, that everyone was quite open. The sadness which she recalled when she (pretended) to be twelve years old again was released a little bit. A married man shared his bitter childhood. He had to collect firewood and animal dirt to fertilize the crop and do other chores because his father was away in East Sumatera. A young man acknowledged that remembering his childhood was burdensome. However, that burden was released when he could tell about it to his group, which he felt looked like his own family members. A nun was happy because everybody in her group was open, as if they were brothers and sisters. She was touched to hear the burden of a married man, and she already prayed for him. At the end of this plenary session, the facilitator said that the exercise showed that the notion of humility had just been experienced by the trainees. They could "successfully" endure these experiences because of their faith in Christ.

The next session was the "Photograph Encounter." The facilitator provided the trainees several photographs of unknown persons. Every trainee had to select one of the photographs. The facilitator reminded them that the exercise was not only about their past. Based on the previous exercise, some participants supposedly already realized that they felt better than when they were twelve years old. Participants were asked to express the ideas that supposedly had been inspired by studying the photographs. The facilitator herself first gave an example. She chose a photograph of several men building a house. She mentioned that as a staff member of PANKAT she would always like to work together with the priests and others at the office. She believed that a nice house was built by laying many bricks on one another. She said, "I have participated in building something nice which can be enjoyed by others".

After all participants each got their chosen photographs, they again had to share their ideas in small groups. A young man chose a photograph of a gathering of youths. He mentioned that, based on that photograph, he would like to work primarily among the younger generation in his local congregation. A young woman had a photograph of women villagers working in a rice-field. After looking the photograph, she recalled her past. She said that she had gone to Jakarta with her uncle who promised to send her to school. In fact, her schooling was postponed and she had to

do house-work for her uncle's family for about a year. After graduating from high school in Jakarta, she returned to North Sumatera. Looking at the photograph, she felt that she was lucky to be home again. As a matter of fact, she did not have a job, so she could not earn money to support her younger brothers and sisters. She knew that she had to work harder with her parents such as taking care her younger brothers and sisters at home.

It seems that this session, the utilization of photographic images, was intended to bend the vague Batak tarombo historicity into the participant's own (hi)story. Most of the comments in the Photograph Encounter exercise, generally speaking, recalled the burdensome experiences which happened because of the bad treatment the participants had received from their relatives. The treatment came of the participants' past (hi)stories in dealing with their dalihan na tolu people. The participants certainly were not familiar at all with the persons photographed. However, these pictures could activate their ideas - as is supposed to happen if we look at a photograph of certain people - to think of what happened after the photograph was taken. The advantage manipulated in this session, as Barthes has argued, is the notion of the "reality" a photograph has



impressed on the people who look at it.<sup>38</sup> Understandably, the participants had to look for a "real" and immediate solution from others or from themselves, in ideas at least!

After the small group session, no plenary session followed in which the group could share their experiences. Instead, the facilitator conducted an evaluation on the exercise. She asked the participants if they felt anything had, in fact, become easier for them to do as a result of the Photograph Encounter. Someone mentioned that looking at the photograph itself was a helpful means of activating his mind. A male participant said that there was a right photograph which could match his past experiences. Another participant acknowledged that the photograph had helped him realize that God was involved in his life. At the end of the evaluation, the facilitator reminded them that the idea(s) they got from the exercise actually were the right responses. The photographs stimulated a Christian response to their (past) stories.

At the next session, one of the PANKAT staff members explained the next steps in the process of the Story and Idea program. He reminded the participants that a human being has to be conscious about what he/she wants to do.

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<sup>38</sup>. See, Roland Barthes, The Grain of the Voice. Interviews 1962-1980. translated by Linda Coverdale. (New York: Hill & Wang, 1985), p.355. Also, James T. Siegel, Solo in the New Order. Language And Hierarchy In An Indonesian City. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p.260.

Their "stories," which were not the same as the Batak turi-turian (folklores) and torsa (legends), supposedly made them consciously realize when and where they were, from where they came, and to where they would go. Their ideas were nothing but a situation which they wanted to actualize based upon the stories they had experienced. New stories had to be created. Moreover, he stated that Christianity certainly has its own "Stories," such as Church traditions and the Holy Scriptures. The Christian Story is not just a matter of what happens on Sundays. He gave an example: some people have said that "you are a porhanger (a local congregation leader) only on Sundays," or, "Today is Sunday, do not lie!" As Christian people, they had to compare their own stories with the Christian Story which talks primarily about the search for God's Kingdom. In a booklet distributed to the participants at that session, it was written:

Our life even has deeper meaning because we still have the Big Story, an inherited Story from our former generation: Holy Scriptures, traditions, Church teachings, the life experiences of our Christian predecessors, and many experts' thought in various disciplines related to our lives as Christians.

In this movement (comparison with the Christian Story) we read together the Holy Scriptures, listen carefully about how the first Christians told their stories which were also about the story of God.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>. PANKAT Keuskupan Agung Medan, Cerita Dan Cita Dalam Praksis. Gerakan Pertemuan Pendalaman Iman Dan Kegiatan Belajar-Mengajar. (Pematang Siantar, 1986).

One of the ways to compare someone's (hi)story with the Big Story (biblical story) is to locate the biblical stories in the context of the present day situation of the readers. Moreover, the roles cast in the Big Story have to have their analogies in the participants' present day societies, indeed with his/her own identified role. It has become possible to realize the analogy and identification because of God's involvement in human affairs through His son Jesus who supposedly transcends the historical notion of before or/and after a given event.

The sessions of the Dining Table and Photograph Encounter can be regarded as didactic exercises. However, since the Batak Catholics supposedly believe that the (hi)story of Jesus is real and beyond all temporal boundaries, the efforts and goals aimed for in the two exercises are not simply for didactic purposes. Regarding the efficacy of past stories of Jesus Christ, particularly of his incarnation and sacrificial death, Auerbach noted that an allegorical device imparted to a faithful Christian can possibly penetrate the person's consciousness not only as a didactic lesson, but as a real happening.<sup>40</sup> The fact that the participants in the Dining Table session experienced the Christian notion of humility and that the

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<sup>40</sup>. Erich Auerbach, Scenes from the Drama of European Literature. Foreword by Paolo Valesio (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p.95.

photographs could initiate the participants' proper Christian responses clearly shows the overwhelming biblical God's words upon all Christians' personal and allegorical (hi)stories.

Until the last days of the training, however, most participants were still not quite sure how they could know that their own past (hi)stories and those told by the others were really related or associated with the Big Story. As was mentioned by some participants, they even had difficulties recalling their childhood when they did the Dining Table exercise, for example. I noted a participant in his late thirties who commented that he should have all night or even longer to recall his situation when he was twelve years old. This does not mean, I believe, that they had forgotten their childhood. Rather, I believe they thought that personal past stories were not worth recalling, since traditionally there has been always the Batak tarombo and its (imagined) related matters. In contrast to their traditional notion of the past, Christianity, or Catholicism in particular, has provided them with certain chronological evidence of the biblical discourses to their transcendental (hi)stories.

The next movement then, was to comprehend the Message which supposedly dwells within the Big Story. The movement was intended to help the participants relate their personal past (hi)stories to the Big Story. In the booklet it was written:



Consequently we have to ask ourselves and others, what does the Christian Story want to reveal to my (sic) present life and to my life together with others? Why?

Maybe there is not always a clear and satisfying answer for all people. It is important that we let ourselves be challenged by the Christian idea(s) and try that the Christian idea(s) will also become our idea(s).<sup>41</sup>

The fifth and final movement in the Story and Idea program is the conclusion. It was mentioned that the success of any encounter which utilized the Story and Idea program depended on the skill of the leader who facilitated the process. The facilitator supposedly could summarize what happened during the process and make a conclusion that the other participants would want to actualize.

In the early 1980s, skilled facilitators with knowledge of the Bible, however, was not available yet in the archdiocese of Medan. By this time, rather than having a direct access to the Bible as has been practiced by HKBP Lutheran Church, the Batak Catholics "listened" to their (expatriate) Franciscan Capuchin priests, who were regarded as the authorized persons to interpret the Words, apply the Biblical words to religious as well as socio-economic affairs. Although the HKBP in their 1952 "Confession" officially stated their break-up with (some) indigenous traditions, they still have to deal with the Batak notion of god-like hula-hula. This hula-hula's official spoken words

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<sup>41</sup>. PANKAT Keuskupan Agung Medan 1986, op.cit.



in the form of umpasa have been believed to be blessings of life. The Catholic Church, with its diversified membership (religious and clerical members vis-a-vis the laity) has not had a clear opinion of what the proper place of the hula-hula is supposed to be.

For the last decade, however, the Catholic Church in the archdiocese of Medan has considered that, regardless of his/her membership status, every Catholic person supposedly can be an interpreter of God's Words. Some historical events, such as the first ordination of a Batak priest in 1964, the installation of the two Batak Bishops in North Sumatera in the 1970s, Bishop Datubara's 1980 Pastoral Letter, the establishment of PANKAT and PPU, have stimulated the need for trained and skilled interpreters. As a matter of fact, the Catholic Church has also faced internal problems. The shortage of priests who have been trained to interpret the Words, perhaps, (as was often stated in various documents) has not been the main cause of the need. The fact that there have been about 1197 active local congregations in the archdiocese of Medan located in all corners of North Sumatera, I think, has been one of the most urgent causes of the need. Perhaps, this is not only a side-effect of the easier access of biblical interpretation for the commoners, as Patison noted was true in Europe in the late Middle Ages. He writes,

It was not books, handwritten or printed, that caused trouble; it was their dissemination among

the wide audience not trained in the correct modes of interpretation and the prevailing forms of authoritarian literacy.<sup>42</sup>

But also, as I have argued, there has been an idiosyncrasy in the Batak traditional discourse which put hula-hula as the authorized source of the blessings inherent within umpamas and umpasas. This typical Batak discourse actually has utilized words and sentences not merely in their literal meanings but more as devices to keep its (dalihan na tolu) system imagined.<sup>43</sup>

It seems that the Story and Idea training program has been designed by the Catholic Church to deal with the typical Batak dalihan na tolu discourse. The PANKAT staff have tried explaining that the proper words used in a Christian discourse in fact relate to an origin not to the power of the speaker. Words, in terms of Christian beliefs, work to convey the Big Story. All Christians supposedly have the same access to the words, despite the blessedness of any speaker. Accordingly, the dalihan na tolu discourse, the deliverance of the hula-hula blessings in particular, seems to be at odds if it be applied to the proper Biblical discourse. The Cerita dan Cita program is likely not intended to explain the oddity faced by the Christian Bataks

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<sup>42</sup>. Robert Patison, On Literacy. The Politics of The Word from Homer to The Age of Rock. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p.100.

<sup>43</sup>. see, Stewart 1979, op.cit. p.208.

participating in the "trained discourse" required to interpret the Christian Message. The program, at least, has enabled the participants to transcend their (hi)stories and has hooked them into the definite Christian notion of historicity. In other words, the program has tried to facilitate the participants in embodying the notion of personality (vis-a-vis the notion of marga) which is necessary in establishing a stable personal relationship with God. However, the acknowledgement or confirmation that a Batak Catholic may participate in the Christian "historical" discourse is by no means without certain boundaries. These are boundaries which can be a constant production of discourses exercised by the interpreter's (indigenous) knowledge vis-a-vis another's.

## Chapter Five

### THE WORDS' BOUNDARIES PRESENTED The Holy Scripture Courses

The training program organized by PANKAT described in the preceding chapter, at least helped the participants (and supposedly their local congregations later) to locate the boundaries of the notions of tarombo as well as of the dalihan na tolu based discourse. Catholicism and its biblical historicity offers an alternative discourse which can deal quite easily with any Catholic Batak personal as well as genealogical (hi)story. The PANKAT staff tried training the participants in realizing that their past (hi)stories can probably be attached to certain events which are then believed as personal discourses with the God of the Big Story. To a certain extent, PANKAT has helped its trainees to "realize" that, although they certainly cannot hold on to any event of the past, they surely can hold on to the "sensible" images of it, particularly those images which have been exercised and produced within the Story and Idea program.

Since the images can be invented and conceived only after a discourse with the Big Story, a knowledge of how to deal with the biblical texts is therefore a necessity. The last steps in the PANKAT Story and Idea program clearly stated that a skilled and trained Catholic is needed to make

the Christian ideas (provided by the biblical text) become the present day Catholic ideas. Since the late decades of the last century the Protestant Churches in the Bataklands have utilized the Bible in their religious activities by providing direct access to reading the texts.<sup>1</sup> Until the Second Vatican Council (1963), the Catholic Church in North Sumatera utilized the Bible indirectly through images depicted by Church rituals and devotions, priests, religious people, etc. When the Catholic Church encouraged Catholics to have direct access to the Bible - e.g. as was stated in Bishop Datubara's 1980 Pastoral Letter - this was not, I think, merely an invitation just to read (to utter) the text, the words of God. This new approach has not treated the Holy Scripture simply as a symbol of someone's faith existing or stored somewhere else.<sup>2</sup> As I will describe on

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<sup>1</sup>. In 1876 Padan Na Imbaru (The New Testament) was translated in Toba Batak characters by L.I. Nommensen. It was published by the British and Foreign Bible Society. Seven years later it was published in Roman script by the same publisher together with the Dutch Bible Institute. After the 1932 revision, Padan Na Imbaru has been utilized by the Protestants as well as by the Catholics until the present day. In 1894 the Toba Old Testament, Padan Na Robi, was translated by P.H. Johannsen and published by the same Dutch and British publishers mentioned above.

<sup>2</sup>. This new approach likely will not treat the Holy Scripture as it was in the advertisements for a high-tech credit-card-size Bible. In the USA, people may buy a complete Old and New Testaments etched onto a chrome-coated glass plate which used laser technology. Although this Bible can be put next to other "plastic" cards in a wallet, it needs a microscope with 100 times magnification to read the text. The advertisement mentioned, "But it is not intended to be practical; only



the following pages, since the early 1980s the Catholic Church in KAM (Keuskupan Agung Medan = The Archdiocese of Medan) has promoted a special method or program for dealing with the words of God. This method has been specially designed because of the idiosyncracies of the biblical text and because of the Catholic Bataks' response to it.

The new method for utilizing the Bible, which has been promoted by the Catholic Church in the archdiocese of Medan, is through the so called "KKS" (Kursus Kitab Suci = Holy Scripture Course) offered for lay Catholics by the archdiocese's Committee of Holy Scripture. The course, I believe, has been offered primarily as the result of the 1980 Pastoral Letter's appeal that every (lay) Catholic be able to "interpret" the biblical texts which are the words of God. The staff of KKS mentioned that the course has been one of the ways to fulfill the needs of Catholic people in KAM for pendalaman iman (to deepen one's faith). The staff wrote:

The faithful are eager to have their religion become a compass for their daily lives. One of the best methods to deepen their faith is, to privately as well as communally as a congregation, read and meditate on the Holy Scripture and "memetik buah" (pick the results) which will be useful for our daily lives.<sup>3</sup>

This last sentence of the staff's statement undoubtedly

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a personal symbol of faith." See: USA WEEKEND (July 22-24, 1988), p.14.

<sup>3</sup>. P.Kleopas, Sr.Ignasia Simbolon, (no date), Marilah Kita ber-K.K.S. p.1.

strengthens the goal of the PANKAT training described in the preceding chapter, the goal which primarily tries to explain how important the notion of personality is of stable personal relationship to God, (vis-a-vis the notion of marga) for being a Catholic Batak. The purpose of the biblical training course (KKS) organized by the staff of the Committee of Holy Scripture of KAM, generally speaking was to give the participants a knowledge (skill?) through reading, meditating on and picking out the fruits of the Holy Scriptures. However, it will be clear from the following description of the biblical training that the courses quite often could not satisfy either the staff nor the participants. Although the staff tried to give the participants a typical basic exegetical knowledge, because of their (traditional) knowledge of dalihan na tolu discourse, in some sessions the participants had a hard time in interpreting certain biblical texts.

The first (Basic) biblical training course (KKS) in KAM was held on February 6-12, 1983, in PPU Pematang Siantar.<sup>4</sup> Except for some basic courses which were organized locally by certain parishes, all KKS in KAM have been directed mainly by the Dutch Capuchin priest who, as I mentioned earlier, is also the director of PPU. He used to work as a parish priest in the Karo Batak area and understands the

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<sup>4</sup>. Menjemaat (no.3, V, March 1983), p.78.

Karo language quite well. He does not know the Toba language, but he has mastered Indonesian. A Toba Batak nun has been his only assistant in directing and facilitating the courses. In August 1987, there were three successive KKS levels offered, namely: the Basic, Continuing and Facilitator Candidate courses. The last one is divided into two levels. In describing the differences between the three levels of courses, the staff compared them to three different meals which would be offered to the participants. The Basic course participants will eat a meal of whatever is served to them. The Continuing course participants have to eat a meal as offered in buffet-style dining. Participants in the Facilitator Candidate course can cook their own meal and supposedly share it with others, too. The daily activities for the KKS courses follow, more or less, the same schedule mentioned earlier in the description of PPU. During the first hour of the evening's recreational time, the participants usually attend slide-shows about the Holy Land. During my research in 1986-1987, I had the opportunities to attend and participate some in the four KKS courses, although not in a systematic manner.

**THE BASIC BIBLICAL TRAINING COURSE (KKS)  
The Making of Interpretative Readers**

The first thing to be introduced to the participants in the basic course was knowledge of how to deal with biblical

texts. Most of the participants came from rural parishes. Not only because of their modest educational background, but also because of the past tendency of discouraging Bible reading, the participants were unfamiliar with how to read it. Moreover, there was an extra difficulty since only the Indonesian Bible is used in the courses. The staff priest argued that the Indonesian text was used because most of the present-day Catholic Bataks "do not know" some archaic words used in the Toba text. Based on my observation the choice of using the Indonesian Bible was to minimize the manipulation of dalihan na tolu in biblical discourse as well as of the disputable translation of certain Toba words in the training sessions. He also did not allow the participants to use the Indonesian annotated Bible because its interpretation or explanation can disturb the process of the training.

During the first two days of the five-day KKS Basic course, the participants were surprised by the fact that the biblical texts could offer them more meanings than they previously thought possible. The Bible's words and sentences could inspire other meanings which challenged their personal commitment. In one of the exercises, they were assigned to carefully read the first four sentences of the Gospel written by Luke which is shown below:

Seeing that many others have undertaken to draw up accounts of the events that have taken place among us (1), exactly as these were handed down to us by those who from the outset were eyewitnesses and

ministers of the word (2), I in my turn, after carefully going over the whole story from the beginning, have decided to write an ordered account for you, Theophilus (3), so that your Excellency may learn how well founded the teaching is that you have received (4).<sup>5</sup>

It seems that it was a new "knowledge" for the participants to learn that the given text could cast different "actors" such as: Luke (the author), Theophilus (for whom the text was written), the eyewitnesses and ministers, and of course Jesus himself who is implicitly mentioned in the text. Some participants acknowledged that, to them, previously the word of God was nothing but the speeches and sermons of the priests and local congregation leaders. They were also quite confused in situating the temporal perspective of the four "actors" described in the text. This confusion, I believe, is due to the traditional Batak perception of the notion of tona and its historicity.

Generally speaking, tona is a message or the last words "instructed" by someone's parents, grandparents or someone from the older generation. I rarely found a Batak writer who made any reference regarding this term. Instead, Vergouwen mentioned that tona usually was given at the time of manulangi (a meal-giving ritual to honor people who have

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<sup>5</sup>. The English biblical quotations used in this writing comes from: Alexander Jones (general ed.) 1966. The Jerusalem Bible (New York: Doubleday & Company Inc).



reached a ripe old age) and when someone is dying.<sup>6</sup> Vergouwen also noted that the notion of tona was often manipulated to authorize some official feasts and rituals organized by a village as well as to confirm some legal issues. The authorization could be invoked more strongly by mentioning that the tona was instructed by a revered Batak ancestor such as Singamangaraja. Whenever an appeal was being made to some old and acknowledged rules and institutions, quoting umpamas as the "tona ni ompunta do i, tona ni amanta" (it is the command of our grandparents; it is the command of our fathers) was preferred rather than just saying i do adat (this is adat).<sup>7</sup> The notion of tona was also strongly applied in legal issues when witnesses or oaths were needed.<sup>8</sup> Based on the Vergouwen report, it seems that, regardless of the truth of the original words, tona somehow made it impossible for the Bataks not to enact what had been said. Indeed, a tona will be invoked and enacted within the dalihan na tolu discourse context.

Because of the effective and practical implementation of the Batak notion of tona, in the discourses practiced by the Catholic Bataks, the staff has deliberately utilized the

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6. See, Vergouwen 1964, op.cit. pp.95, 283. Some Toba Bataks told me that a tona can also be an ancestor's "curse" of prohibiting this or that regarding his/her discourse with another marga people.

7. Vergouwen 1964, op.cit. p.139.

8. Ibid. pp. 396 and 403.

term tona for the biblical message. L.Schreiner, a German Lutheran theologian who used to live in the Bataklands, although he entitled his book Telah kudengar dari ayahku. Perjumpaan Adat dengan Iman Kristen di Tanah Batak (I have already listened from my father. The Encounter of Adat and Christian Faith in the Bataklands) mentioned that the Batak Toba New Testament revisionists actually displaced the term tona with adat in translating the Greek word "paradosis" (ancestral teachings). Schreiner said that they wanted to make sure that the message of the biblical God was really distinctive from other inherited (ancestral) messages.<sup>9</sup> Rather than further pursuing theological explanations, which are beyond the scope of this dissertation, I would like to describe how the staff as well as the participants reacted to the utilization of the notion of tona. The utilization will show how far Christianity or Catholicism in particular has been "interpreted" or "contextualized" in North Sumatera.

An exercise offered to the participants to find a tona out of the Gospel written by Luke (Luke 6:47-49) showed that the text, the written material, was somehow transformed into words which could be listened to, could be witnessed by, and needed to be enacted.

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<sup>9</sup>. Lothar Schreiner, Telah kudengar dari ayahku. Perjumpaan Adat dengan Iman Kristen di Tanah Batak. translated from the German by Naipospos, Th. van den End and J.S. Aritonang. (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 1978), p.84.

Everyone who comes to me and listens to my words and acts on them - I will show you what he is like (47). He is like the man who when he built his house, and dug deep, and laid the foundations on rock; when the river was in flood it bore down on that house but could not shake it, it was so well built (48). But the one who listens and does nothing is like the man who built his house on soil, with no foundations: as soon as the river bore down on it, it collapsed; and what a ruin that house became!(49)

The participants needed almost three hours to discuss, in small groups, and to formulate the tona (main message) of the text. In the plenary session some groups reported that they needed such a long time to reach a result because, they thought, they could not read the Indonesian text and formulate the answer well. In fact, some groups just quoted one of the sentences of the given text as the main tona. One participant even mentioned that, had they had an Indonesian linguist, their discussion would have been done in a shorter time. The two staff persons stopped by each group discussion. At the end of the plenary session the staff priest said that perhaps it was not the difficulty of mastering Indonesian or the absence of an Indonesian linguist that were the main problems which caused the extra long discussion session. He noticed that each participant's ability to discover his own tona from the text was restricted by his being in a group. My own notes on one of the groups showed that the participants also hesitated to give a tona (based on the text) to other group members with whom they could not claim any dalihan na tolu status. It was

so, I think, because some participants who came to KKS (although it was assumed that they had been trained in the PANKAT basic courses) were still unfamiliar with the Catholic notion of personality. It seems that the participants were facing a dilemma. On the one hand, quoting a sentence of the biblical text provided a safe solution for keeping the text apart from the traditional dalihan na tolu discourse boundaries can explain the hesitation I noted above. On the other hand, the participants could not ignore the biblical text which tells about the life of Jesus, written in a typical biographical form. As is argued by Spacks, a biography

implies for its readers the desirability of understanding, valuing, interpreting their own lives. It also illumines every reader's life by generating intimate awareness of another.<sup>10</sup>

Jesus' biography, is special to Catholic people, to the Batak Catholics in particular. Of course, Jesus "is" not one of the dalihan na tolu people. As I have noted earlier in the PANKAT's program of Story and Idea, no matter how humiliating (the Dining Table session) or personal (the Photograph Encounter) the experience, it can always be related and located in the perspective of Jesus' (hi)story, the Big Story. The biblical God's involvement which supposedly matters in every Christian personal (hi)story, I

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<sup>10</sup>. Patricia Meyer Spacks, Gossip (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), p.108.

believe, is the tona for which every Catholic Batak has to look. Moreover, the presence of the indigenous Capuchins and other religious people in the archdiocese of Medan have provided a living image of Jesus. The odd lives of celibate Batak priests and other religious people, their vow of not having "private property" and their obedience to their superiors (who live somewhere outside the Bataklands) have been some of the images of Jesus within their "Batakness."

The biography of Jesus in the biblical text probably made it easier for readers to imagine and identify themselves with the story. Moreover, this imagined identification (sometimes) can give the readers pleasure by involving them in resolving the situations staged in the text.<sup>11</sup> After the exercise of finding the tona, the participants were trained to identify with one of the "actors" cast in the following two texts. The texts of Luke 7:36-50 and Acts 2:42-47 which, I think, were deliberately selected by the staff. The exercises on the two texts will be described successively below.

In his introduction to the Luke text about the sinful woman who put perfume on Jesus' feet in a pharisee's house (Luke 7:36-50), the staff priest explicitly asked each participant to choose one of the actors in the story and to identify him/herself with the actor. He explained that this

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<sup>11</sup>. Ibid. p.114.



method would help them to listen more carefully to the words of God. He added that this method could also make it easier for them to spend at least 30 minutes meditating on the text, meditation in which God supposedly would reveal His tona to them. I can not describe what God's tona really was for the participants. However, in the plenary session, they gave, at least, some personal comments concerning the given text. Identifying himself with the host (the pharisee man) one of the participants thought that it was quite strange that Jesus as a "prophet" could not know beforehand who the lady was. Another participant said that similar to the Batak custom, it was very shameful not to offer a guest the proper things needed. A man in his late fifties said that he had experienced a similar humiliating situation as had the sinful lady. It happened during his first years in Sabang, a place in the northern part of the Moslem dominated area of Aceh. He acknowledged that, being a Catholic Batak, he was constantly suspected by the Acehnese Moslems.

In meditating on the Acts 2:42-47, the participants were asked to practice the so-called "Two Marks" method. First, a question mark would be put after the sentence which was not understood. Later it would be asked of others in the small group discussion. Second, they were asked to underscore the sentence which gave them new pengertian

(knowledge) or terang khusus (special insight).<sup>12</sup> The text is below:

These remained faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers (42).

The many miracles and signs worked through the apostles made a deep impression on everyone (43).

The faithful all lived together and owned everything in common (44); they sold their goods and possessions and shared the proceeds among themselves according to what each one needed (45).

They went as a body to the Temple everyday but met in their houses for the breaking of bread; they shared their food gladly and generously (46); they praised God and were looked up to by everyone. Day by day the Lord added to their community those destined to be saved (47).

In one of the group discussions I attended, the notion of a new Christian community implied in the words of:

persekutuan (brotherhood, verse 42), percaya pada teman ("lived together and owned everything in common," verse 44), bertekun ("went as a body to the Temple every day," verse 46) and tulus hati ("shared their food gladly and generously," verse 47) were the most underscored words.

In the plenary session the subject of communal property, as mentioned in verses 44 and 45, got the most question-marks from the groups. Regarding verse 44, a participant said that if they really trusted their friends, it would not be impossible to establish communal property.

<sup>12</sup>. As a matter of fact there was a third arrow mark. This third mark will be put after the most emotionally touching sentence which supposedly also gives a practical direction for someone's life (see, P.Kleopas op.cit. p.6). I have no idea why this third mark was dropped in the exercise I attended in 1987.

In order to explain the questioned sentence "according to what each one needed" (verse 45), another participant gave the example of the Catholic priests having a lot of property which they had shared with the needy. Regarding the same sentence, another participant commented that the present-day priests and nuns had to give the property of their hearts, if not, well ... (he did not continue his words). I would like to say that the unsaid words here would be either a presupposition that the images of Jesus would be continuously performed by Batak religious people or an implication that the odd (economic) lives of the first Christians have also been represented in the Bataklands. This Two Mark method, I believe, was one of the staff's efforts which was used to convince the Catholic readers that the biblical texts could be related to their own ideas of (Christian) life. This biblical reading method - as Broyard argues about a new way of reading a book - is an example of someone talking back to a certain text he/she is reading.<sup>13</sup>

The staff intended that the two methods of reading the biblical text just mentioned would show that a Catholic

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<sup>13</sup>. Anatole Broyard in his article "The Price of Reading Is Eternal Vigilance" argues that by marking a book someone is reading means that he in effect writes his own book, a countervision. He wrote, "I've come to understand that there are two dramas in reading: the drama of the books internal relations and the drama of its relation to me. Sometimes, by default, the second is the better one." See, The New York times Book Review (April 10, 1988), p.11.

"reader" could "participate" in the text's narration and could apply it in his/her own (hi)story. However, it seems that the staff not only introduced the knowledge, but also tried to "control" how far a reader might have freedom in "marking" the biblical text he/she is reading. A text of Paul's Second Letter to Timothy (2Tim.3:14-17) was used by the staff to give certain boundaries on how far a Catholic reader may talk back to the Bible.

You must keep to what you have been taught and know to be true; remember who your teachers were (14), and how, ever since you were a child, you have known the Holy scriptures - from these you can learn the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (15). All scripture is inspired by God and can profitably be used for teaching, for refuting error, for guiding people's lives and teaching them to be holy (16). This is how the man who is dedicated to God becomes fully equipped and ready for any good work (17).

The first two verses (14-15) undoubtedly suggest that readers think about their own "teachers." The participants acknowledged that their "teachers" mostly were porhangers (local congregation leader), Sunday-school teachers, grandmothers and missionaries. In the plenary session, the staff nun explained that (with regard to verse 14) they should remember why someone with whom they were familiar was so important because they could then recall what he/she had done. This process, she said, should be conducted primarily by way of reading and referring to the teachers' wisdom implied in the biblical texts. As a matter of fact the Bible, she said, was the thing which could stimulate their

mind. In conclusion, she stated that the participants could neither exploit nor manipulate the Bible for their own interests. They could never give meanings to the Bible just as they could never give fruit to the tree. What they might do was to pick meanings from the Bible.

She also asked the participants to read the main "Christian Guide Book," the Bible more often. After the exercise on Paul's Letter, the participants were informed that they could purchase a copy of the Indonesian Bible for only fifteen hundred rupiahs (US\$ 0.90) which was almost 60 % off the regular price.

THE CONTINUING BIBLICAL TRAINING COURSES  
The Making of "Practical" Interpreters

The Basic Course left problems: how can the readers know that they are on the right track in utilizing the text. How can they know that they really only "pick the fruits from the tree." In other words, how can the participants (who mostly were the active local congregation leaders in KAM) recognize that what they are thinking about when they are doing the reading is something really inspired by God Himself. Concerning this problem, the staff designed certain exercises which focussed primarily upon the words which were - as written by the Gospel authors - "said" by Jesus himself.



In the first days of the five-day Continuing Course, the staff offered certain texts which could explain that Jesus (a non Batak man who lived twenty centuries ago) is not separated from their present-day lives. The participants were asked to meditate on two texts, namely Mark 4:1-20 and Matthew 18:21-35 which actually describe how Jesus used to talk and to teach people in parables. The staff mentioned that the tona in the parables is certainly beyond the boundaries of space and time. The Modern Webster's dictionary defines a parable as "a fictitious story pointing a moral." The staff explained that, first of all, the Gospel authors recorded and wrote the parables in order to communicate Jesus' tonas to the first Christian people and to others who wanted to read and to listen to them. The Church, has proclaimed the tonas to the present-day people. The staff priest acknowledged that these texts, which have been "inherited" from generation to generation, are quite complicated for present-day Christians and other readers to read and to comprehend. Regarding the complicated process of comprehending the biblical text which often has caused various interpretations, the staff priest said,

"Sayang dahulu tidak ada foto. Kalau ada foto, habis perkara, ... semuanya jelas."

"It is a pity that at that time there was no photography. If there had been, that's final, ... everything will be clear."

This priest's comment reflects, I believe, his anxiety about what the biography-type text of Jesus signified at the time between the "death" of Jesus and the present-day readers' lives. He was anxious and probably had to face a dilemma concerning the text. On the one hand, by recalling the notion of photography, he was imagining and thought that the uncertainty of the (open-interpreted) text would be made clear since, in a certain sense, a photograph is something denotative. On the other hand, he also realized that the "knowledge" of the readers, which has been produced since the "death" of Jesus until the present-day, undoubtedly has caused the text to be something connotative.<sup>14</sup>

Although the text about Jesus, his past life, and its subsequent "knowledge" are for the most part historical materials, the staff wanted to make clear that what was written by the Bible authors was not merely journalistic news. The staff pointed out that the call of Jesus' to his first disciples, described in the New Testament (Mark 1:16-18; Luke 5:1-11; John 1:35-42), for example, is not just a historical report.

In a lecture session the staff explained that the Gospel authors actually wanted to remind their readers and listeners that to be one of Jesus' followers, someone had to

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<sup>14</sup>. To make this de/con-notative point I have to give credit to: Roland Barthes, Image Music Text. Essays selected and translated by Stephen Heath, (New York: Hill & Wang, 1977), pp.27-28.

exercise the same "trials and errors" as did Peter and his colleagues. Thus, although the biblical texts give information about certain (historical) events, they primarily were intended to deliver God's tonas. Following the lecture, the participants were asked to meditate on two texts about the calls of to Matthew (Matthew 9:9-13) and Zakeus (Luke 19:1-10). In the call to Zakeus, after a period of private meditation, each participant was asked to prepare an after-meal speech to Jesus as Zakeus had done. In fact this type of speech is also acknowledged in the typical Batak aftermeal mandok hata (saying words). The staff suggested that the participants give speeches which would be more or less similar to Zakeus's speech to Jesus (rather than to utilize the traditional umpama/umpasa).<sup>15</sup> Each participant, would read his/her speech in a small group session and express what he/she would expect Jesus' reaction to be after listening to him/her. In the plenary session which followed, one of each group's members gave a speech. After all the speeches were given, the participants gave their comments or their impressions about the exercise. Most of them were excited and delighted that they could listen to others' calls for joining the Catholic Church (situated

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<sup>15</sup>. On the other texts, the participants were also given exercises such as: to write a letter to one of the "actors" staged in the story of the Cana wedding party (John 2:1-11) and to perform a role play based on the story of the cured ten lepers (Luke 17:11-19).

in a Protestant dominated society) inspired by the (hi)story of Zakeus. Regarding the participants' comments, the staff reminded them that a biblical text supposedly always gives a personal tona for its reader (or listener) which supposedly has to be implemented in someone's daily life.

In several exercises dealing with the biblical texts, the staff often warned the participants that the personal tona they experienced in their (hi)stories were, by no means, events which happened only by chance. The staff always stated that no kebetulan (chance occurrences) happened when they read the biblical text in the proper way.<sup>16</sup> With this statement the staff intended, I think, to assure the participants that their calls for joining the Catholic Church were continuous with the similar calls to the first disciples. Should the notion of discontinuity come to the participants' mind, at least two questions could be raised. First, how could people recognize events of the past? Second, was the staff's statement about "picking the fruits from the tree" still valid? In an exercise on comparative analysis of two texts: a Batak story of the Three Birds and Genesis 3:1-24, the staff probably tried to answer the two crucial questions stated above, as well as to make a distinction between the traditional Batak tona and

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<sup>16</sup>. The Indonesian word "kebetulan" in fact is derived from an adjective "betul" (right, true) and the prefix/suffix ke-an.

the biblical tona.

The following "Three Birds" text given to the participants is the Indonesian translation. According to the staff, it is an abridged edition of the original Toba text.<sup>17</sup> In the "original" Toba text's introduction it is explicitly stated that the story shows how the Batak ancestors explained the notion of dalihan na tolu in a parable of the Three Birds story. Here is the translation from the Indonesian text which was handed to the participants in the KKS course.

A STORY OF THE THREE BIRDS: MARTUTUK BOSI,  
MARTUTUK SERE AND MARTUTUK SIMBORA

There was a bird called in Toba Batak, the Imbuluman bird. He had three sons each of whom had a different colored beak. The oldest was named Martutuk Bosi (Iron Beak), the second was Martutuk Sere (Copper Beak) and the youngest was Martutuk Simbora (Silver Beak). The three birds in fact also had three different attitudes and talents.

In one of his last days of life, the Imbuluman called his sons and advised them to love and support each other in their lives. He said, "My sons, regarding your own colored beaks which indicate your talent, I suggest that my son Martutuk Bosi stay at the lowest part of this banyan tree. At the middle, my son Martutuk Sere has the duty to protect all of our property. And you, the youngest, Martutuk Simbora, since you are the lightest and the most intelligent in perceiving the situation, please stay at the top of this tree. You have to tell everything that

17. The "original" text, perhaps, is the same one written by C.Lumbantobing, J.C. Omputumonggoasi, "Pidong Martutuk-Bosi, Martutuk -Sere dohot Martutuk-Simbora," in 12 Torsa-torsa. Rumbi I (Tarutung: Parhorasan, 1957), pp.109-118.



happens to your older brothers. The three of you must never think that your place is for you only. Please realize that the places you stay are owned by all of you together."

A short time later the Imbuluman died. His three sons lived in peace and prosperity. However, there was another bird named Martetek Balanjo who lived not too far from the banyan tree. He made his living by begging alms from others. This bird had the bad habit of provoking people to fight against each other. One day he met the Martutuk Bosi and said, "Sir, I am quite concerned about your fate. I think it is worthless that you live here. While you work so hard, your younger brothers live merrily above you. To be fair, it would be better if the three of you took turns to guard this tree. But, please do not tell about this matter to your brothers." After this, he asked a little sum of food stuff for his provision. When he ran out of food, he went to the Martutuk Sere and suggested that he be careful because his older brother would fire him and replace him. The same thing was mentioned to the Martutuk Simbora. Due to this provocation, the three brother birds were furious and fought with each other.

Their fighting finally was heard by the raja (chief), and he called the three birds. The raja asked them to explain why their previous peaceful life and harmony suddenly was disrupted although they were brothers. Then, each of them told about what Martetek Balanjo had done to them. After listening to each other's stories, they realized that they were fooled by the Martetek Balanjo. Finally they were reconciled to each other in front of the raja and forgave each other because of their misunderstanding. They got their peaceful life again. The fate of Martetek Balanjo was so bad. He suffered and died ... because he could not get food any more from the other birds.

The staff asked the participants first to read the text carefully several times, and then to answer the following four questions:

- (1) This story has a lot of symbols; try to note down

symbols you found in it. What does each symbol try to say?

(2) Is it possible that what is told in the story ever really happened? Or, in other words: is the story reportorial news? Explain your answer!

(3) Is the content ("isi", Indonesian) of the story true or not? Explain your answer!

(4) What is the message (tona) of this story?

In one of the group discussions, I noticed that the members did not have any difficulty finding symbols in the story. They agreed that the birds symbolized a father and his three sons. The Martetek Balanjo bird was a kind of malicious person. The raja was a wise judge in a court. The banyan tree symbolized the family's prosperity. In answering the second question, the group unanimously said that the story did happen in the past. A person even argued that it really happened because there was a Martetek Balanjo-type person among his relatives. The group also agreed that the content of the story is "benar" (real as well as true!). It has happened often in several families. Another group member explained that he personally knew two men who were brothers who fought for a certain piece of inherited property. The dispute was appealed up to the Supreme Court in Jakarta.

After each group reported their answers in the plenary session, the staff asked them : "Is it possible for a bird to say words?" The participants were stunned upon hearing

this rebuttal. One of the participants retaliated, responding to the staff question by saying that the birds in the story certainly could speak or say words to each other although they were not understood by human beings. He argued that if the birds did not speak to each other, how could the fact that Martetek Balanjo begged and got food from the others be explained. The staff then explained that there was a difference between the sentences: "a bird manghatai (says words)" and "a bird mangalapathon (gives meanings)." After a brief silence, another participant acknowledged that it was true that the story never happened. It was only a parable, about something which could happen. He added. "It tells the situation in our families, Church and hurias (local congregations)." I noticed that the person who had previously argued with the staff was still upset. He blamed the question (number two) and just uttered it again. At the end of the plenary session, the staff stated that although the story was unreal, it was a great help in realizing what happened in daily life. The story could deliver its messages, which supposedly had also been experienced in society. It helped people to know how to deal with their in future life.

After the Three Birds story session was over, the staff assigned the text of Genesis 3:1-24 with the same four questions. That time the participants were more careful in their discussion to when answering questions two and three.

However, it seemed there was still uncertainty in their answer. On the one hand, they realized that a snake cannot speak to a human being. The garden of Eden, they believed, could not be found on the world-map. On the other hand, they could not deny the facts that snakes walk on their bellies, or that mothers have pain when giving birth, or that people have to work hard for their living. However, they knew that the text originated from and was quoted from the Holy Scriptures, which were written, they believed, by the "first prophets." This made them quite hesitant to acknowledge that the story was not a real "event." Regarding question number two, one group only mentioned that they were "khawatir" (anxious?) to say that the story of Eden was real. Another group reported that the story was real as far as its words and sentences were written by the ancestors and the first prophets who were its authors. Concerning question number three, all groups declared that the "isi" (content) of the story was benar (correct). At the end of the plenary session, the staff hoped that, after dealing with the two mythical stories, the participants could differentiate between what is "benar" (right, correct, true) and what is "benar terjadi" (real, happened). The staff priest explained:

Benar is not the same as terjadi. The story of the Three Birds is benar, but, it never terjadi (happened). The Bible is certainly benar, but, ... it is not historis (historical). For the Bible, the historical event is not the most important thing. Rather, it is

its truth, its messages.

The exercises given in the Continuing course which culminated (as the staff priest told me) in the comparative analysis of the Three Birds story and the Genesis story, I believe, were designed by the staff to explain that the reading of biblical texts needed a special "knowledge," particularly in dealing with the words. Both the words of the participants' ancestors (as it had been imagined e.g. in umpama/umpasa) as well as the words of God (as it had been "written" in the biblical texts) showed that their "presence" was bounded neither in the past nor in eternity (because they have to be implemented in present-day life). These words, which are clearly known to have been "voiced" by the "speaker," can only become the signifiers because they have to be contextualized in a given discourse by present-day readers or listeners. In this regard, Barthes' argument,

... that a text is not a line of words releasing a single "theological" meaning (the "message" of the Author - God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture<sup>18</sup>

can be, I think, put into the consideration of this KKS (biblical training course) discourse.

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<sup>18</sup>. Barthes 1977, op.cit. p.146.



Accordingly, a "proper" reader or listener has to be prepared and trained to this "new reading" knowledge. In the reading exercises on the Three Birds and Genesis stories the participants became confused when they had to deal with the question of whether or not the story ever really happened. This confusion, I would like to argue, was due to the characteristics of a typical Batak discourse. In the discussion on the Genesis text - even after the discussion of the Three Birds story - some participants still thought that the text was a real journalistic news report made by the Bible authors, who, "people said," were believed to be the "first prophets," "the ancestors." On the one hand, due to the notions of tarombo and dalihan na tolu, the Bataks, in a certain sense, have perceived that one of the adat roles (hula-hula, boru or dongan tubu) rather than personal identity are known to play in their (historical) discourse. Supposedly, every participant in the dalihan na tolu based discourse will be labeled only as the hula-hula or boru or dongan tubu. The Bataks can easily imagine that chronological historical events can be disregarded because the identified personal background (someone's birth, job, death, etc) is something irrelevant so long as the person still keeps his/her marga. The "unreality" (tak benar terjadi) of the dalihan na tolu based discourse, for example, in the bird story, does not matter to the Batak people, I believe, because its isi (content) is benar

(correct) since they have dealt with similar incidents in their social usage, landscape and daily life. Regarding this dalihan na tolu based discourse, Auerbach's reflection on Homer's poem vis-a-vis the biblical story is worth-while recalling here. He writes,

so long as we are reading or hearing the poems, it does not matter whether we know that all this is only legend, "make believe." The oft-repeated reproach that Homer is a liar takes nothing from his effectiveness, he does not need to base his story on historical reality, his reality is powerful enough in itself; it ensnares us, weaving its web around us, and that suffices him. And this "real" world into which we are lured, exists for itself, contains nothing but itself.<sup>19</sup>

On the other hand, regarding the biography-type Bible, the Gospel, in particular, the Batak Catholics cannot put the biblical "actors" within the taronbo-based memory of the past. The "actors" in the biblical texts, such as Jesus, its authors, the first Christian people and most of the present-day readers, are not the marga people. However, since the Catholic Bataks have acknowledged that the Bible somehow also has the notion of tona, its historicity can be similar to the tona based "memorized history."<sup>20</sup> Since this

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<sup>19</sup>. Erich Auerbach, Mimesis. The Representation Of Reality In Western Literature. translated from the German by Willard R. Trask. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), p.13.

<sup>20</sup>. To some extent I would like to follow Peter Nabokov's description on his notion of "memorized history." His concern about its extinction, I think, is not, an universal observation. Nabokov mentioned that this memorized history which is spoken and heard has something paradoxical. He writes, "... while it can preserve intimacy and locality over astonishing time depths, it

memorized history needs to root its actions in place, not time, Nabokov argues that this kind of history depends very much on a face to face discourse. He writes,

This history also looks at life realistically: if I am needed someone will harbor me and find a language for me and speak to me(sic) when there is a reason. Unless I have a purpose now or for tomorrow, what good am I? Let me die.<sup>21</sup>

The two historical notions, the (traditional) Batak memorized history and the Christian biography-type Bible, have probably required the Catholic Bataks to revise their thoughts of their past. Being a Catholic Batak, is not just a matter of ignoring one of the two historical notions mentioned above. In fact, as far as I could notice, many Catholic Bataks have moved back and forth from one to another of the two perceptions of the past. This does not mean that the Catholic Bataks, do not do anything "good" to their "Batakness" as well as to their Christian faith. Undoubtedly the participants were delighted and had "pleasure" in meditating on the biblical texts which had been assigned to them in the course exercises which I have

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seems to be only one generation away from extinction. It is a fragile linkage of spider strands across time. For it to endure someone somewhere must continue to bear witness, must intuitively resist the demands of media and archive in favor of the interactive, oral narrative." Peter Nabokov, "Present Memories, Past History," in Calvin Martin (ed.), The American Indian and the Problem of History (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p.145.

<sup>21</sup>. Ibid.

previously described. At least some of them (hopefully) became conscious of the fact that their bitter dalihan na tolu related past memories could be and were relieved. This was done, surprisingly, by "referring" to the biblical texts.

What is the surprising "power" of the biblical reference text? I have mentioned the Batak KKS participant who was upset because he learned from the staff that the Three Birds story could never have really happened. To retaliate, he again just uttered again the given question as if its words or sentences might be misread. His reaction, I think, indicates the awkward situation he had to face. He has to accept, the distinction between fiction and fact, between his Batak memorized history (as it was, for example, depicted in the story) and the thought of asking a question based on chronological historicity. To put it in other words, he had to realize the distinction between words carrying the possibility of an "unreal" reference and words tied to actual events and objects. To utter the question, I think, was his acknowledgement that it was the Words (of the question) which could be blamed for and were responsible for his surprise. I think, he thought, it was words, which made it possible for such an awkward question to be formulated.

The same case of the "surprising" words can also be seen from the inconsistent answer of one group to question number two regarding the text of Genesis 3:1-24. The

question was: "Is the story journalistic news?" Here is their answer:

Kami percaya pada nenek moyang, nabi-nabi yang pertama yang menyaksikan peristiwa itu dan menuliskan apa yang benar terjadi. ... Tetapi peristiwa itu betul-betul terjadi, tidak! Kami hanya berbicara soal pesan. Bahwa sungguh terjadi, ... itu dikhawatirkan.

We have believed in ancestors and the first prophets who witnessed that event and wrote down what really had happened. ... But, did that event really happen, no! We only talked in terms of messages. Whether it really happened, it's worrisome.

Again, the answer given above shows the awkward situation caused by the biblical text with which the group had to deal. Since "there was no photography" (as the staff priest said) the group could only inherit words as they were represented and written down in the biblical text regardless of who its real authors were. "Ancestors" as well as "first prophets" are just other ways of saying "people from the past." The second part of the answer indicates the hesitation of the group to interpret the given words in terms of the chronological historical details. Instead, the Batak notion of tona, I believe, was recalled when they utilized the term "pesan" (messages). Unfortunately, it is only words (of tona) - and not a photograph nor other images - which have the "surprising power" to be able to stay beyond the boundaries of Batak tarombo as well as of



Christian historicity.<sup>22</sup>

In the preceding paragraphs I have tried to show that the "knowledge" of Jesus (and his related words) produced since his "death," can be acknowledged by the Batak Catholics because of their observance of tona. Both the knowledge and the notion of tona, which actually depend on the utilization of (the surprising) words, will produce a quite open interpretation. Realizing this consequence and regardless of whether it was done deliberately or not, in the last exercises of the Continuing course, the staff assigned two texts which concerned to human language(s). The texts concerned the stories of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13) and the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9).

I would like to state that even the staff's knowledge of the two texts introduced to the participants shows inconsistency in dealing with the "surprising" (biblical) words. The text on Pentecost, generally speaking, explains that "Pentecostal language" (the apostles' words) which were surprisingly understood by every listener, each in his or

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<sup>22</sup>. As it was argued by Michel Foucault, perhaps, this tona based (hi)story is similar to his notion of "genealogy": "a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects etc, without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in its empty sameness throughout the course of history." See, Colin Gordon (ed.) Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977 By Michel Foucault. translated by: Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, Kate Soper. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), p.117.

her own language. The staff argued that there has been a Pentecost-type language in the Catholic Church which can be understood by its believers no matter what their (cultural) background. The staff priest gave his own experience of being a missionary in the Bataklands. He said,

I came from a far place by airplane. Although we are different in ethnicity and nationality, however, we are still united. I realize that the Holy Spirit is present, even without any fire nor storm. This is the fact of our Church unity.

After explaining that every participant probably had his/her own Pentecost, they were asked to meditate on the two texts and to find out what their Pentecostal experiences had been.

In contrast to the Pentecost text, the staff explained that the story of the Tower of Babel showed the disaster of not having the same language. Consequently, misunderstanding and disunity would be the disastrous result. As a matter of fact, in one of the group discussions as well as in the plenary session which followed, I noted that no participant found any tona from the Babel text in his/her (hi)story. Instead, most of them were impressed by the staff priest's explanation made a few minutes before that every Christian person supposedly has had his/her Pentecost. The Holy Spirit might come even without any odd things happening in someone's life. Most of the Pentecostal experiences told by the participants, were good or fortunate events which somehow related to their dalihan na tolu relatives. From these, I will cite two examples. One participant told of the

time he was fishing at Toba Lake and suddenly felt that he had to go home. He did and found that his house was on fire. He also saw that his brother-in-law was among the people who were helping to put out the fire. He was very surprised about this since they had not talked to each other for almost two years. Since the fire they again have a good relationship. Another participant told of the time his wife had a serious illness. He was broke and did not have enough money even to pay for transportation to send her to a Catholic clinic in the nearby village. Somehow he was able to borrow the money needed to hospitalize his wife. Due to his wife's illness, surprisingly, his relatives visited her at the clinic and the break-up between them was healed.

What was the relevance, of putting together the Tower of Babel and Pentecost texts in the given exercise? In his analysis on the image of Babel, Roland Barthes argued that two "mythologized" knowledges could be derived from it. He wrote,

First the difference between human morphologies is asserted, exoticism is insistently stressed, the infinite variations of the species, the diversity in skins, skulls and customs are made manifest. ... Then, from this pluralism, a type of unity is magically produced: man is born, works, laughs and dies everywhere in the same way; and if there still remains in these actions some ethnic peculiarity, at best one hints that there is underlying each one an identical "nature," that their diversity is only formal and does

not belie the existence of a common mould.<sup>23</sup>

The (Dutch origin) Capuchin staff priest's acknowledgement "I came from a far place by airplane" confirms the need for the Babel text to be presented. Moreover, since everybody's Pentecost has been acknowledged (and experienced) by the Church as well as by the participants, this fact does not ignore the presence of God represented in the concept of the Holy Spirit. The Pentecost text which has acknowledged the diversity of people inspired by the Holy Spirit, I think, could be overshadowed by the Babel text. To put it in Barthes' words: "The diversity of men proclaim his power, his richness; the unity of their gestures demonstrate his will."<sup>24</sup> An acknowledgement of being actors cast in the Big Story, made the participants realize that they are, as Auerbach has noted about the biblical heroes,

bearers of the divine will, and yet they are fallible, subject to misfortune and humiliation and in the midst of misfortune and in their humiliation their acts and words reveal the transcendent majesty of God. ... their greatness, rising out of humiliation, is almost superhuman and an image of God's greatness.<sup>25</sup>

To answer the question about the relevance of presenting the text of the Tower of Babel the staff probably did it because

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<sup>23</sup>. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*. Selected and translated from the French by Annette Lavers. (New York: Hill & Wang, 1972), pp.100-102.

<sup>24</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>. Erich Auerbach 1953, op.cit. p.18.



they felt the absence of this image would make it difficult to present (read: to interpret) the Pentecost text as the (historical) Catholic Church unity. The Catholic Bataks, the participants in particular, do not ignore, the possibility of practicing martarombo, the dalihan na tolu based discourse, and its related matter. Acknowledging this imaginary marhata, the language not tied to events, is perceiving events as Messages - as there being a "Messenger" or "Author."<sup>26</sup>

THE FACILITATOR CANDIDATE BIBLICAL TRAINING COURSE  
The Making of Authorized Interpreters

The Facilitator Candidate course was organized on two levels. I attended the first level course given for the second time and the second level course given for the first. To attend these two courses, participants were required to have already attended the Basic as well as Continuing courses. The first level course started with an evaluation of the biblical activities the participants had done in their local parishes or local congregations. First, they were asked to evaluate how far the Holy Scripture was utilized by people in their local congregations. Here are some of their reports:

(1) They (participants) felt it was easier to pick the

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<sup>26</sup>. I have to acknowledge my indebtedness to J.T. Siegel who enabled me to make the point on this distinct notions of language.



biblical messages and share them with their fellow Catholics especially within the religious services in the church.

(2) They were able to quote biblical texts and uses them to comfort unfortunate friends.

(3) They could recall biblical texts more often. For example, a participant reported that the younger child in a family dared to criticize his older brother because he did not attend the Sunday service which was, he thought, "against" the Holy scriptures.

(4) After attending the KKS courses, they quite eagerly prepared (and read the text beforehand) for their sermons or classes for the Sunday service or other religious activities.

They also told of some of their difficulties which were:

(1) Since most of the Catholics in their local congregations did not understand Indonesian well, they had difficulty in sharing the programs offered in KKS courses in PPU.

(2) The Indonesian Bible was rarely be found in the local congregations.

(3) There has been a common belief among the Batak Catholics that if you read the Holy Scripture often, you are like the Protestants.

With regard to the evaluation mentioned above, the staff said that even if the participants had attended a

thousand KKS courses, it would not help to solve these difficulties. The staff promised that the Facilitator Candidate course would offer a special method named the APA method (Amati, Pahami, Aktualisasi = Observe, Understand, Actualize). The staff mentioned that practising the APA method would require a rather long time for its preparation and implementation. It was recommended that it be utilized in the local congregations because by this method it was preferable to look directly to the text rather than consulting the referential (biblical) books. In short, the staff said that this method intended to disclose what was inside the minds of the Bible's authors. This method would train the participants to organize a Bible study group by utilizing the three consecutive APA questions concerning the given text. Below is a translation of the staff's suggestions on how to formulate questions so that the APA method would work effectively.

AMATI questions:

The observing questions have to be able to help the group's participants perceive the most important thing within the text. They will be asked to read the text thoroughly. The questions supposedly can be answered by reading the text carefully. Who does what, when, where and how will be the basic questions in this Amati step.

PAHAMI questions:

The questions about understanding will be the most important step because the participants have to deal with the meaning and intention ("arti dan maksud") of the given text. The questions, for example, will ask about an explanation of the "unsaid" ("tersirat") behind the "said" ("tersurat") text. Also, what do certain words or sentences want to express and about what did the author want to tell the addressee. These Pahami questions, hopefully, will develop the participants' powers of thinking and intuition.

AKTUALISASI questions:

The actualization question supposedly will encourage participants to relate the biblical texts to his/her own life so that he/she will be challenged to actualize Jesus' message derived from the given text. Thus, the participant does not only have to analyze the text questioned but also to let the text challenge his/her own life.

As an example of the APA question method, the staff gave an exercise on a text about the acknowledgement of the birth of Jesus as it was written in Matthew 1:18-25:

This is how Jesus Christ came to be born. His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph; but before they came to live together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. (18) Her husband Joseph, being a man of honour and wanting to spare her publicity, decided to divorce her informally. (19) He had made up his mind to do this when the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy spirit. (20) She will give birth to a son and you

must name him Jesus, because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins."(21) \now all this took place to fulfil the words spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and they will call him Emmanuel, a name which means 'God-is-with-us'."(23) When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do: he took his wife to his home (24) and, though he had not had intercourse with her, she gave birth to a son; and he named him Jesus.(25)

Questions (and answers) number 1, 2 and 3 below are the Amati ones. Number 4 and 5 are the Pahami, 6 and 7 are the Aktualisasi questions.

- 1.(+) What problem did Joseph deal with?  
(-) Mary was already pregnant before they married (verse 18).
- 2.(+) What did Joseph think as a way-out?  
(-) To divorce her informally (verse 19).
- 3.(+) Why did he change his previous plan?  
(-) It was due to the angel's explanation (verse 20-21).
- 4.(+) What was Joseph's most important action?  
(-) To obey God's message.
- 5.(+) What was the meaning and outcome of Joseph's obedience for the human being?  
(-) Jesus was born in a family of David's descendants.
6. Find out one experience in your life which was similar to Joseph's experience and action.
7. What kind of attitude and/or action will the experience and action of Joseph encourage you to do in the near future?

The staff considered the last two (Aktualisasi) questions to be the most important part of the APA method because, supposedly, every human activity has a relevant connection (hubungan) with the Bible.

This APA method, especially the last two Aktualisasi questions, will give the reader an opportunity to fit his/her (hi)story to a certain biblical text. The principle of "picking the fruits from the tree," cannot be avoided in the APA method. It seems that because of anxiety about a possible misunderstanding in responding to the Aktualisasi in the second level of the Facilitator Candidate course, the staff offered a special program. This program tried to help the participants see what was really in Mark's (one of the Gospel's authors) mind when he wrote the "story" of Jesus.

The level two course opened with a game of jigsaw puzzle. The participants were divided into small groups of 3-4 persons and were asked to put the jigsaw-puzzle pieces together. In the plenary session which followed, some groups thought that they had been able to accomplish the game primarily because of their good luck. While they were matching the pieces, they suddenly got the clue part for the surrounding pieces. There also were some groups which could not finish their job within the given time although every group had the same kind of jigsaw-puzzle. After learning the correct image depicted in the jigsaw-puzzle, some participants tried again and (they were surprised) were able



to match the pieces in only minutes. The staff, explained that the main difficulty in matching the pieces was the lack of information about the image depicted in the jigsaw. Similar to the jigsaw-puzzle game, the staff mentioned that there was a certain knowledge in Mark's Gospel, knowledge which supposedly makes its reading and understanding much easier if we know it. The main goal of the second level course was, the staff added, to give an overall view about the Gospel of Mark so that the participants would become trained persons dealing with its texts. This course would offer knowledge on: who Mark was, why he wrote, for whom, etc.

It is unnecessary to describe in this dissertation the basic exegetical knowledge of Mark's Gospel taught to the participants. I noticed that the participants were quite excited because it was the first time they heard that a Gospel could be divided into structures. The staff also reminded them that by knowing the structure of Mark's Gospel they would remember that all events in the life of Jesus were not chance occurrences. Referring to a text on Mark 1:1-12, the staff stated that, due to the Holy Spirit's guidance, the story of Jesus' early activity in the desert did not happen by "kebetulan"(chance).

The staff said quite often that since it has been implied that Mark's Gospel has a united general structure, there would be no need for different ("kebetulan")

interpretations of its texts. This explanation was probably utilized by the staff to settle some disputes among the participants (as occurred in some plenary sessions following the group discussion) on interpreting certain texts.

I also noted that there was a typical awkward solution which came up when the dispute occurred in some plenary sessions. When one group gave a different interpretation from all the others, usually the blame was put on the group's speaker. The speaker was usually the person who formulated and wrote his or her group's discussion. No wonder he/she could quite easily be "blamed" for misformulating what had been discussed in the group. A typical comment, which was usually given by one of the "different" group's members (other than the speaker), was:

As a matter of fact, in our group we also discussed and came to a point which was not too different from that (other groups' interpretations) ... Why, after it was written down, then, did it become something different?

It is true that some participants did not have mastery of Indonesian, so it was difficult for him or her to write down the group's discussion report in Indonesian. In one of the plenary sessions, a speaker was quite upset to be blamed by his group. He said,

In our(sic) group discussion, when everybody was talking it seems that everything was alright. Why ..., what happens, after it was formulated and had to be written, then, the isi (content) became confused and disappeared.

With regard to this type of dispute, in a plenary session the staff priest said, "As far as we still cannot formulate our words (read: interpret) and write them down clearly, it means that our minds are not matang (firm) yet!"

The main "problem" that bothered the upset speaker mentioned above, I think, is that his group's written interpretation on the given text was "measured" by a different scale from that of "everything was alright" used in his group's discussion. In his written report, as was stated by the staff priest, the participant was supposed to give his worked out opinion rather than follow the motto: "everything is alright" of his fellow Bataks. I would like to say that this "worked out opinion" is the "beforehand knowledge" (read: truth?) as it was pointed out in the jigsaw puzzle session and in the analysis of Mark's Gospel. With regard to the notion of worked out opinion requested by the staff in the participants' interpretations, perhaps, Foucault's note on "Truth" is worth recalling. He argued that " 'Truth' is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements."<sup>27</sup> I cannot claim whether the Batak Catholics - who were excited about the biblical knowledge (authorized by the staff) offered in KKS, and who have had the notion of "everything was alright" in

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<sup>27</sup>. Colin Gordon 1980, op.cit. p.133.

desires are distinct words and can be read by heart and feeling."<sup>28</sup> Being a Batak priest and the director of Social Economic Committee of the archdiocese of Medan, he has promoted a new relationship, particularly in socio-economic affairs, between the North Sumateran Catholic Church and the universal (read: European) Catholic Church. During his fund-raising trip to Europe in 1980, he acknowledged that he was quite uneasy about being in a position of a peminta ("beggar"). He supported one of his Batak Capuchins who had said to an expatriate Capuchin priest that the Catholic Bataks actually need bantuan (help) and not a pemberian (gift) from abroad. He argued that the notion of help will make the helper as well as the helped people realize that they need each other's solidarity, brotherhood and equity in practicing their Christianity.<sup>29</sup> Believing that the Holy Spirit would always inspire the lay leaders, he asked the local parish priests and the Church hierarchy to support the local leaders in their new tasks.

I believe that the Batak Capuchin's arguments expressed in his book Teologia Orang Desa (Villagers' Theology) are on the same plane as the Pentecostal experience noted in the biblical training course. He stated that the Holy Spirit is certainly inspiring the activities of the local lay leaders

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<sup>28</sup>. Fidelis Sihotang, Teologia Orang Desa (1979), p.8.

<sup>29</sup>. Fidelis Sihotang, Eropa Selayang Pandang. Renungan Pastor kampung. (1980), p.34.

their process of interpretation - will likely follow Foucault's note in considering the Christian truth. However, one important thing that I noted was that they were very pleased and acknowledged the "truth" exercised in the notion of "everybody's Pentecost." Someone may argue that the case of the accidental fire or illness as someone's Pentecostal experience mentioned earlier, actually was only his own knowledge or thought or imagination (or whatever it would be called) which made him "realize" that it was the work of the Holy Spirit. One thing that cannot be argued is that the "knowledge" (of dealing with the Bible) can be obtained (in the archdiocese of Medan, in particular) only after participating in an activity of pendalaman iman (deepening someone's faith), the Indonesian term for markursus.

As a matter of fact, there has been an alternative way for the lay Catholics to gain an access to the biblical knowledge. In 1979 a Batak Capuchin priest, who had been active in rural development projects in the archdiocese of Medan acknowledged that he needed a new type of local Catholic congregational leaders. These leaders would minister not only in matters around the pulpit and cemetery but also in social, economic and justice activities. Based on his experiences in dealing with Catholics in several villages, in his booklet Teologia Orang Desa (Villagers' Theology) he states, "Village people can be regarded as the Living Book which is written by the Holy Spirit. Their deep



in their duties. Jesus, the loyal Shepherd, promised that to his believers. However, during my research in the archdiocese of Medan I rarely found that the Committee of Holy Scriptures and the Committee of Social Economic Affairs ever officially organized the training course together. Should the two committees have done so, the KKS training probably can be more effectively put into the context of the local socio-political and economic issues. The absence of cooperative activities between the two committees, I argue, has been one of the characteristics of the Catholic Church which is probably due to the discourses practiced by the indigenous people.

## Chapter Six

### INDIGENOUS WORDS FOR THE CATHOLIC CHURCH'S CONSENT ? The Toba Catholic Marriage Ritual, Revisited

There are two reasons which explain why the marriage ritual will be used as an example of how far the Catholic Bataks in the archdiocese of Medan have interpreted Catholicism. First, over the past decade matters relating to the Batak marriage ritual have often become important issues discussed by the Bataks themselves. This is due, among other things, to the influence of some external factors such as modern-urban cultures adapted by some Bataks who live in the cities, Indonesian nationalism, Christianity, etc. These factors have intruded on Batak cultural life and its notion of dalihan na tolu which is fundamental to Batak marriages. Second, the release of the Second Vatican Council documents (and their Indonesian translations) caused the Catholic Church in the Archdiocese of Medan to promote and to try to exercise a process called Indonesianisasi. It was not only a matter of replacing expatriate Church personnel in certain jobs (see, Chapter Three) but also an effort to appreciate indigenous cultural values and to adapt them to the local Catholic Church's practices. In terms of the Catholic sacramental services, the sacrament of marriage has been one of the most important efforts for Indonesianisasi in the Archdiocese of Medan. In my description and analysis of "A Workshop On Toba-Batak and Roman Catholic Wedding Liturgy"

(Lokakarya Liturgi Perkawinan Toba-Batak dan Roma Katolik), hopefully I will explain why the Toba Batak wedding ritual needed to be Catholicized.

After Indonesian independence, the Toba Batak people and the other ethnic groups had to face the penetration of the notion of Indonesian nationalism. Every person with a (Batak) marga name (which usually indicates the name of a home village in North Sumatera) had to be categorized not only as a Batak person but also as an Indonesian citizen. As I mentioned in an earlier chapter, in the first decade after independence (1950s) the government of the Indonesian Republic was not really successful in its attempt to use Batak society and culture as one of the representations of Indonesian nationalism. The marga peoples who live in the "Batak"lands (already neatly categorized during the colonial time as Angkolas, Mandailings, Tobas, Dairis, Karos and Simalunguns) were "represented" to make the motto of Indonesian nationalism - Bhineka Tunggal Ika (unity in diversity) - possible to be imagined. Most books about the Batak people published in the 1950s and early 1960s mentioned that their main interests were to acknowledge the indigenous society and cultures in the Bataklands, North Sumatera, as part of and related to the national ideology and cultures imagined in the notions of Pancasila and

Bhinneka Tunggal Ika.<sup>1</sup>

Now, in the 1980s after two decades of the New Order era, new kinds of books about Batak people have been published. Most of them are typical manuals on performing Batak adat rituals. Some of the books are in Indonesian and published mostly outside the Bataklands, particularly in Medan and Jakarta. Perhaps it is intended that they would be read by the non-Batak Indonesians. Undoubtedly they are primarily intended to be utilized by the Bataks who already live outside the Bataklands, particularly in Jakarta and other big cities in Indonesia.<sup>2</sup> Regarding the "large" number of Batak people who live outside the Bataklands, the new style manuals about Batak adat and rituals may have been published in order to deal with the fear of losing their identity among the Bataks in their homelands as well as in the other parts of Indonesia.

Their main fear, I believe, is about the survival of

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- <sup>1</sup>. See, Drs.Nalom ANI Siahaan & H.Pardede, Sejarah Perkembangan Marga-marga Batak (Balige: Indra, 1975/1954). E.St.Harahap, Perihal Bangsa Batak (Djakarta: Dep.P.P.& K., 1960). Siahaan M.A. Umpama ni Halak Batak IV (Medan: Bin Harun, 1964). N.Siahaan B.A. Sedjarah Kebudajaan Batak (Medan: Napitupulu & Sons).
  - <sup>2</sup>. Although on Jakarta's population ethnic based statistics are no longer available, however, people in Jakarta can easily learn of the presence of the Bataks since their professions and places of social-gathering are quite significant. Jakartans will often say that taxi-drivers and city-bus operators in Jakarta are mostly Bataks. A certain block at the well-known Senen shopping center in Jakarta is also known as the Batak market. Many products from the Bataklands are available in this market.

their notion of dalihan na tolu. Many factors in modern Indonesian socio-cultural, politic and economic life have intruded into the Batak dalihan na tolu based way of life. The fear, for example, has been expressed in the observation that the younger Batak generation, primarily those living outside the Bataklands, cannot speak the Batak vernacular languages. In his publication, one author even added a preface written by his wife which encouraged Batak mothers to speak in Batak to their youngsters at home.<sup>3</sup> It was argued that only the (Batak) language and its related matter could become the key-factors to maintain the life of the Batak adat.<sup>4</sup> The most despised person is a "lost Batak person" (halak na lilu), a Batak who cannot master (memorize?) the knowledge necessary for discourse with other Bataks. Not knowing the Batak tarombo, ignoring the proper dalihan na tolu social rules, and being unable to quote umpama/umpasa are all losses which consequently weaken the traditional kinship of the Batak people.

Two Batak editors of Pokok Pokok Adat Batak (The Fundamental of Batak Adat), a book compiled in Indonesian and published in Jakarta in 1981, mentioned that they paid special attention in describing the Batak marriage ritual because "kekeluargaan yang teratur adalah sumber kebudayaan

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<sup>3</sup>. T.M.Sihombing, Jambar Hata. Dongan Tu Ulaon Adat (Jakarta: Tulus Jaya, 1980s), p.9.

<sup>4</sup>. Ibid. pp.7-9.



yang dapat membangun budi luhur" (an orderly family life is a cultural source which can build a good morality).<sup>5</sup> In the introduction of their book, the two editors expressed their fellow Batak people's concern that modern life, with its individualistic philosophy of life, has slowly ruined the soul of Batak kinship. They said that there was no solidarity anymore; almost everybody thought only of him/herself. The main interest was in material wealth and rank or status which then could be boasted about. Almost no one wants "to think about others voluntarily" (dengan sukarela memikirkan yang lain). Between brothers, it's often difficult if one needs help from his wealthier brother; even borrowing is very difficult if there is no guarantee that the loan will be paid back. Even worse, someone dares to ask for every cent of interest on money borrowed by his own brother.<sup>6</sup> The two editors, as well as the other authors who wrote the same kind of adat manuals, did not assume that the availability of the books would guarantee a solution to the anxiety of the ruining of dalihan na tolu. What they were trying to say, I think, first, was, with regard to the Indonesian speaking Bataks (read: the Batak Jakartans and their modern lives), that the original Batak kinship still

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<sup>5</sup>. Drs. Jailani Sitohang & Sadar Sibarani (eds.), Pokok Pokok Adat Batak. Tata cara perkawinan di Toba. (Jakarta: Mars-26), p.1.

<sup>6</sup>. Ibid. p.3.

exists. It still can be imagined as it has been written and printed in the new publications about Batak adat. Second, these publications, supposedly would be used in various adat rituals, the marriage rituals in particular, because their keaslian ("authenticity") is guaranteed.

The facets of modern urban life which have been lamented above, such as the absence of "to think about others voluntarily," in fact have happened and could hardly be avoided by the Bataks, particularly those who are living in cities. Recalling the adat through observing what is written in the manual adat books is probably the same process as asking the readers to remember (and memorize) the idea that "to think about others voluntarily" really had existed in the past. With regard to the future of Batak society and culture, the two Batak adat book editors mentioned earlier, stated that it was their hope that the next generation (of Batak people) would inherit the book. The book could be their guide to observing Batak adat, especially its marriage rituals. Indeed, a typical Batak ancestral authorization for this book was needed, and a proper umpama was quoted for this need. They quoted, "Sinuan ma bintatar, parlinggoman ni babiat. Sai tubu ma anak na pistar, siboto uhum dohot adat" ("May you bear smart children who master laws and adat").<sup>7</sup> To conclude their

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<sup>7</sup>. Ibid. p.7.

introduction, the editors acknowledged that their manual was not a (newly) composed book. It was just a result of collecting information told and described by Batak elders who are still living and who know about adat. They even added that sources were also compiled from adat as well as from scholarly books written by some anthropologists and Christian theologians. The idiosyncratic bibliography included on the last page of this adat book was probably also intended to be its authorization.<sup>8</sup>

The common acknowledgement of most Batak editors that they preferred to compile typical adat manual books rather than to write them, I think, is an effort to manipulate the

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<sup>8</sup>. Except for my numbering, the bibliography listed here literally follows the original text. (1) Ruth Benedict, "Pattern of Culture". Houghton Mifflin Company Boston 1953. (2) Franz Boaz, "The Mind of Primitive Man". The Macmillan Company New York 1938. (3) George P. Murdock, "Social Structure". The Macmillan Company, New York. (4) Margaret Mead, "The Growing Up in New Guinea". Penguin Book Middlesex England, Reprinted 1954. (5) Dr. Lothar Schreiner, "Telah Kudengar dari Ayahku". BPK Gunung Mulia Jakarta. (6) Paul Bodhold Pedersen, "Darah Batak dan Jiwa Protestan". BPK Gunung Mulia Jakarta 1975. (7) Dr. Kuncaraningrat, "Methode2 Anthropology". Thesis gelar Doktor dari Universitas Indonesia. (8) Dr. Kuncaraningrat, "Pengantar Anthropology", Himpunan Sari Kuliah. (9) Dr. Harun Adiwijono, "Religi Suku Murba". BPK Gunung Mulia 1977. (10) St.M.Sihombing, "Jambar Hata". Penerbit BAS Tobing Jakarta 1972. (11) M.S.Pasaribu, "Tarombo Borbor Marsada". Penerbit ... 1940. (12) Wasinton Hutagalung, "Sejarah Marga Batak". UD Bahagia, 1961 Medan. (13) A.N.P.Sibarani, "Umpama Umpama Batak". Penerbit PARDA 1976 P.Siantar. (14) Willy Situmorang, "Ruhut Ruhut ni Adat Batak". Fa.Apul Medan 1977. (15) N.Siahaan BA, "Sejarah Kebudayaan Batak". CV.Napitupulu & Sons Balige 1964. (16) Ompu Buntilan, "Sejarah Batak". KARL SIANIPAR TEX Balige 1977.

notion of archaism. Nothing can stop the fact that the Batak notion of dalihan na tolu is changing. It is already a historical fact that, among other factors, Christianity, Indonesian nationalism and other external factors have shaped Batak traditional cultures; and the custom of dengan sukarela memikirkan yang lain (voluntarily thinking of others) has not been founded in the dalihan na tolu social organization. The notion of dalihan na tolu actually depends very much on the elaboration of typical Batak language formulated in umpama and umpasa: a "language" which probably is the same one on which Hobart commented:

We tend to assume that language is there to communicate some truth about the world, whereas it may just as well be seen as instantiating, exemplifying, or hinting at, the ineffable.<sup>9</sup>

Rather than simply allow the notion of dalihan na tolu to be "language" in this sense, these editors, due to their fear of its unclear future, prefer to recall (and to imagine) its archaism. Indeed, this archaism must be something that people can hook on to in terms of its space and time. Unsurprisingly, the most needed (imagined) restoration is the importance of recalling the ideal Batak marriage. A Batak marriage always means that a new (imaginary) scheme of tarombo partuturan is established. The typical martarombo discourse and its various possible goals are presented. Who

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<sup>9</sup>. Mark Hobart & Robert H. Taylor, (eds.) Context Meaning and Power in Southeast Asia (Ithaca: SEAP, Cornell University, 1987), p.14.

has to be revered by whom (of course, within the boundaries of umpama/umpasa based discourse only) among the marga involved in the marriage supposedly will be established in every marriage.

The suggestion of performing an archaic marriage ritual as it presumably used to be at the time of rich and more complete Batak symbolism has been raised particularly by the Catholic Church. The Liturgy Committee in the Archdiocese of Medan organized a workshop on marriage ritual which tried to deal with the fear in a peculiar way. The workshop was held in May 31 - June 5, 1987 at P.P.U. (Center of Lay Training), Pematang Siantar.

#### WORKSHOP ON TOBA BATAK (AND) ROMAN CATHOLIC WEDDING LITURGY

In one of the first sessions in the workshop, the participants were asked to compare two versions of Toba marriage rituals. The first version came from one of the workshop's working-papers which was prepared by Bishop A.B.Sinaga. He is also the chairman of the Committee of Liturgy of the Indonesian Bishops Council. The Bishop's paper actually had its sources mostly from the typical Batak adat manuals published in this century. The second version was the participants' own experiences in attending and participating in Batak marriage rituals in their local areas. They were assigned to answer the question: "Which



elements of Bishop Sinaga's paper have already disappeared?" Undoubtedly, the eliminated elements reported from the group discussion mostly were the ritual elements considered as "insults" to Christianity.<sup>10</sup> In the plenary session some groups also mentioned that some elements were not observed any more because, they said: "makna tidak dimengerti lagi" (its meanings are no longer known) due to the "erosi zaman" (erosion of ages).

Of course, the above question was not intended to judge that the present day Toba marriage rituals are less official or less valuable than those of previous times as "recorded" in various Batak adat books. Rather, I think, the question indirectly tried to tell the participants that there has been a sense of loss of some of their adat marriage rituals. However, this loss has been something that probably cannot be forgotten. The Catholic marriage ritual, instead of restoring the loss, has tried to cancel it. A typical Catholic Batak adat wedding invitation text, I would like to state, will explain the cancelation. A text of a typical Catholic Batak marriage ritual invitation usually requests people to attend both (separate) ritual celebrations: the Church blessings (pamasu-masuon) and the adat blessings. They were held in the Church and in the bride's parents'

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<sup>10</sup>. They were for example, mangupa tondi (rite of strengthening someone's soul), mangabing debata hidup (asking for a first son from the god of life), pagar mula jadi (protecting newborn baby). etc.

residence, respectively. In several Catholic marriage rituals I attended, after the sacramental blessings officiated by the priest in the church, the priest and the local congregation leaders usually were invited to eat first at the house of the bride's parents. It was always said that the priest had to eat first because he had other "business" to attend to and "could not wait" until the time of the official adat meal. Apparently, for the Catholic Bataks there has been no problem that the two "official" rituals duplicate each other.

However, for certain Catholic Bataks, looking at the invitation text can create a feeling of uneasiness. As was mentioned by a Batak Capuchin priest with regard to the practice of the Catholic Church in administering the sacrament of marriage, he said that there has been "dualisme Batak" (Batak duality). He said that it was due to the fact that the Bataks "sudah telanjur diKristenkan" (had already been Christianized). The priest's uneasiness, I think, came from his own difficult situation, that of being a priest and yet a Batak who has kept his marga name. It means that, regarding the invitation text, as a Batak Catholic priest, he feels obliged to view it as something duplicating the marriage ritual. This typical Batak invitation text is formulated in official Toba Batak adat words. In a certain sense, this invitation text can be analyzed in the same way Siegel notes that the similar funeral, wedding or other adat

ritual announcements are presented in Javanese society. He writes,

The announcement, however, is made in sentences as full of formulae and archaisms as possible. Thus the person holding the selamatan is effaced. It is not his own voice, not his own sentiment, but that of the community that is expressed when someone else speaks for him in a language as far removed from the "natural" language of either of them as possible. Language that is divorced from its origin is language that is replicable; anyone who knows the code could say the same thing.<sup>11</sup>

Looking at the common Batak invitation text (see, Appendix 1.), everyone with a Toba Batak marga name will recognize that he/she somehow will be counted in and involved in the "new" martarombo due to the given marriage. Then, every Batak person (being hula-hula, or boru, or dongan tubu), supposedly, will participate in the proper way and words whenever he/she has a dalihan na tolu based discourse with its various possible end results. The long list of dalihan na tolu relatives' names and their residences (particularly the residential addresses outside the Bataklands) of the host listed and exposed in the invitation even acknowledges that the "authority" of the notion of adat stretches beyond the Batak geographical boundaries.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup>. James Siegel, Solo in the New Order. Language And Hierarchy In An Indonesian City (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p.68.

<sup>12</sup>. The same way of thinking was also manipulated in listing the entries of Sitohang's adat book idiosyncratic bibliography. See note no.8

In this regard, the Church blessings for the married couple (which are often spiced with some umpasa and the delivering of ulos) I think, have been considered by the Batak Catholics in the same way as they have when they put the residential addresses of their relatives who live outside the Bataklands in the invitation text. It is understandable, therefore, that the priest should have his meal first and not have to join the official adat meal when the jambar will be officially distributed. Indeed, it does not matter if a priest without a marga name has a meal before the official one. The problem may come up when a Batak priest starts to question or interpret the invitation text rather than just read it. A Batak priest may tend to do so because, as a person with a Batak clan name, he may see something awkward and feel uneasy in administering or performing a marriage ritual (at the church) which, later will be performed again in the house of the bride. In this respect, the invitation text will not make sense any more. Its validity will be gone.<sup>13</sup> This is the uneasiness that actually was felt by the Batak priest and it explains his statement that there has been "dualisme Batak" in the Catholic Church. This "Batak duality" which, somehow, has

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<sup>13</sup>. Regarding the notion of wedding invitation, J.T. Siegel writes: "The wedding not only announces marriage, it establishes a couples as wed. The fit between fact and announcement is not that the announcement simply expresses the fact, but that the announcement makes the fact what it is." Siegel 1986, op.cit. p.68.

been needed to keep the Adat (with capital "A") invitation text still valid by itself as well as to cancel its loss.

One of the main goals of the workshop was to try to interpret Christianity in order to deal with that uneasiness. There was a popular and well-known word inkulturasi (adapting indigenous cultures) which has become an important word in the Catholic Church's liturgy in Indonesia. As a matter of fact there is no clear definition of that word. Based on some statements I noted during the workshop, the meaning of inkulturasi, perhaps, can be revealed. In its proposal, the Organizing Committee of the workshop stated that the Roman Catholic rite of marriage ritual in fact has given a chance for inkulturasi.

Accordingly, it would be better if the workshop took a chance and created a marriage ritual of the Catholic Batak rite. Looking back at the mission history of the Catholic Church in the Batakland, we learn that some Dutch Capuchins already incorporated some Batak cultural elements in the Catholic Church's liturgy. In contrast to the Protestant mission, some Dutch Capuchins used, for example, gondang (Batak rhymed drums music) and its appropriate dance (tortor), ulos (Batak adat textiles) in the Catholic liturgy. Moreover, the chairman of the Committee of Liturgy of the Archdiocese of Medan said, during the workshop's opening ceremony, that the notion of time was important. Considering that the Catholic Church has been in Indonesia



for 450 years and 50 years in the Bataklands, he said, it was time for the participants themselves to mencipta inkulturasi (create "inkulturasi"). Bishop Sinaga even added that he hoped the workshop's participants could find a true inkulturasi. It seems that the people involved in the workshop thought that, since the Batak people themselves would do the process, it could be expected that the "new" inkulturasi could be more properly formulated. What happened in the workshop will show that, to create the process of inkulturasi, is not without difficulties for the Catholic Bataks.

In one of the discussion sessions held during the first days of the workshop, the participants were asked to make a list of symbols used in the Batak marriage ritual. I will not describe the result since there have been many Batak adat as well as anthropological and theological books to which one can refer.<sup>14</sup> Right after the symbol listing session, there was an important session which dealt with the process of adapting the Toba Batak indigenous cultures to the Catholic Church's liturgy. The workshop's Organizing Committee (O.C.) asked the participants to describe which parts of the Toba Batak adat marriage ritual were the core

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<sup>14</sup>. Among others, see for examples: op.cit. Ph.L. Tobing 1956, A.B. Sinaga 1981, T.M. Sihombing 1986.

(inti) and which the peak (puncak) of it.<sup>15</sup>

From the discussion groups' reports it was clear that the participants had a hard time reaching a decision about the two choices requested. After discussion group, the plenary session which followed was full of argument about each other groups' report. One group argued that the core of the Batak adat marriage ritual was the time when the two parties (the bride's and the groom's dalihan na tolu people) have the official meal and the married couples eat from the same plate. The peak part, this group thought, was the time when the raja ni huta (village chief) gives his adat words (in umpama and umpasa). Another group reported that the peak part was the act of delivering the ulos to the newly wed couples. There was a group who argued that the ulos deliverance was the core part and the blessings given by the adat chiefs was the peak part of the Batak marriage ritual. After almost two hours of "unsuccessful" discussion to look for the same core and peak parts of the Batak marriage ritual, it was clear that one single result could not be proposed by the participants.

The difficulty in reaching decisive choices regarding the peak and the core parts was probably due to a typical Batak hesitation. The Batak (adat) dalihan na tolu principle

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<sup>15</sup>. To make the question clearly understood, the Organizing Committee explained that, in terms of the Catholic Eucharistic celebration, consecration is the core and communion is the peak.

certainly has caused Batak people to hesitate to claim any authority other than the one proposed in it. To differentiate between the notions of "core" and "peak" was a difficult job for the Batak participants. Moreover, they rarely accepted another's choices, I think, because they were afraid of the implied authorization. One of the participants acknowledged (and was supported by many of his fellows) that he was afraid that the workshop would use his name and that of others' to authorize the choices. He was afraid lest any result of the workshop be published and would somehow challenge the adat dalihan na tolu marriage ritual. Concerning this issue, the Organizing Committee told the participants not to worry about it. All results coming from the workshop would be only for the Church's internal considerations.

An event occurred during the plenary session just described above which is worthy of note. In a typical Batak temperamental discussion, the participants argued with each other. Regardless of whether they agreed or disagreed with the other group's choices, whenever a group's speaker quoted certain umpas as parts of his group's argumentation, the other participants spontaneously answered with the proper words i ma tutu! (so be it!).

During the last two days of the workshop, the participants, grouped in their own local and neighbouring congregations, were assigned the task of proposing "new"

forms of the Roman Catholic and Batak marriage rituals. The Organizing Committee reminded them that, although the new proposed forms were not intended to eliminate the adat ritual, as far as possible they would give an impression that there were no longer any duplicate rituals. With regard to the hesitation expressed in the previous session, the Organizing Committee stated that the proposed new ritual would not be put into practice in the local congregations immediately after the workshop was over. The proposal, however, would be simulated and videotaped. Based on the video-records, sometime in the near future the Liturgy Committee in the archdiocese of Medan would issue an official manual on the Catholic Batak marriage ritual.

All of the five groups agreed that the consent of the couples, the time when the bride and the groom each give their "wedding oaths" was the part of the ritual which could not be duplicated. This (Catholic) consent ritual is a distinctive form. In the Batak marriage ritual, the bride and the groom never say any words by themselves. Rather, it has always been their dalihan na tolu relatives who officiate at the marriage by saying common adat words. Moreover, the consent in Catholic marriage is by no means a consensus between two marga groups as it is believed to be

in the Batak marriage.<sup>16</sup> Instead, it is a personal agreement between the bride and the groom and witnessed by a priest and two other additional persons.

The efforts to elaborate the consent rite with some Batak cultural symbols were prevalent in the participants' proposals. The proposals were intended to establish a ritual which could be accepted in Batak tradition as well as in Catholic Church practice. One group suggested inviting the dalihan na tolu representatives to show up at the altar as additional witnesses during the consent rite. This suggestion was immediately objected to by a priest (who was a member of the Organizing Committee) because, to do so, needed an authorization first from the Bishop's office in Medan. All five groups, however, proposed that, after the consent, the priest would deliver the proper ulos to the married couple and give his blessings. Some groups suggested the dalihan na tolu elders of the bride as well as of the groom would perform the same act after the priest. Some umpasas and newly formulated prayer (which was, of course, invoked in the name of the biblical God) were used in the blessings given by the priest and the elders. Some groups also recommended that the signing of the Marriage

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<sup>16</sup>. Vergouwen, for example, more than 50 years ago noted, "Marriage is a 'bride-price' marriage. The woman is released from her group - not just from the small circle of agnates within which she was born - on payment of an agreed amount of money, or the handing over of objects of value." op.cit. J.C. Vergouwen 1964, p.156.



Certificate be performed at the altar as part of the ritual.

In the workshop's last plenary session, the participants discussed the (proposed) marriage rituals which had been videotaped. The main concern was about how they could transform the (Catholic marriage) consent into something that would be "understood" by the Bataks. Some participants still did not understand the personal agreement implied in the consent. They questioned who could officiate and in what manner could a Catholic marriage be officiated? One participant argued that an official marriage consent could not be sufficiently expressed in the single word "yes." He said that a distinctive sign (in this regard, what he meant, I think, was an ulos) was needed to perform a marriage ritual, not just words. His argument, I think, was a reaction against another participant's suggestion that, after the consent, the priest would bless the ulos and hand it over to the proper dalihan na tolu person. This person would deliver it at the adat ritual later. Another participant, a Batak priest, even objected to the blessing of an ulos. He was afraid that it would imply that the ulos was a kind of amulet.

Moreover, since the consent implied that it was only the two persons who made the marriage agreement, questions came up in the discussion: what were the roles of the couple's parents (and their dalihan na tolu relatives), the local congregation (huria) and the priest? Were they simply

witnesses of the marriage? With regard to these questions, the notion of a sacramental marriage observed in the Catholic Church and administered by a priest, can explain the special role of a priest in a given Catholic marriage ritual. In a Catholic marriage ritual, a priest is considered not only as a witness but also as the person who has the authorized role of delivering (the biblical) God's blessings upon the married couple.<sup>17</sup> Based on this notion of sacramental marriage, one participant argued that the parents, as well as the dalihan na tolu relatives of the married couple, would participate in the priest's act of delivering the blessings. This participation, he said, was represented in one of the most distinctive Batak symbols, an ulos, and it would be delivered by the priest. Knowing that the adat ritual held after the Church ritual cannot be performed without an ulos and, in order to solve the problem of duplicating a ritual, he also proposed a special solution. Before the Church ritual was conducted, he recommended that the local congregation's leader talk to the

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<sup>17</sup>. In certain conditions, i.e. if a priest cannot visit to a distant congregation more than once a year, the Catholic Church also acknowledges that a marriage can be performed without the presence of a priest. This exception, however, has rarely occurred in the archdiocese of Medan. When a priest makes his regular visit to a distant congregation, usually it is also the time he officiates at the sacraments of marriage, baptism, etc. In North Sumatera, particularly in the rural areas, a Marriage Certificate issued by a Church has been the only valid document of someone's married status.

parents and their dalihan na tolu relatives and suggest that an ulos be delivered by the priest. If this procedure could be carried out, he said, "it will make sense in the Batak people's mind" (kalau dipakai cara seperti ini maka masuk akallah!).

I have shown in the preceding pages that until the last session of the workshop, there was always a problem of interpretation, problem of Catholic Toba Bataks interpreting Catholicism into their Batakness and vice versa. Each side has had its own problematic boundaries when it has to do with something related to the notion of adat. It was reported that, usually, the Batak Christians just kept quiet when they knew that there was a "betrayal" of Church teachings. In contrast, they would be outraged if adat were betrayed.<sup>18</sup> The argumentative proposals for dealing with the proper utilization of ulos in the workshop exemplified the problem. However, I noted some situations which, I think, point out how some Catholic Bataks have exercised the notion of interpretation, of Catholicism in particular. I noticed that certain things related to Batak perception of language, have mattered when the process of interpretation was checked due to the (cultural) boundaries of the interpreter, of the subject interpreted and of the people to

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<sup>18</sup>. See, A.B.Sinaga, 1986. "Pengertian Adat Dan Implikasinya Terhadap Agama," in B.A. Simanjuntak (ed.) 1986. Pemikiran Tentang Batak, 125 Jubileum HKBP. Medan, PDPKB Universitas Nommensen. pg.86

whom the interpretation was addressed as well. The events when the participants spontaneously answered the quoted umpamas and umpasas with (the proper words) i ma tutu, and the recommendation to "talk face-to-face" beforehand about the ulos deliverance by the priest, I think, are examples of a "successful" solution in dealing with the problems encountered in the process of interpretation.

Someone may possibly ask about the liability of the solution above in regard to the participant's expectation of a distinctive "sign" rather than just a word "yes" for a Toba Batak and Catholic marriage ritual. Since he supported the practice that a priest can properly deliver the ulos in the Church's ritual, it seems to me that he did not have the same problem as did the Batak priest with "dualisme Batak" (Batak duality). His expectation of something more than words, I think, came from his concern to understand the Catholic consent which was interpreted by the bride and the groom who were, in fact, his fellow Batak people. The Batak people, he knew, would not ignore practicing martarombo discourse in their daily lives. Martarombo which does not question the origin of its authority as the Catholic word (read: voice) "yes" does. He was aware that the desire to talk to others and to quote umpamas and umpasas have been appreciated by his fellow Bataks since almost every Batak person knows the most familiar umpama:

"Si boru puas si boru Bangkara  
Molo dung puas sai so ada mara"

A satisfying girl is a girl from Bangkara  
If we satisfyingly talk to others, there will be  
no grudge anymore.

implies. This Batak perception of language and word will always provide unlimited solutions whenever there is a problem of interpretation. But, to be loyal to his Batakness as well as to his Catholic faith, this participant wanted the ulos deliverance by a priest instead. He considered that the ulos, as a token of sahala, delivered by a hula-hula to his/her boru would be properly equivalent to biblical blessings which are delivered through authorized Catholic priests. He perhaps, thought that the deliverance of the ulos was unproblematic because it can be performed without invoking any (the priest's) voice; thus, canceling its origin.

It is true, his expectation was also another interpretation, an interpretation which will not see dualisme Batak as something problematic except for the fact that, being a priest (for a Batak person) is something odd. This is an oddity which has been one of the most important focus of interpretation of Catholicism in the Bataklands. The Batak priest's attempt to "escape" from the oddity actually only causes him to feel the imagined dualisme Batak and the uneasiness it brings with it.



## PART THREE

**MARHATA, THE INDIGENOUS DISCOURSE  
AND THE BATAK CATHOLIC COMMUNITY OF INTERPRETATION**

In its traditional meaning, marhata is the right of any Batak married man to speak in a given (official) discourse. Tampubolon, a Batak scholar, mentioned that the Batak marhata is similar to the Indonesian notion of musyawarah (deliberation) or pertukaran pikiran (exchange of ideas). The speakers in this kind of musyawarah, Tampubolon writes, "will be organized so that each of them has his turn to say his words."<sup>1</sup> Another Batak scholar, Sihombing, in his book Batak Philosophy (1986) published in Indonesian, in Jakarta, argued that to master the marhata, a Batak speaker not only has to have the intelligence to follow the meanings and goals of the words said by others but also has to have a treasury of distinctive words and many metaphors which can beautifully decorate his words as well as sharpen what he is saying. Accordingly, he added that a good Batak speaker has to master "a good number of umpamas and umpasas to counter the offence of another speaker."<sup>2</sup>

A Batak theologian, Sirait, said that the past

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- <sup>1</sup>. Drs D.P. Tampubolon, "Upatjara 'Mangongkal Holi' Didalam Transisi Untuk Mendjadi Suatu Manifestasi Penghormatan Orang Tua Jang Bersifat Komemoratif. Seminar Adat di HKBP, 28 Djuli 1968 (Pematang Siantar: FKIP HKBP, 1968), p.9.
  - <sup>2</sup>. T.M. Sihombing 1986, op.cit. pp.133-134.

"primitive animist Bataks" were the authors, the center and the warehouse of professors who are experts in metaphors. In his article (in Indonesian) on the Toba-Batak umpama and umpasa, he concluded that the Toba-Batak metaphors are still "up to date in modern Batak society". Moreover, he states,

perumpamaan itu adalah hasil perpaduan/ratio manusia yang memisahkan/mengisyaratkan suatu pandangan berasosiasikan konsep yang dapat dijangkau oleh akal budi manusia.<sup>3</sup>

A metaphor is a result of a human/rational fusion which represents/hints an opinion associated with a concept which can be reached by human common sense.

Sirait's article was reprinted in Bona Pasogit (Home Land), a periodical published in Indonesian as well as in Tobanese. The only date printed on this periodical was the date of the official registration permit namely 1980. Sirait's article was originally published in Sinar Indonesia Baru, a Toba Bataks oriented newspaper in North Sumatera.

Marhata, in fact, cannot be separated from the Batak adat notion of jambar (meat portion distribution) from which, for example, a hula-hula speaker knows the kind of words (umpamas and umpasas) which will be properly delivered to his boru or dongan tubu audience. The effectiveness of marhata, perhaps, can be exemplified from an umpama which says:

<sup>3</sup>. Midian KH Sirait, no date. "Sekitar Arti Dan Makna Perumpamaan Batak Toba, Dahulu Dan Sekarang," in Bona Pasogit. no.5, p.23. Another article in the same issue, however, indirectly mentions the date: February 1982.

Sineat ni raut, gambiri tata daonna  
Sineat ni bibir, juhut daonna.

To be wounded by a knife, gambier is the remedy  
To be wounded by a pair of lips, the meat is the  
remedy.

The juhut (meat) "treatment" indicated above, refers to the notion of adat (tarombo and its dalihan na tolu related matter) performed, imagined and interpreted in a given jambar event. Every Batak will agree that in a given jambar event - the moment the wounded adat (imagined) community is restored - mastering the marhata is very important.

Regarding the Batak notion of marhata, someone may ask: How have the Christian Bataks dealt with the Words of the Big Story, the Bible? The establishment of the Christian Churches has been based on the interpretations of the Words. Since the majority of the present day Toba Batak Christians are Protestant majority, perhaps, this made the Protestant reformists' attitude toward the biblical words dominant among the Batak Christians. According to the reformists' opinion, as Patison mentioned it,

The Bible, directly inspired by God as Word, is the one sure and unsullied manifestation of truth in language. In it, language is not a barrier to understanding or to action. It IS understanding and action.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, because of the Lutheran teachings that only one Sacrament of the Church, namely the Word of God, exists and is fully revealed in Christ's preaching and accessible in

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<sup>4</sup>. Patison 1982, op.cit. p.101.

its wholeness and simplicity, Patison adds,

Truth is immanent in language; the Bible is language perfected; every man can receive this truth without mediation, using the powers inborn in mind and spirit.<sup>5</sup>

A further analysis of Batak Protestantism is beyond the scope of this dissertation. But, as I have described in part two and especially in chapter five, the Catholic Bataks realize that the Big Story as the True Words actually have been manifested to them distinctively through the presence of the expatriate as well as the indigenous religious people. Indeed, due to the importance of lay participation promoted in the 1980 Bishop's Pastoral Letter, some people in the archdiocese of Medan were afraid of the role of the indigenous religious people. This fear was shown in the two cases which occurred in 1987.

A new campus for the School of Theology and Philosophy in Sinaksak, Pematang Siantar was officially opened in late January 1987. The six bishops of Sumatera, the minister of Public Housing (a Catholic Batak), the Vatican ambassador and several local government officials were invited to the opening ceremony. Some PANKAT staff members were disappointed in a banner which hung above the main stage of the ceremony. The banner said, "The harvest is rich but the workers are few." It is a quotation from the Gospel (Luke: 10.2). The new campus was built on ten and a half hectares

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<sup>5</sup>. Ibid. p.102.

of land outside the city of Pematang Siantar. Because of a successful fund raising in Europe, this new campus is primarily a place which is used to train Capuchin seminarians as well as diocesan seminarians from all dioceses of Sumatera. The campus was built in two years after the land had been bought. There were 134 seminarians in the 1987 school year. The two former separated campuses, located in Parapat and Pematang Siantar, could not meet the needs of the growing number of seminarians. The PANKAT staff questioned whether the banner's word "workers" meant only "priests." If so, then what about the role of the hundreds of local lay leaders who had been trained in the archdiocese of Medan? The PANKAT staff, who were mostly religious people (priests and nuns), feared that the priests who were graduated from the school might be alienated from their co-workers, the local lay leaders.

More than half a year later, in August 1987, the faculty members of the school organized a workshop to evaluate their school's curriculum and activities. Some PANKAT staff were also invited to participate in the workshop. In his working paper, a Dutch Capuchin priest, one of the PANKAT participants, mentioned that he was afraid that the graduates of the school might disturb the developing life of the Catholic congregations in North Sumatera as had been promoted by the Bishop of Medan's 1980 Pastoral Letter. He realized that, due to the large



investment, the Pematang Siantar school is considered a vital institute in the future of the Catholic Church in Sumatera. In order to make his opinion clearly understood, he preferred to state it in negative sentences. He writes,

Hopefully this institute will not make a bunch of people, an elite personnel, a group who think that they know everything, who claim that they are far above the jelata congregations which are subjected to be organized, ordered, instructed and ruled. A caste people who have complete facilities and their status is undisputable because the access of the blessings deserved exclusively in their hands. People who may think they are mightier, holier, purer and stronger because they got, (they thought), their duties and authorities from God himself to decide everything in the Church life. Indeed, they think that it has been done so for the sake of the salvation of the congregations which are considered very naive and simple so that they can be ruled strictly.<sup>6</sup>

The priest suggested, that the school not simply deliver the same European (sic) theology, but should create a rich and flexible theology so that the awkward dualism between the role of priests and lay people could be broken.

That the three-day celebration of the opening ceremony of the school was attended by about 30,000 Catholics from all parts of North Sumatera shows that the PANKAT priest's opinion expressed above somehow can be made relative. His opinion is perhaps an ideal. Some of the attendants actually had to travel almost a half day to get to Pematang Siantar. During the three-day celebration, I was told, the Organizing

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<sup>6</sup>. Arie, Apa yang saya harapkan dari (para lulusan) STFT di masa mendatang? (1987), p.2.

Committee raised about twenty million rupiah (about US\$ 14,000) from the auction, donations and other contributions given by the attendants. The Committee acknowledged that the amount of money raised was only a little bit bigger than the cost of the celebration. The presence of many lay Catholics at the dedication of the new seminary in Pematang Siantar shows somehow their respect to the religious people. This means, I believe, that the history as well as the image of the Catholic Church in North Sumatera, has not been separated from the roles of religious people (priests, brothers and nuns). The Catholic Church in North Sumatera in the late 1980s, however, was different in at least two paradoxical matters from its image of the 1960s. On the one hand, the number of religious people was growing and its way of life was being strongly shaped by the native participants. On the other hand, almost at the same time, participation of the local lay leaders in the Church activities was being promoted. In the case of the Catholic Church in North Sumatera, since both the religious people and the lay leaders shared the same notions of tarombo and dalihan na tolu (and their related matters), dealing with the paradoxical matters mentioned above has been a distinct discourse within the life of the Catholic Church.

The importance of the religious people's status and role in the life of the Catholic Church in the archdiocese of Medan is not doubted. The growing number of Batak

priests, brothers and nuns, has also changed the images and ideals of religious life. Regarding the continuity of religious life in the Catholic Church, Dyer differentiates between its image and its ideal. Addressing the religious people, he writes,

A compelling image of some sort drove each of us at one time to embrace the religious life. Most surely it was an image, not an ideal. Ideals have little power in themselves to drive anyone to do anything; much less can they force the magnanimous response called for in a religious vocation. To call the image which once propelled us to accept the challenges of the religious life an ideal, is to misname it.<sup>7</sup>

The Catholics, the religious people as well as the lay people in North Sumatera also have dealt with the image and ideal mentioned above. The notion of ideal, Dyer argued, "is something we acquire afterwards in religious life. It finds lodging in our intellects only after years of study and experience within the religious community. It is not acquired suddenly without preparation."<sup>8</sup> As a matter of fact, it is the Batak notion of marhata which has made the Catholics in North Sumatera (quite successfully) deal with the two notions. In other words, the logic marhata, the typical umpama/umpasa based discourse, has been used to interpret the same Big Story (Bible) from which the image as well as the ideal of Christianity have come. The paradox of

7. Ralph J. Dyer, S.M. The New Religious. An Authentic Image (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1967), p.1.

8. Ibid. p.1.

the Catholic Church in North Sumatera in the late 1980s, thanks to the typical Batak marhata way of interpretation, never shattered its notion of community, which is both (Batak) adat and Catholic as well.

The following two chapters will describe first, how the (Batak) indigenous religious people have interpreted (and been listened to by their fellow lay Catholics) their status and role. An analysis of the feast of Saint Francis of Assisi celebrated by the religious people as well as on a Batak Catholic father's perception of priesthood will be the case studies. Second, I note that the Christmas celebration in the Bataklands has been the most elaborate communal celebration for the Batak Catholics. An analysis of a Christmas celebration in Samosir will show that the Batak notion of marhata has juxtaposed idiosyncratically tarombo (all Bataks' genealogy), dalihan na tolu and its related matter with the historical birth of an expatriate man called Jesus. The two chapters, I believe, will explain that the paradox of the Catholic Church imagined in North Sumatera in the late 1980s has become, the key factor of its Community.

## Chapter Seven

### CELEBRATING THE FEAST OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI AND THE "DIFFICULTIES" OF RELIGIOUS PEOPLE'S PRAYER LIFE

A celebration of the feast of St. Francis Assisi was held in Pematang Siantar on October 3-4, 1986. Most of the religious orders and congregations which work in North Sumatera have their convents in that city. Except for one congregation of religious brothers, the sisters of St. Joseph, and the diocesan priests and seminarians, all other religious people in Pematang Siantar have been members of Franciscan orders. During the first day of the celebration, a Capuchin Franciscanologist gave a talk to his Franciscan brothers and sisters on "The Franciscans in Present-day Indonesia." Transitus, a prayer service to "commemorate" the death of Francis of Assisi, followed the talk. The second day, beginning in the early afternoon, there was a breviary (office-prayer) service, an eucharistic celebration and a reception.

St. Francis of Assisi, died in 1226, has been admired by Catholic people because of his idiosyncratic life with regard to his concerns on the notions of poverty and death. He called (and represented) these two concepts as the "Lady Poverty" and the "Lady Death." Representation, I believe, has been one of the most important factors in Franciscan spiritual life. Auerbach (1959/84) in his comments on



St. Francis of Assisi in Dante's "Commedia" noted that the life of St. Francis is represented as a marriage with an allegorical female figure, the Lady Poverty. He also mentioned that in medieval art or literature, allegory meant something more real than it does for the present-day societies. In allegory people saw a concrete realization of thought, an enrichment of possibilities of expression. On his sick bed when he was dying, St. Francis had a chance to add to his well known poem "Canticle of Brother Sun" a new verse dedicated to his Lady Death. These two idiosyncrasies which have been observed by thousands of Franciscan priests, brothers and sisters postulate somehow a disappropriation to some of the present-day socio-economic and political issues, including the Batak notion of sahala. How have the Catholic Bataks dealt with this Franciscan spirituality?

In the Transitus which I describe below, I note that the Franciscans who participated in the service were recalling an event that happened 760 years ago. The introductory part of the service, I believe, made the recalled event possible of enactment in the Batak temporal and spatial context. The abbrevations coded for cast actors and the translation of Transitus' introductory part are included below.

P = Leader of the service and St. Francis  
 P1 = First narrator  
 P2 = Second narrator  
 FR = A Franciscan

## Introduction

### 1. Forewords

( P1 ) Twenty years after his conversion, Francis realized that his death was approaching ('di ambang pintu'). He called some of his closest brothers and friends. He asked them to sing with clear voice and full of spirit the praising song of the death which was so near, or, it is better to say, of the life which comes closer.

( P2 ) This evening we gather to commemorate the last hours of our brother Francis who had a fullness of life with God. Since his conversion in San Damiano, brother Francis had been enthusiastic and full of great desire to participate in the loving embracement of God the father. Francis was longing for the sister of death. Then, Francis asked his companions to sing the praising songs to God loudly at the time of his dying. This evening we also praise our God while we are commemorating the death of our brother Francis.

( P1 ) My younger brother, may God give His peace to you.

( FR ) (without turning around) Who is calling and greeting me?

( P2 ) We are, your brothers who attended the solemn death. We will accompany you in this reflection. We will tell you a lot about the event so that you and the

others who are here now may experience its minutes; then, you can pick the wisdom of the death for the present age. Please follow us to the past, at Portiuncula in October 3, 1226.

2. A song

3. Introductory Prayer

( P ) Let us pray. Almighty God, our brother Francis followed the way of your son's life. He received a special and wonderful gift gratefully. Because of his loving heart, his life was changed into a living cross with the wounds of your son. We ask that you also let us follow your son's ways and to imitate the way of life of our father and brother Francis. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

A narration on the minutes of Francis' death and singing the Canticle of the Brother Sun followed. The service ended with a renewal of the three religious Franciscan vows professed by the congregation. The stage for the service, was set as the bedroom of the dying Francis with a board signed "Portiuncula 3-10-1226" posted on the wall. A life size portrait of Francis painted by one of the seminarians was there, too.

In terms of temporal notification (past, present and future), the written discourse between the first narrator (P1) and a present-day Franciscan (FR) in the introduction shows perfectly the interpretation done by the Batak

Franciscans concerning the founder of the Franciscan religious people. The discourse between P1, FR and P2 and its stage direction, the bracketed words ("without turning around") are the key factors (or whatever it may be called) which make the notion of interpretation as triadic in its essence.<sup>9</sup>

Josiah Royce argued that a process of interpretation can transform the most general distinctions of past, present and future appear in a new light.<sup>10</sup> He stated that an interpretation is neither a human perception nor a human conception. Instead, he wrote:

it is either something of the nature of a mind, or else is a process which goes on in a mind, or, finally, is a sign or expression whereby some mind manifests its existence and its processes.<sup>11</sup>

The notion of interpretation, moreover, according to Wlad Godzich, needs a notion of institution which

is first and foremost a guiding idea, the idea of some determined goal to be reached for the common weal; it is this goal that is sought according to prescribed behavior and the application of set

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<sup>9</sup>. I follow the triadic characteristics of Josiah Royce's notion of interpretation. He argued that "interpretation is a relation which not only involves three terms, but brings them into a determinate order. One of the three terms is the interpreter; a second term is the object - the person or the meaning or the text - which is interpreted; the third is the person to whom the interpretation is addressed. See, The Problem of Christianity. With a new introduction by John E. Smith. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1918/1968), p.287.

<sup>10</sup>. Ibid. p. 288.

<sup>11</sup>. Ibid. p.282.

procedure. The idea itself is adopted by a group of individuals who become its public possessors and implementers.<sup>12</sup>

An interpreted past event such as the death of St. Francis could be a worthy or meaningful event for the people as long as each person in the concerned community can keep the discourse going. The Transitus' first narrator described earlier once said: "My younger brother, may God give His peace to you." His greeting was responded to by the present-day Franciscan - played by a Batak Capuchin seminarian who certainly observed the bracketed words - by saying: "Who is calling and greeting me?" The proper answer given by the second narrator (and not by the first one, deliberately!) shows that, in a process of interpretation, a notion of triadic discourse or a notion of institutional idea is needed. The second narrator's answer: "We are your brothers who attended the solemn death. We will accompany you in this reflection," of course has been the "institutional" interpretation of Franciscan brotherhood, let us say, since 760 years ago. In this regard, J.Royce also reminded that,

In fact, what our own inner reflection exemplifies is outwardly embodied in the whole world's history. For what we all mean by past time is a realm of events whose historical sense, whose records, whose lessons, we may now interpret, in so far as our memory and the documents furnish us the evidences for such interpretation. We may also

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<sup>12</sup>. Samuel Weber, Institution and Interpretation. Afterword by Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p.156.



observe that what we mean by future time is a realm of events which we view as more or less under the control of the present will of voluntary agents, so that it is worth while to give to ourselves, or to our fellows, counsel regarding this future. And so, wherever the world's processes are recorded, wherever the records are preserved, and wherever they influence in any way the future course of events, we may say that (at least in these parts of the world) the present potentially interprets the past to the future, and continues so to do ad infinitum.<sup>13</sup>

Undoubtedly, the interpretation of Franciscanism, e.g. the Transitus organized by the Franciscan religious people in North Sumatera was also based on the interpretation of Saint Francis of Assisi on the biblical Jesus. Based on the fact that the majority of the religious people in North Sumatera are Bataks (people with the marga names and somehow still observing tarombo and dalihan na tolu) to a certain extent, a contradiction between their Franciscanism and their (adat) Batakness has shown up in their religious life. Franciscanism and its three religious vows of poverty, obedience and celibacy which were introduced by the expatriate missionaries is in contrast to the three most wishful Batak sahalas of wealth, being honored and many children. It seems to me that the three Catholic religious vows - now observed by the Batak people - have been one of the most important issues which need to be interpreted by the Batak lay Catholics as well as by the Batak religious people themselves. In order to deal with these contradictory

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<sup>13</sup>. Josiah Royce (1918)1968, op.cit. p. 288.

issues, their interpretations, interestingly, have manipulated the typical Batak "marhata logic."

A Toba Batak lay person's interpretation of the Catholic Church's priesthood will show a process of this marhata logic interpretation. One of the first Batak Catholics (whose son is a Capuchin priest) explained to his fellow Bataks what he believes a Batak priest is. He writes,

My love and respect of a priest has been so deep. The election to be a priest with the three vows namely: live in poverty, obedience and celibacy for the sake of serving Christ and His Church, I believe, is a gift from Christ. It is something beyond human nature. Whenever I meet a priest or if he is willing to visit my home, I have considered him as a messenger of Christ.<sup>14</sup>

This man was graduated from the Catholic Teacher Training School in Balige (1937-1940) and he used to be a Catholic religious and school teacher in Tambunan, Balige. On his three school years in Balige he comments:

According to my life-experience (penghayatan), the Catholic Church and her priests are inseparable. during the three school-years, my soul was happy, peaceful and I was so sure that I would enter the heaven at the world hereafter. Why? Here is the secret. In my life-experience the soul of the Church has been the priest as the real successor of Christ. Every morning he is in the church to serve people with sins who want to receive the sacrament of confession, to celebrate the holy eucharist and to give the communion to the congregation. So, anyone who wants a holy life should be together with a priest.<sup>15</sup>

14. Gr.A.Tobing - Pahae, "Sekelumit Ungkapan Hati Dalam Usaha Sebagai Orangtua Seorang Pastor," in Menjemaat (1982, no.11, th.4).

15. ibid.

He even recalled the silence or loneliness of his life because of the internment of the priests during the Japanese occupation. He acknowledged that, due to hard economic and political conditions during the Japanese military occupation, many of his fellow Catholics abandoned their Church. Although some Catholic churches were open, there were only a few people attending. At that time, he realized how hard it was to be a Catholic person and not have a single priest available to celebrate the eucharist and to administer the other sacraments. It was not until early in 1950, he said, that a Dutch Capuchin priest was again able to visit the Catholic congregations in his home village and those in nearby villages, too.

The importance to him of a priest as the figure of Christ can be seen in his comments made when his son was ordained in 1975. Previously his other two sons had been seminarians, but they never made it to the priesthood. His son's first eucharistic celebration, which took place in his home village, was attended by many of his dalihan na tolu relatives, neighbors, and local government officials. He and his wife were exalted. He describes,

That day, as his own father and mother, we attended the Holy Mass offered by him. From his own hands we could directly receive the body of Christ in the forms of bread and wine, the forms we never had it so before.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>. Ibid.

His description given above of a priest as the figure of Christ is by no means the complete and official Catholic theological explanation of priesthood. Some of his relatives and friends told him that a Batak son should not be a priest. In his answer to this misunderstanding, he explained that his son's priesthood is centered in the notion of the three religious vows. These vows, which in terms of the Catholic Church's traditions, have become the most significant interpretation of a total dedication to observe the life and work of Jesus. Some of his fellow Bataks argued with him (the priest's father) that as a priest, his son would give him neither grandchildren nor material wealth. His son will not give any help (read: money) to his parents or to his brothers and sisters. Regarding the question of his son's priesthood, he answered that his son actually had sent another kind of help to him and his family every day. As a priest, he argued, his son celebrates Holy Mass everyday. Consequently, he is sure that his son prays for his health and his long life. His life, then, will always be blessed by God.

Moreover, he thought that being the father of a priest had certain advantages which helped him to actualize his religious beliefs. He has been so proud that his neighbors often call him ama ni pastor (the father of a priest) instead of the regular term of reference reserved for a married Batak man. The Bataks usually call a married man by

the term ama ni "so and so" [the father of ... (his first child's name)], or ompu ni "so and so" [the grandfather of ... (his first grandchild's name)] at due times. He acknowledged that his new extraordinary term of reference had made his words and deeds in daily life somehow in accordance with it. In his own words, he says,

The name "the father of a priest" has become a pushing and guiding factor for us to do our best in life by observing the norms of life more perfectly for the sake of our God and our society.<sup>17</sup>

There is probably an explanation for his pride. Until the present day, personal names of Batak married men are rarely said in public discourses. The explanation for this practice is related to the notions of adat, taboo, fear of ghosts, misfortune.<sup>18</sup> Or, some old Bataks informed me, that in the past people would not tell their personal names for security reasons. In the past, one (marga) village used to raid another village and kidnap adults for slavery or children for amulet homicide (pangulu balang). The preference for using paternal or grandpaternal terms gives a Batak married man an honor which every Batak longs to have. The term assures at least one of the most important sahalas, sahala hagabeon. Accordingly, the person can easily imagine the

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<sup>17</sup>. Gr.A. Tobing 1982, op.cit.

<sup>18</sup>. Edwin M. Loeb, Sumatra, Its History And People. R.Heine-Geldern, "The Archeology And Art Of Sumatra." (Wien: Institutes Fur Volkerkunde Der Universitat Wien, 1935), p.65.



continuity of his tarombo.

The two descriptions, on Transitus and on priesthood, show how the Batak Catholics have domesticated the oddities of Franciscanism, as well as of religious life in the Catholic Church, into their own Batak knowledge. In the case of Transitus, the bracketed words, I believe, are the device which allow the celebration to make sense to the Bataks. In this regard, Bishop Sinaga told me that the Bataks rarely have the typical Javanese mysticism, a spirituality which is primarily dependent on conducting a personal discourse with God or with other saintly persons in the Catholic Church. What is important for the Bataks in practicing their religiousity, the bishop said, is to convince them (on the basis of marhata discourse) that a given practice is masuk akal (this is an Indonesian term for "makes sense"). The Transitus's introductory discourse and its bracketed words explained to the actors, as well as to the spectators, that Franciscanism has been something both within as well as beyond the spatial and temporal boundaries of life in the past, present and future. It is within the boundaries because the actors and spectators were aware that what was being performed was a play. However, it is also beyond the boundaries because they have seen that the (expatriate and native) Franciscans who live in North Sumatera and their distinct Bible oriented extraordinary life-style are by no means vague figures of Christ.

In terms of the Batak notion of "masuk akal," any form of interpretation on the matters related to the life of St. Francis of Assisi has been relevant also in the lives of the present-day Batak religious people. The father of a Batak priest's answer that his son sends home prayers every time he celebrates the eucharist can certainly "make sense" in terms of the typical Batak dalihan na tolu idea of give and take. It was, then, masuk akal too. Indeed, the father's answer of a prayer gift-giving did not mean that he believed that people could live by prayer alone. What he meant in the given discourse with his relatives was - of course, by assuming that it was based on marhata discourse - that the notion of dalihan na tolu give and take is put in the context of prayer, especially in the religious people's life style.

How have the North Sumateran religious people themselves understood the notion of prayer in their extraordinary life-style? During my stay there, I never heard that any lay Catholic questioned the prayer life of their fellow priests, brothers or nuns. For the lay Catholics, the fact that the religious people observed the three vows, visualized through their distinctive clothes and living in convents, provide a clear image of their extraordinary life. The religious people themselves, however, acknowledged that they have had "difficulties" in their prayer life. The Atmajaya 1979 survey on the problems

of leaving religious life reported that the religious factors which mostly related to prayer life actually were only the second biggest category of problems (29.1 %). The first category was the socio-cultural factors (43.2 %) while the personal-psychological factors (27.7 %) were the lowest ones.<sup>19</sup> The 1979 survey defined the socio-cultural factors as any kind of cause coming from other people (family, relatives, friends, etc.) which might influence the religious people to leave their convents. The religious factors were matters relating to someone's batin (inner being?) as well as the prerequisites of a religious life. The personal-psychological factors were matters relating to someone's personality. The socio-cultural factors mentioned by religious people surveyed, were the basic requirements for someone to be categorized as religious people such as: living together with other members of a religious community in a given convent, to obey and do the given job, not to be tempted to live in luxurious consumerism and to maintain their celibacy, which sometimes was difficult under the pressure of adat. It seems, that one of the biggest factors for leaving religious life of the people surveyed in 1979 was the extraordinary life of the religious people and the paradoxes to the normal worldly life. The paradoxes which

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<sup>19</sup>. Agustinus H. Subagya OFM Cap. et all, Masalah Meninggalkan Hidup Membiara dan Faktor-faktor Penyebabnya (Jakarta: Pusat Penelitian Atmajaya, 1980), no.26.

from the lay people's point of view, or as it is described by a former Catholic religious person: a religious life is "an apparently meaningless goodness. Their simplicity is more obvious than their depth."<sup>20</sup>

Since the notion of prayer in the Catholic Church concerns a special discourse with God, it seems that it has also challenged the North Sumateran indigenous religious people's (traditional) marhata based discourse. In an 1985 conference of young (read: indigenous) Capuchin priests of the archdiocese of Medan, it was acknowledged that they were experiencing several difficulties in their spiritual lives. Here is a list of these difficulties.

1. There was a lack of self-confidence and of a need to take care of the spiritual life. It made it difficult for spiritual life to be the priority of their daily activities.
2. To be busy in other activities was more desirable than to be personally disciplined in the spiritual life.
3. Routine prayer was not suitable and was considered as something imposed upon them.
4. There was no place, and no reference person available to counsel in the matter of prayer.
5. The alternative activities available so far were lukewarm.

In the same conference, these young priests also proposed

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<sup>20</sup>. Peter Levi, The Frontiers of Paradise. A Study of Monks and Monasteries (London: Collins Harvill, 1987), p.15.

some possible solutions - listed below - to overcome the difficulties.

1. Try to schedule their own personal spiritual activities.
2. Pay more attention to: sermon preparation, eucharistic celebration, liturgy of penance and spiritual conference followed by a personal meditation.
3. Participate in the spiritual activities organized by the regional superior.
4. Participate in the local community's spiritual activities if there are any.
5. Look for spiritual books and read them regularly.
6. Try to internalize eucharistic celebration as a source of spiritual power.
7. Improve the short prayers (doa kilat).<sup>21</sup>

Two years later, in 1987, concerning the prayer-life of his fellow Capuchins, the superior (a Batak priest) of the Medan Capuchin region learned that communal prayer was not observed in many communities under his supervision. He believed that each of his Capuchin brothers would not deny that praying was important. He knew that some Capuchins could be examples as men of prayer, but, generally speaking, private prayer was rarely observed. He got an impression that many Capuchin communities did not appreciate a communal eucharistic celebration, and, it was celebrated only when

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<sup>21</sup>. Antar Kita (September 1985), pp.13-14.



there lay people were coming. Eucharistic concelebration with other priest-brothers was rarely done and quite a large number of his fellow priests were negligent in celebrating the eucharist unless they were officially asked to do so. He concluded his report by saying,

The interests for spiritual life and the need to deepen someone's prayer-life actually were quite big enough. But, it was not understood that this could really be done only by the act of praying itself. It cannot be gained primarily only by attending one of the spiritual training courses.<sup>22</sup>

The prayer life of the religious people, the Capuchins in particular, as it was reported above by the superior has to be viewed in terms of the (Capuchin) Franciscan spiritual traditions. As the followers of the Franciscan traditions, the Capuchins have had the so called vita mixta, a mixed life of working and contemplating. In 1979 when the Indonesian province 's Capuchins gathered in a meeting, they already realized that, the portion for work was unfairly imposed in their province with the danger that the portion for contemplative prayer was either given up or less observed.<sup>23</sup> Referring to the Franciscan Capuchin spiritual treasury, on the occasion of the Fifth Plenary Council of The Order of Friars Minor Capuchin held in 1986, a Capuchin brother tried to explain the concept of contemplation. He noted that, "Etymologically, contemplation is one of the

<sup>22</sup>. Komunikasi (1987, no.16, May 20).

<sup>23</sup>. Simpai (1979, no.14), p.324.

richest synonyms of seeing, of being able to see more deeply, more profoundly, where ordinarily nothing is seen."<sup>24</sup> In contrast to another method of praying, meditation, he added that contemplation is not discursive and not an activity of mind where people take the initiative. He writes,

The important thing is to keep in mind that we are speaking of a non discursive way of seeing; we are talking about a direct and immediate vision. It is characteristic of St. Francis that he who enjoyed everything pleasing to the sight was able to give us a really human and poetic vision of the world, above all in his "Cantico di Frate Sole" (Canticle of the Brother Sun) which he wrote when he was already blind!<sup>25</sup>

Accordingly, it seems that special infrastructures are not necessarily needed to bring people to contemplative prayer.

To recall the solutions mentioned earlier which were proposed by the young Capuchin priests, why did they think that a special place needed to be established for a special situation? As a matter of fact, at the 1979 Indonesian Capuchin meeting, the Capuchins from the Medan and Pontianak (West Kalimantan) regions proposed that kind of house of prayer be established. It would be a residence located in a quiet area where a Capuchin could do a retreat by himself or with others: an open house where people could pray, share

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<sup>24</sup>. J.C.C. Pedroso OFM Cap. Franciscan Contemplation (Rome: The Capuchin General Office, 1986), p.12. This manuscript was distributed to the Capuchins in North Sumatera.

<sup>25</sup>. Ibid. pp. 19-20.

spiritual experiences and study.<sup>26</sup> At the time I did my research in North Sumatera, there was a residence in the vicinity of Medan which was intended as the house of prayer for the Capuchins of the Medan region. A Capuchin who often visited the house told me that it was rarely used by his fellow Capuchins. However, rather than say that the Batak Capuchins pray less, I would argue, instead, that they have their own (cultural) explanation for the notion of praying.

The prayer life which has been related to the need for a house of prayer in a quiet area, most likely could not match the way the Batak Catholics like to pray. A sense of togetherness in religious practices as it has been exercised in the eucharist celebration by the priests as well as by the (lay) congregation described earlier clearly showed that a form or a method of private prayer was not "masuk akal" (yet) for the Bataks. The religious people in North Sumatera of course, are not excluded from observing and performing their office, the hourly daily prayer required in religious life. The office actually follows the annual Church calendrical liturgy. Repetition is prevalent in the chanted office prayer. However, the Batak religious people, who supposedly were already trained in biblical studies, have had "difficulties" using the biblical words in the office prayer. They have questioned: is the use of the biblical

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<sup>26</sup>. Simpai (1979), no.14, p.325.

words any different from the use of the umpama and umpasa words in the Batak marhata? To a certain extent, both, the biblical words in the office prayer as well as in the umpama and umpasa have been chanted. In the case of the religious people's office-prayer, Peter Levi mentioned that "the chanted office wonderfully concentrates thoughts and feelings." He also reminded that "one of the critical moments of religious life is the time when verbal prayer begins to drop away, and wordless attention takes over, for longer or shorter periods." He adds,

The attention and inattention combined in the experience of the chanted office, and its fine musical control, with the variation imposed by cantors, lessons, repeated responses and alterations of psalm-tone, and the sense of the slow underlying movement of day and night and season, perfectly bypass this problem. The paradox is that the dutiful chanting of words is in fact wordless prayer.<sup>27</sup>

Why, then, did the young Capuchin priests (who thought that they had difficulties in their prayer life) mention that "routine prayer was hardly suitable to their working activities or consider it as something which was imposed upon them? The notion of routine, I think, has to be explained here. The notion of routine related to the prayer life, I believe, came from the cultural as well as moral "burden" of a trained Batak religious person. He or she thought, perhaps, that the biblical words as Divine Words

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<sup>27</sup>. Peter Levi 1987, op.cit. p.182.

could not be treated as umpama and umpasa words had been treated. The ordinary Bataks, as I have noted in Chapter Five, will likely think that the dalihan na tolu based discourse or the use of umpama and umpasa in particular, has nothing to do with the notion of routine. I would like to argue that, to some extent, the use of umpama and umpasa is similar to the use of hikayat (classical Malay historical text) by the Southeast Asian peoples to deal with their past. The Batak umpama or umpasa, as Errington argues on a hikayat text, is "images brought into being by words." But, she adds,

The words function not as abstraction explaining events to which they are not intrinsically attached, but rather to bring into being images drawn from the visible world. ... They (images) are actually made of words, not just told about in words.<sup>28</sup>

The imagination brought by uttering an umpama or umpasa, I believe, makes it difficult for the audience to feel the notion of routine.

Moreover, the Batak religious people have been assumed to be at odds by their colleagues primarily because of not (fully) observing the dalihan na tolu or adat principle. This oddity consequently, has made them think they are out of context if they still use the notions of hula-hula, boru,

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<sup>28</sup>. Shelly Errington, "Some Comments On Style In The Meanings Of The Past," in Anthony Reid and David Marr (eds.) Perceptions Of The Past In Southeast Asia (Singapore: Heinemann Educational Books, 1979), p.30.



or dongan tubu as it is supposed to be in the Batak marhata. I would like to argue, then, that the notion of Routine will matter to the religious people whenever and wherever they (in a certain sense) stop, question and fail, to think that they do not have the extraordinary life style anymore vis-a-vis the commoners' daily life: that is, whenever they question and fail to observe the direction of the bracketed words and its following odd discourse in celebrating Transitus or the prayer life in general.

Still, why is the available house of prayer rarely used by the Batak Capuchins? It is true that one of its main factors is - as was acknowledged by the young priests - that to be busy in other activities is more desirable than to be disciplined in personal spiritual activities. In general, most of the religious people's works and activities in present-day North Sumatera are still the same typical charitable and non-profit (mission)works as were done when there were only expatriate missionaries. Only some Catholic schools in the urban area and St.Elizabeth's Hospital in Medan are exceptions. The Catholic Church in North Sumatera now has two special schools for the blind and the deaf and mute children, a center for the elderly and homeless people (all of them in Medan), a rehabilitation center for the handicapped and disabled in Pematang Siantar, a center of leprosary rehabilitation in Lawedeski and several orphanages. These charitable works and institutes have been

run and financially supported by various religious orders and congregations. In the first chapter of my dissertation I mentioned how odd the notion of money or other financial support was from the Batak's point of view. The unanswered oddity itself justified the fact that it was something "masuk akal" to the Batak Catholic's "knowledge." Otherwise, the suspicion that the Catholic priests charged payments for their sacramental services should have been true.

In the late 1980s, the number of indigenous members of Catholic religious people surpassed the expatriate's. Regarding the suspicion above, the justification made fifty years earlier, that because of their "odd" religious life-style the expatriate Catholic missionaries were accepted by the Batak society (see Chapter One), I believe, is still valid for the lay Catholics; as far as their fellow Batak religious priests, brothers and nuns observe their three religious vows. The same justification, however, is quite difficult for the Batak religious people.

The notion of Routine or the difficulties of prayer life as well as the need for a house of prayer, I argue, have been ideas and images properly needed by the Batak religious people to justify their status. Without the ideas and image concerning their prayer-life (which are paradoxes to the ordinary life-style) the Batak religious people will not think that their status somehow is masuk akal. Accepting the paradoxes has required the Batak religious people to

make non contradictory what actually is contradictory with regard to the linguistic conflict between Batak umpama/umpasa based discourse and Catholic Bible based discourse. If they did not do so, they would be obliged to campaign against Batak practices. No wonder that, in this regard, Levi said "That language should be so very important in houses of silence is another paradox of monasteries."<sup>29</sup> Indeed, the notion of language, which sounds paradoxical, mentioned by Levi is related to the biblical words, the Big Story of the man called Jesus. In the following chapter I will analyze how the Batak Catholics have interpreted Christmas, the birth of Jesus.

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<sup>29</sup>. Peter Levi 1987, op.cit. p.204.

## Chapter Eight

### CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION AND THE BATAK CATHOLIC COMMUNITY OF INTERPRETATION

In the 1986 Christmas season, Bishop Datubara suggested that Catholics in his archdiocese not continue the practice of organizing Christmas celebrations (and parties) before December 25. He hoped that in one or two years every Catholic would discontinue this tradition. The tradition had been practiced primarily by the Protestant Churches in North Sumatera, in the Bataklands in particular. The main point of the Bishop's new policy on the celebration of Christmas was that Catholics would observe Advent weeks instead, which are certainly an important part of the preparation for the Christmas celebration. It seems that the Bishop's policy was also intended to minimize a growing commercialization of Christmas celebration. The non Catholic Churches usually argue - as I often heard - that since the (real) Christmas had already happened centuries ago, nothing was wrong in celebrating it before December 25. They believe that the annual Christmas celebration, primarily, is a commemorative celebration of a past event. As it, hopefully, will be made clear in my analysis, a Catholic Christmas celebration in Palipi (one of the Catholic parishes in Samosir) in 1986, shows that it was by no means celebrated only as a birthday commemoration of a non-Batak man who lived hundreds of year ago. They explained - as I saw it - that even though Jesus

was not a man born of a Batak tarombo, their Catholicism is not estranged from their Batakness.

I came to Palipi ten days before Christmas day. The local parish priest told me that, for the past two weeks, the Catholic youth and Sunday-school children had been rehearsing the plays, choirs, and dances which would be performed at the Christmas celebrations. They practiced in the parish hall, the only large building available for social gatherings in the local area. Nobody will deny that the Christmas celebration has been the biggest and the most important religious celebration for the Batak Christians. Officially, the Easter celebration is the most important one. But the most largest attendance at services and celebrations during the Christmas season proves that Easter is celebrated less than Christmas. The fact that the Christmas celebration is only a week before New Year's day is another factor for its importance. Since the Indonesian Moslems usually ask and give each other's forgiveness at the end of Ramadhan (fasting month), the Christian Bataks have practiced, perhaps, New Year's day as the time when they ask for and give forgiveness.

Christmas celebrations in the Bataklands, in Palipi in particular, were organized in ways different from those which the Bataks usually follow in their adat celebrations. Batak peoples are very familiar in organizing big celebrations in which hundreds of people participate. A



Batak adat celebration usually consumes a large amount of manpower, time and money which is, to some extent, shared among the host's dalihan na tolu relatives. To organize the Christmas celebrations in Palipi, the Batak Catholics somehow manipulated, their adat ways. Except for the eucharistic celebration, the lay local leaders, together with their staff are the persons usually in charge of organizing the Christmas celebrations. A lay local leader acknowledged that every year during the months of November and December, he had to spend much of his time preparing various kinds of activities for the Christmas celebrations for his local congregation. Consequently, he barely found enough time to do his own job to support his family. In this regard, he argued, that it would not happen if belas kasih (mercy) existed in every member of the Catholic Church. He believed that the Christmas celebration should not disadvantage anyone. He often heard about belas kasih, he writes,

Belas kasih is most respectable and often to be a topic in a given prayer service or sermon. Due to its most respectability, however, it has been so difficult to be realized in daily life.

He stated that disputes and problems also occur in the Catholic Church's life because there was a lack of "mercy" in its congregation. Since a Christian "mercy" only comes from Christ, he proposes,

Belas kasih (mercy) has various forms, one of them is self-sacrifice (pengurbanan diri), and within a

self-sacrifice is participation (partisipasi).<sup>1</sup> He mentioned that the present-day Catholic Church supposedly is neither "Pastor sentris" (priest oriented) nor "Porhanger sentris" (local leader oriented). The congregation, the lay Catholics supposedly, could help some of their local leaders do their jobs. He was annoyed by some people who criticize their local leaders for not giving them perfect service. He mentioned that some people of the local congregations even undermine their local leaders because the leaders do not have a suit-coat, tie, and a pair of shoes as most the Protestant ministers do so. He thought that perhaps one of the Batak customs caused this lack of participation by the Batak Catholics. He says,

A scholar from "nowhere" (banua holing) has said that Batak people have very high self-esteem so that they cannot be ruled "vertically" (secara vertikal) but "horizontally" (secara horisontal) instead.<sup>2</sup>

Undoubtedly, he derived his argument from the typical training-course for lay leaders which was organized by PANKAT.<sup>3</sup> The Christmas celebration I am going to describe will show how the Batak Catholics in Palipi in 1986 dealt with the notion of belas kasih and partisipasi which had been introduced by the Catholic Church.

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1. M.Naibaho, "Belas Kasih Dalam Masalah Kita," in Menjemaat (1985), no.10, th.7, pp. 359-362.

2. Ibid. p.361.

3. See Part Two of this dissertation.

The pastor in Palipi quite successfully implemented Bishop Datubara's new policy for the Christmas celebration for Catholics. There was one exception, the Catholic Daughters of Urat (one of Palipi parish local congregations) had to celebrate their local Christmas celebration on December 21, 1986. They had to do so because two days later, one of the local student associations planned to perform a play as part of their Christmas celebration. The main reason for the Catholic Daughters's earlier Christmas celebration was - as it was said by one of their staff - that, as a home association, they deserved to do it first. Otherwise, most of the money that might be donated in Christmas celebration would be grabbed first by another group.

The first official 1986 Christmas celebration in Palipi was started on Christmas eve. That evening, the Sunday-school children had their turn to stage the Liturgy of the Words (Drama Sabda) followed by the eucharistic celebration. The Drama Sabda, based on biblical stories, started with the text of Genesis (the creation of the world), followed by some prophecies, and ended with the good news of the birth of Jesus given by the angels to the shepherds. When the Genesis text was staged, an actor cast as the narrator said that among various kind of fowls, God especially created a rooster. The fowl, then, can always make people get up on Sunday morning so that they will not be late for church. The congregation in the church, of course, smiled while

listening to that joke. There was a session called marayat-ayat ( uttering the biblical verses) between the episodes of the drama sabda. In the Toba Batak, "ayat" means verse. In marayat-ayat, almost all children of the local Sunday-school took their turn, stood in front of the altar and uttered their selected verses from memory. The staging of the Liturgy of the Words ended when all actors stood and prayed before the nativity scene which was set in the church. Collecting alms (mandurung) and the eucharistic celebration concluded the Christmas eve service. Mandurung, the way the Batak Catholics do the collection in a given religious service is distinctive. There are no ushers to collect the money from the congregation. Instead, the congregation has to wait in line before the altar and put the money in a basket or other container. Some people, deliberately pull out the money from their wallets while on their way to the altar. They did it, perhaps, to show to the others that they have "thick" wallets.

The marayat-ayat organized once a year has been one of the most important Christmas celebrations. It has been looked forward to with anticipation by children as well as by parents and relatives. In the 1986 Palipi Christmas celebration, while most of the participants were children, I also came across youth and housewives who did the marayat-ayat. The marayat-ayat participants are people without (or, at least have not yet earned) the right to continue the

Batak marga lineage. Marayat-ayat actually is one of the Christmas traditions of the Batak Protestant Churches, HKBP in particular. Some Batak Catholics told me that some Catholic local congregations adapted the tradition within the last two decades. The biblical verses for marayat-ayat are usually selected by the participant him/herself (read: their parents). Among the Catholics, however, the verses are usually selected by the local Sunday-school teacher. I noticed that most of the children uttered the biblical verses quickly (which were memorized beforehand) in a flat tone. Children are not expected to deal with the Bible as an adult or the official preacher would.

Attending marayat-ayat would be boring unless one knew whose child was on the stage. Knowing his/her marga name in the context of the local dalihan na tolu is an important part of not invoking a feeling of boredom. However, there are always some extraordinary children who perform marayat-ayat. Here are some comments made by the Bataks on marayat-ayat:

That little kid is really great. The other children who are already at school can do only one or two verses. He did four, he looked so confident when handling the microphone.

Hi, he is bashful... don't be in a hurry!

What marga is she ... that one who was just in front of us?

Wow, he is very neat doing it.

The practice of performing marayat-ayat, I believe, is



meaningful not only for the Batak children and their parents at a given local community as was noted in the comments given above. In various Batak adat rituals, children can by no means participate. Based on the fact that the Batak children have been the primary participants of marayat-ayat, indicates that the biblical verses are images that somewhere else there is the voice or words of someone else (God). Casting Batak children in the role of a Batak notion of parhata (official spokesman in adat affairs) to utter the biblical verses, I think, puts Barthes' notion of the death of the author in a parody. As I have argued, marhata, the Batak discourse, does not need the notion of an Author. In this regard Barthes argued,

Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes futile. To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing. Such a conception suits criticism very well, the latter then allotting itself the important task of discovering the Author (or its hypostases: society, history, psyche, liberty) beneath the work: when the Author has been found, the text is "explained" - victory to the critic.<sup>4</sup>

The only notion of Author available in the Batak dalihan na tolu discourse supposedly are the hula-hula, boru, and dongan tubu. But, again, these three notions of Author have been in a (imagined or interpreted) process of mind within which no victory can supposedly be claimed. Since children

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<sup>4</sup>. Roland Barthes, Image - Music - Text. Essays selected and translated by Stephen Heath (New York: Hill & Wang, 1977), p.147.

recite the verses, and they do so in a tone that indicates they do not understand what they recite, then, "no author" is assumed in marayat-ayat. But surely every Batak Catholic thinks that the biblical God is the Author. Similar to the solution to the difficulties of the Batak religious people's prayer-life, marayat-ayat has been likely a way of making non-contradictory what actually is.

A similar way to the one of dealing with Catholicism exemplified in marayat-ayat occurred in another case which primarily concerns the Catholic notion of participation. The case is primarily related to the way the Catholic youth thought about money during the Christmas celebrations. The Christmas celebrations in Palipi were held from December 26, 1986 until January 1, 1987. Five different local youth and student associations organized them. Here is the list, giving dates and organizers.

December 26, 1986: Palipi Catholic Youth Association.  
 December 27, 1986: Palipi Catholic Students Association in Pematang Siantar.  
 December 29, 1986: Palipi Catholic Youth Association in Medan.  
 December 30, 1986: Palipi, Mogang and Urat Students Association in Pangururan.  
 January 1, 1987: Palipi Catholic Students Association in Balige.

Since the village of Palipi only has one Catholic grade school, one public grade school and one Catholic junior high school, young Palipians have to go outside their village to the cities such as Balige, Pematang Siantar, and Medan for their higher education. During the long Christmas and New

Year vacation, these Palipians usually return home. For the Batak Christians, New Year's Day has been the time to give and to ask forgiveness to/from their relatives, friends, neighbors, etc. Another reason for going home during the rainy months of December and January is that these months are the planting season for growing rice for people in Palipi. The homecoming youngsters are labor for their families with rice fields. As I noticed, "urbanized" students did not hesitate to help their families with the planting. The Christmas celebrations listed above, could also have been organized because of the home coming of these students.

Each Christmas celebration was held in the evening (about 7:00 - 11:00) with its main feature, a play. Each evening, the typical Batak madohata (speech giving) given by the priest, one of the nuns, representatives of the elder as well as of each of the youth associations opened the celebration. I went to all of the five evenings. After madohata, there was the so-called "liturgy." Everyone who had just given a speech would come up to the stage and light a candle. The Pangururan and Medan groups also had marayat-ayat in their liturgical sessions. The Medan group included a group of students who gave the Christmas greetings in the national languages (Toba, Karo, Simalungun, Nias, Javanese, and Indonesian) as well as in the international languages (English, Dutch, French, German and Japanese). The time

spent for the play was no longer than the time spent for the various musical and dancing performances given between the episodes of the play.

The five plays performed by the Palipian youth more or less had the same topics. The Palipi group performed a play entitled "The King of Artaban." It was a story about a king who was, supposedly, the fourth wise man of the East. He had a hard time acknowledging the (Christmas) message. He could not find the man called Jesus until his crucification. The Pematang Siantar group performed "Christmas Celebration In A Communist Country." The two plays just mentioned, in general, showed the miseries suffered by the faithful people who practiced their religious beliefs while under the oppressive authorities in the given societies. The other three groups did not give the titles of their plays. The three of them, however, had the same plot. It was about the less fortunate and poor (Batak) students who had studied hard and successfully got their school degrees in the cities. On Christmas eve, they realized that their hard times were nothing compared to the sufferings of Jesus dedicated to human salvation. In contrast, some of their friends and even their own relatives from wealthy families failed their exams because they spent most of their time partying, drinking, and gambling. The miseries of life staged (read: imagined) by the Palipi youth during the Christmas celebration, I think, reflected their families'

economic situation and their struggles to deal with the need for money. The Christmas season in the Christianized Toba Bataklands is the time when money is often talked about.

Attending the celebrations was not free of charge. Although there were no tickets sold, adults had to donate a minimum of two hundred rupiah. They made their donations at the entrance of the parish hall. Children received a 50 % discount, or entered free of charge if they came with a person who paid the regular donation. Except for the Pangururan group, the other four groups asked the nuns from the local convent to take the entrance donation from the attendants. By the end of each celebration, the nuns would give the collected money (which was already counted) to the Organizing Committee of each group. I noticed that the attendants gave the entrance donation to the nuns properly. There was no gemor (noisy exchange of words) which might come from people asking for a favor or privilege to enter the hall as might happen among the dalihan na tolu people. Some people, the nuns told me, even gave more than 200 rupiahs. One young Palipian told me, "If our(sic) nuns are the persons responsible for the money, it is alright, there will be no problem."

During the musical and dancing shows between the play's episodes, there was another chance for money transfer. People also called it mandurung. The shows were traditional singing and dancing (andung-andung and tortor) as well as



the modern one [folk songs(sic), and disco dancing]. While the singers, musicians or dancers were performing, several spectators came to the stage and gave some money to them. The money might be put in the place available, or handed directly to any special (talented, kin-person, etc.) performer favored by the giver. People mostly gave hundred rupiah bills, and only rarely five hundred rupiah bills. It was quite common that the bills were slipped not only in the performer's pocket but also between his/her fingers! Indeed, this mandurung practice instantly made people enjoy knowing and talking about who gave what to whom. An uncle (mother's brother) of a male performer told me that somehow he had to mandurung for his nephew. Another man said he did mandurung because his son's group organized that evening's celebration. The money collected in mandurung (even the money given personally to some performers) would be added to the entrance donations and belonged to the association. Some was used to pay rent for the use of the parish hall, sound system and costumes and given to the parish priest. The largest amount was shared among the performers and the rest was kept by the association's treasurer.

Before I came to Palipi, some of the local lay leaders I met in one of the training courses organized in PPU Pematang Siantar told me that they were proud of their youth's participation in the Christmas celebration. Although most of them studied in the cities, they were not ashamed to

participate in their home parish's Christmas celebration. Based on the contents of the plays staged during the Christmas celebrations and the comments addressed to me by several Palipian youth, it seems to me that a "poor and backward" Samosir was an acknowledgement often expressed by the Bataks.

How in the late 1980s, have the Bataks, generally speaking, really thought about their acknowledgement of a "poor and backward" homeland? During the campaigning months of the last general election (1987), the Bataklands got a nationally well-known nickname as "the map of poverty" (peta kemiskinan) in North Sumatera. Because of it, a special development program called Maduma (in Batak: wealth, prosperous and dignified) was promoted by the central government in Jakarta and funded mainly by BANPRES (Bantuan Presiden), the President (Suharto)'s Fund. The fund of 400,750,000 rupiahs (US\$ 235,735.30) would be given to the farmers in forms of low interest loans. Maduma was started in October 20, 1986 and officiated by a Batak cabinet minister. A seminar on Maduma was held in one of the international hotels in Medan in September 24-25, 1986. It was participated in by several local Batak scholars and Batak government ministers from Jakarta as well. The goal of development program was to raise the Bataklands' (Karo and Simalungun not included) annual income from 240,000 rupiahs (US\$ 141.18) to the national level of 540,000 rupiahs (US\$

317.65). In order to get the Batak votes, GOLKAR (Golongan Karya), the government's ruling party used Maduma as one of their campaigning slogans. The GOLKAR Bataks, however, changed it into an acronym of "martangiang dungi mangula" (pray and then work). Regarding the acronym, a Batak journalist argued that, in fact, it was the result of Bataks' disappointment about Maduma. He noted that the Bataks had thought that the program would give money lavishly as the Batak migrants usually do when they visit their homelands. They were disappointed because the requirements for getting the loan were not easy.<sup>5</sup> Several Batak musicians also composed hit pop-songs about Maduma and two films were made to inform the people about Maduma.<sup>6</sup>

Even though they dressed in urban, fashionable clothes during the Christmas season, the Palipian youth rarely identified themselves as people from the cities. The youth in the Bataklands, in Samosir in particular, have had to go to cities to survive and to improve their lives because of the local limitations on land, natural resources and jobs. I often heard people say that only children (and their parents), the elders and some "unfortunate" young people

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<sup>5</sup>. Bob Hutabarat, "Maduma, antara Makmur dan Doa," in Kompas. (1987, July 19).

<sup>6</sup>. The titles are: Menyongsong Fajar di Pantai Barat (Looking for the Dawn in the West Coast) and Hati Terpaut di Danau Toba (Tying the Hearts at Toba Lake). See, Sinar Indonesia Baru (1987, January 14).

stay in the Bataklands.<sup>7</sup> The unfortunates can be school dropouts, people with health problems, or one of the male kinsmen who has to take care of his family's properties in the home village. Going to school in the cities and later looking for a job has been the only chance for the young Bataks to improve their lives from their "poor and backward" homelands. A Dutch Capuchin priest, who is a senior teacher in the minor seminary in Pematang Siantar, reminded his seminarians that to be a priest they would have to be ready for self-sacrificing duty. When they finish their study and are ordained as priests, they will not have the typical Batak satisfaction. It is a custom that after finishing his studies and getting a job, a Batak son will proudly mail a check to his parents in the Bataklands.<sup>8</sup> Sending a prayer, argued by the father of a Batak priest mentioned in Chapter Seven, I think, can be considered as masuk akal because of the custom above.

That the Christmas celebration organized in Palipi was not full of typical (modern commercialized) merry activities, I argue, shows an example of the typical communal (Batak) "ad infinitum" marhata discourse on

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7. See also, DAR, "Opsus Maduma Untuk Tingkatkan Pendapatan Masyarakat Tapanuli," in Kompas (1986, July 31). and Batara Sangti, "Dengan Opsusdu Maduma, Mungkinkah Putra Putri Tapanuli Betah Tinggal di Daerah Sendiri," in Waspada (1987, April 9).

8. Lembaga (1986, April).

Christianity. The Batak Catholics (lay people as well as priests, brothers and nuns) with their notions of tarombo and dalihan na tolu have not been satisfied enough with a given interpretation on Christianity neither as in its form of the religion of Jesus nor in the form of the religion about Jesus.<sup>9</sup> In their Christmas celebrations, the Batak Catholics, in Palipi at least, realized that Jesus, the Son of God, because of his belas kasih (mercy) has participated in their lives through his continual acts of self-sacrifice. In the Bataklands, the image of Jesus is not vague, because several Batak men and women have joined various religious orders and congregations. The Catholic notion of participation, in terms of the Batak adat, has its own idiosyncrasies.<sup>10</sup> As I noticed in the Christmas celebrations, the Batak Catholics acknowledged that their notion of participation (in terms of the Batak dalihan na tolu) was masuk akal, too.

Two idiosyncrasies of this participation, it seems to

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<sup>9</sup>. See, J.E. Smith in his introduction to the work of J.Royce 1918/1968, op.cit. p.4. He writes, "The religion taught by Jesus is essential, but it is incomplete; Christianity is, ultimately, the religion based on the total work of Christ and therefore, requires a further interpreter who can grasp its meaning."

<sup>10</sup>. In this regard, Siegel remarks on the notion of participation. He writes, "Participation, as opposed to simply not bothering anyone else through keeping one's differences hidden, is important because it is in participation that suppression becomes evident, and the rules, or adat, along with it." See, J.T. Siegel 1986, op.cit. p.70.



me, were related to the way the Batak Catholics dealt with the notion of money. First, the nuns were trusted to take care of the money. It is a very common practice all over the Bataklands that nuns (or other religious people) of a local parish be appointed as treasurers or as cashiers of various Catholic social organizations such as CU (Credit Union). In the last ten years, the Catholic Church in North Sumatera has successfully promoted Credit Union in its parishes. As a joke, people have said that the Credit Union has been the eighth Sacrament of the Catholic Church. Some Credit Union staff in Samosir told me that the main success of the Credit Union is that its members can do a "clean and straight deal" when they borrow money. Money is much needed during this Christmas season: paying school-tuition and planting the crops (rice, onion, garlic, and peanut), especially to buy fertilizer and pesticides. Supposedly there is no favor or promise given "under the table" between the customer and the staff of Credit Union in a given transaction. The same clean and straight transaction rarely happens, people said, in other financial businesses. Positions of treasurer and cashier in Credit Union transaction are crucial. The nuns or other religious people have been favored to hold these positions because, even still considered as dalihan na tolu persons, they are jujur (honest). They will not misuse the money. Also, Catholic convents and rectories have been the most common mailing addresses of families when some Batak

migrants who live outside North Sumatera send checks to them by mail.

Second, during the Christmas celebrations in Palipi I noticed that only lay people practiced mandurung. The nuns and the parish priest never did. The Catholic Church and particularly its religious people who observe the vow of poverty are not considered by the Batak Catholics as persons without money. How can the absence of money be understood as something masuk akal (make sense) when in fact, it present? One of the answers is doing the practice mandurung. The notion of money in the hands of Catholic religious people is somehow imitated in the practice of mandurung. In the hands of (Batak) religious people money is handled appropriately since it is supposed to be primarily a means of exercising the Catholic notion of participation. The religious people's honesty in dealing with the money has removed the misuse which previously hindered the participation.<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, a (Batak) nun, brother or priest is also masuk akal if she or he is not allowed to do mandurung. To do so may indicate that they entitle the money and, thus eliminating their (lay) fellows' acknowledgement of a "poor and backward"

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<sup>11</sup>. A well-known answer on the question of money from the Rule of Saint Francis (1221) mentioned, "Even if money is spotted lying on the ground, let it alone, just as the dust on the ground is let alone." See, Lawrence Cunningham, Brother Francis. An Anthology of Writings By and About St. Francis of Assisi (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1971), p.102.

Batakland. As a matter of fact the money collected during the Christmas celebrations was not a substantial amount. It could not be a substitute for the (Catholic Church's and various religious people's) money needed to maintain the presence of the image of Jesus in North Sumatera. I think, the money transferred during mandurung in Christmas celebrations somehow shows its ambiguity. On the one hand, the Batak Catholics who participated in the Christmas mandurung, I believe, knew that their gift (read: the one hundred rupiah bills) would not officially be counted in their adat dalihan na tolu exchange system. The considerations of some mandurung participants who give favors to certain performers, as I described earlier, is to parody the adat notion of blessings or sahala vis-a-vis the Catholic notion of participation. The unsubstantial amount of mandurung money and the displayed (uncovered) rupiah bills at the performers' fingers, moreover, can indicate the absence of the supposedly proper adat gift-giving such as ulos. On the other hand, in the hands of their young people, money would most likely be spent for schooling needs and other "modern urban" related matter such as on fashion clothing which actually are things originated from source(s) beyond the dalihan na tolu boundaries. No wonder, then, that the youth in Palipi asked the nuns to take care of the entrance "donation," if only temporarily.

By celebrating Christmas, the Catholic Bataks could

realize, I think, that being members of the Catholic Community they have to accept the Catholic notion of participation. In the preceding chapter I have described how the Batak priests, brothers and nuns, have seen the paradoxes in their religious lives, but, their presence has provided a clear image of Jesus. That image and its institutional or hierarchical staff have made the Catholic Bataks acknowledge there is an alternative practice, the Catholic notion of participation, to celebrate their religious belief other than their adat practice of umpama/umpasa based marhata. Despite their "difficulties," the loyalties of hundreds of Batak religious people to their three vows have been the available interpretation of the biblical verses. With regard to the fact that the Catholic Bataks' interpretation of Christmas also had its idiosyncracies, it shows the triadic character needed for a Community of interpretation. In his argument, Royce noticed that there has been a notion of "some other neighbors" implied in a given interpretation between the interpreter and his/her neighbor(s). He has written, "I, the interpreter, regard you, my neighbor, as a realm of ideas, of 'leadings,' of meanings, of pursuits, of purposes." He added,

But I am discontent with my narrowness and with your estrangement. I seek unity with you. And since the same will to interpret you is also expressive of my analogous interest in all my other neighbors, what I here and now specifically aim to do is this: I mean to interpret you to somebody else, to some other neighbor, who is neither yourself nor myself. Three of us, then, I

seek to bring into the desired unity of interpretation.<sup>12</sup>

As long as the Catholic Bataks can acknowledge that some of their fellows' religious lives are masuk akal, the notion of Community of interpretation on the biblical verses will also last.

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<sup>12</sup>. J.Royce 1918/1968, op.cit. p.314.



## Chapter Nine

### CONCLUSION: A NOTE ON THE PRACTICE OF TUGU DEDICATION

"A satisfying girl is a girl from Bangkara.  
Satisfy your words so that no grudge arises later."<sup>1</sup>

Recalling my college years in Jakarta in the early 1970s, one of my teachers reminded me to use the polite words "Tapanuli people" in referring to the natives of the Highlands in North Sumatera. The time I did my research in North Sumatera, whenever I had a discourse for the first time with certain people (mostly the Catholics) belonging to one of the Toba margas, they would rarely refer to the word Batak as their ethnic background. Halak hita (our folk) or orang Toba (Toba people) have been the terms to which they usually refer to. Only when they realized that I was a Javanese Catholic priest (one of the halak Katolik), did they not hesitate to call themselves "Batak people." The word Batak has by no means been detached from its (hi)storical images created by outsiders in their dealing with the natives of the Highlands in North Sumatera.

In the final chapter of my dissertation, a note on the recent mushrooming practice of Batak tugu dedication among the Batak peoples, in the Toba Bataklands in particular,

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<sup>1</sup>. A Toba Batak umpama: "Siboru puas siboru Bangkara, Molo dung puas sai so ada mara."

will be described. The two underlined words just mentioned, I argue, have not only been defined (or interpreted) by outsiders, but also have been disputed (or interpreted) by the marga people themselves who, in regard to marhata, accept the words and their images in their present lives.

If you travel from the city of Medan through the city of Pematang Siantar to the Toba Bataklands, three different panoramic landscapes, at least, will impress you. Traveling in a car, less than a half of an hour outside Medan, you will see miles of various neatly grown plantations of palm-oil, rubber, cocoa, and coffee in the East Sumatera areas. You may also hear the noise of the plantation factories as well as of the bulldozers as you pass them on your way. If you are unfortunate, the smell of chemical liquid used in rubber factories or in the palm-oil refineries will unintentionally disturb your comfortable car. Inherited from the former so called "Dollar-land of the East," the world-scale plantation businesses of East Sumatera have been one of the first steps taken by the natives of the North Sumateran Highlands to participate in modern life. A long process of change of images, for example, from crude palm-oil into a brand name "Camay" beauty soap, or from smelly rubber latex into a strong radial "Goodyear" tire is not unfamiliar to many Christianized and educated native peoples of the Bataklands anymore.

When you pass Pematang Siantar - the second largest

city in North Sumatera after Medan - and reach the top of the hilly area toward south, the second panoramic landscape of Toba Lake is in front of you. Since early in this century Toba Lake and its surroundings have been resort areas for national as well international tourists who are looking for exotic images.

Continuing your trip further into the Toba Bataklands, through the Samosir island in the middle of Toba Lake as well as through the main road to the Toba towns of Porsea and Balige, and going up to the Toba Batak Highlands, the third panoramic landscape of various tugus is on your left and right. The tugus, one after another almost every couple of miles, are shaped in an adat antiquated construction, churchlike or other modern monumental architecture. Generally speaking, a tugu is a monumental tomb for an honored deceased Batak marga person.

The mushrooming practice of tugu dedication among the Tobas during the last two decades has also happened in the Simalungun, Karo, Dairi, Mandailing and Angkola Bataklands, although not as significantly as in the Toba areas.<sup>2</sup> People know that based on its Indonesian original word tugu, will easily lead the Bataks in a dispute. Its adat originality

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<sup>2</sup>. Rodgers reported the same practice in the Angkola area. See, Susan Rodgers Siregar, "A Modern Batak Horja: Innovation in Sipirok Adat Ceremonial," in Indonesia. no.27, (Ithaca: Cornell Modern Indonesian Project, 1979), pp.103-127.

has been disputed by the Bataks, as has its validity in terms of Christian as well as Moslem religious teachings, its socio-economic factors, etc. Although Rodgers mentioned that the notion of adat itself as,

Far from being static and hidebound (as the usual translation of adat as "customary law" might imply), Batak adat has actually proven to be extremely adaptative and creative over the past forty years.<sup>3</sup>

The word "dispute" I used above, is defined positively by Rodgers who did her research among the Angkola Bataks.

There are two words tambak and simin, which have been used (and disputed) in addition to tugu to name a Batak tomb. Several old informants and Western scholars mentioned that the oldest among the three words is tambak. When a Batak man dies, usually his body will be buried first in the earth. If the dead person had married and had son(s) who already have son(s), he deserves a special grave. Upon his grave, three levels of soil will be layered one upon the other so that people can easily notice it. This grave is called tambak. If the dead person not only had grandson(s) but also great-grandson(s), based on adat and if his descendants can afford it, they will organize a secondary burial for him. His bones will be unearthed and reburied in a tambak na timbo, batu na pir (a high tomb made of massive stone). Several archeological studies on Batak societies and

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<sup>3</sup>. Ibid. p.103.

cultures have shown that in various areas of Bataklands there are sarchophagi. In his studies on the Batak arts, Heine-Geldern noted that the Toba-Batak sarchophagi "is said to have come into use only in the course of the 19th century."<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Bartlett described that the Batak general sarchophage's form in the early 1930s

might be interpreted as house like or boat like (every architectural form of the Batak has the upwardly curved ridge line) and the great sphinxlike head is exactly that which occurs as the chief among the carvings on the front of the traditional Toba house.<sup>5</sup>

Bartlett also reported that during the first two decades of the twentieth century a tradition of dedicating high tambaks existed. Although the old sarchophage type tombs were not built anymore concrete tombs shaped in antiquated forms were used instead.<sup>6</sup> Since then, the term simin (cement) has been used as an alternative term of tambak.

The third term, tuqu began to be used popularly only in the early 1950s. At Soposurung, a village near the town Balige, in June 17, 1953, a tuqu (obelisk like concrete tomb) was dedicated to Singamangaraja The Twelfth of the

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<sup>4</sup>. See, Edwin Meyer Loeb, Sumatra, Its History And People. With an additional chapter, by Robert Heine Geldern (Wien: Institutes Fur Volkerkunde der Universitat Wien, 1935), p.316.

<sup>5</sup>. Harley Harris Bartlett, 1934. The Sacred Edifices of The Batak of Sumatra (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1934), plate xxiv.

<sup>6</sup>. Ibid. pp.28-29.



Sinambela marga. The tugu was built by the Indonesian national government for his secondary burial. He was officially acknowledged at that event as one of the Indonesian national heroes. He was shot to death in June 17, 1907 after an almost 30 year long battle against Dutch colonialism in the Bataklands. After the sovereignty of the Republic of Indonesia was internationally acknowledged by the Dutch in late 1949 and post independent Indonesian nationalism was introduced into North Sumatera in the early 1950s, the mushrooming tugu dedication was prevalent in the following decades. The shape of the tugus has not only followed the conventional boatlike or Batak adat houselike tombs but many tugus have been built by imitate monumental architecture in Jakarta or well-known church buildings. If the honored deceased person was a Christian, a big cross usually is also prominently built or decorated at his tugu. In some cases, there are also tugus without any ancestral bones in them. These kinds of tugus usually were built as monuments to certain revered margas because a tugu (tambak or simin) can only be built upon a piece of land where the owner is one of the local area marga rajas.

In his article published about the HKBP (Batak Protestant Church) 125th anniversary (1861 -1986), Pasaribu, the president of HKBP Nommensen University noted that the practice of tugu dedication grew steadily in 1955-1965. In the following years, it was rarely practiced and even

stopped. But, he asked, "why has the practice been growing again recently?" To answer his own question, he writes:

There was a guess (sinyalemen) which its truth has to be sought further that the mushrooming practice of building the tugu in the Bataklands during the decade of 1955 - 1965 was due to an effort of a "certain group" (golongan tertentu)<sup>7</sup> to impoverish the Batak peoples materially as well as spiritually and religiously. If it happened in the case of the 1955-1965 decade, what other "golongan tertentu" which is doing the same effort during the recent years?<sup>8</sup>

The fact that most tugus are located in the Toba Bataklands, and since Toba Batak population has been dominated by Christians (Protestants as well as Catholics), a short explanation of the Christian Churches' views concerning the practice of a tugu dedication will be described.

Generally speaking, the Christian Churches, Protestant as well as Catholic, represented by their hierarchy and theologians have thought that, the practice of building a tugu is not a necessity to be observed.<sup>9</sup> Many Christian

7. The group he mentioned, most likely, was the Indonesian Communist Party. See: Paresman Hutahaeen, Tugu Dan Iman Kristen. Unpublished thesis (Pematang Siantar: STT HKBP Nommensen, 1972), p.20. and, Murni Tarigan, Tugu Dan Iman Kristen. Unpublished thesis (Pematang Siantar: STT HKBP Nommensen, 1972), p.27.

8. Prof. Dr. Amudi Pasaribu, "Pembangunan tugu ditinjau dari segi sosial ekonomi," in BA Simanjuntak ed. 1986. Pemikiran Tentang Batak (Medan: Pusat Dokumentasi Dan Pengkajian Kebudayaan Batak Universitas HKBP Nommensen, 1986), p.185.

9. Since 1952, in its Declaration Of Faith ("Konfessi") the HKBP Church has indirectly prohibited the practice of tugu dedication. Its article XVI rejects: "praying to the souls of the holy persons as well as expecting that their power and sanctity can come out of their tombs, clothes,

theological and biblical arguments certainly have been written and published to minimalize (if not to eliminate) several suspected pagan rituals which usually are conducted during the dedication of a tugu.<sup>10</sup> A Catholic Batak writer argues in Parbarita (the only Catholic periodical published in Tobanese by the Capuchin seminarians) that since the Christian people's first ancestors supposedly were Adam and Eve, it would be better if building a church (rather than a tugu) were the priority of every Christian. A church is somehow a tugu of Adam and Eve and of all their descendants.<sup>11</sup>

No matter that there are an official prohibitions and discouragements from building tugus apart from their Churches, many Batak Christians have done so. The most common masuk akal explanation from the tugu's owners is that their practices somehow is the application of the Fifth Command of the Old Testament: to honor one's parents! Some of my informants also told me that the Batak tugu celebration was more or less similar to the Jewish

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goods or remain (relics)."

<sup>10</sup>. Among others, see: Dr.S.M. Hutagalung, 1986. "Pembangunan tugu ditinjau dari sudut Iman Kristen," in BA Simanjuntak 1986, op.cit. pg.192-202. and Lothar Schreiner 1978, op.cit.; D.P. Tampubolon, 1968. "Upatjara 'Mangongkal Holi' Didalam Transisi Untuk Mendjadi Suatu Manifestasi Penghormatan Orang Tua Jang Bersifat Komemoratif." Seminar Adat di HKBP, July 28, 1968, Pematang Siantar.

<sup>11</sup>. A.T. Samosir, "Pesta Tugu," in Parbarita (1982, no.7), pp.8-10.

tradition. The Old Testament mentioned that Joseph brought his father's remains from Egypt back to his homeland (Genesis 50: 1-14). The Christian Churches, the Catholic Church in particular, hardly ignore the practice. They have issued, for example, several ritual (manual) books for the local congregation Church leaders to conduct the "proper" Christian ritual of dedicating a tugu.<sup>12</sup> If a priest or a local Church leader is invited to participate in a tugu dedication, he usually only opens and closes the celebration with official Christian prayers and religious hymns. The distinct mark of a cross or its sign decorated at every tugu dedicated to a Christian Batak, perhaps, has been the most clear (masuk akal) acknowledgement that the tugu owners are by no means pagans.

Other than the discouragements from the religious perspectives on the practice of tugu dedication, another argument most often expressed by people who are "against" it has been based on socio-economic reasons. They have argued that the building of tugus in the Bataklands really wastes time, labor-power and money on something that is unnecessary.<sup>13</sup> In the past, it is true that because the

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<sup>12</sup>. Aturan Katolik Manonom Na Mate (since Bishop Brans authorized the book, it was published supposedly by the middle of 1950s). Gereja Katolik Pangururan, no date, Pedoman Pangula Huria. Kom.Liturgi KAM, Rituale, Ruhut-Ruhut Tangiang Di Angka Ulaon Huria (1985).

<sup>13</sup>. See Amudi Pasaribu 1986, *opcit.* and Hutagalung 1986, *opcit.*



building of a simin and its necessary several days of adat celebration was so costly, the expenses had to be shared among the participating marga members. My own field-notes show, however, that often there is only one wealthy family, mostly from the city (Medan or Jakarta), who becomes the main sponsor of the celebration. In Samosir I attended at least four tugu celebrations or Ongkalan Holi feasts (digging the bones) or Horja Turun (Big Work) feasts as Toba Batak people usually name them. Rodgers also noted the fact among the Southern Bataks.<sup>14</sup>

As I have mentioned earlier, a tugu can be erected upon a piece of land owned by the deceased person only if his marga is one of the local raja margas (margas of the village founders). Its best site usually is as near as possible to the public road or on top of a hill so that outsiders passing the area will easily see it. In 1987, a modest three floor Batak adat house-like tugu (about 30 square-meter and five meters high) could cost about eight million rupiahs ( about US.\$ 5,000 ). A complete (and the ultimate) celebration of a tugu dedication (Horja Turun = the ultimate work) can last at least three days. In this celebration, the host marga will invite their dalihan na tolu people: their hula-hula, boru, and dongan tubu. Moreover, various local village's chiefs (rajas) and elders have to be invited and

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<sup>14</sup>. Rodgers 1979, op.cit.



properly entertained also. When the tugu tomb is completed, usually two or three days before the dedication, the bones of the honored deceased person and some of his dead descendants have to be dug from their first burial sites. Quite often, since the bodies of the honored or other persons had been buried more than twenty years earlier, their bones cannot be found. In this case, the datu (Batak adat priest) or one of the elders usually will take a handful of the local cemetery soil and loudly pronounce it to be the remains of the honored deceased person. The expenses for the digging days, the day of dedicating the tugu, and one or two (or more) days of margondang (adat dancing celebration) are certainly huge. During these days the host has to provide meals for one to two thousands guests and to offer the proper jambar (meat portions) according to the dalihan na tolu adat. I was informed by a person of the host marga that his Jakartan brother, who was the main sponsor of their four days tugu celebration, already spent at least ten million rupiah (US.\$ 6,000). He did so because, as it was said among the guests, until that time he did not have a child from his marriage. By sponsoring the celebration, among others, he looked for the needed blessings (sahala) for his marriage from his ancestors as well as from his hula-hula guests. The blessings usually are done in a ritual of ulos deliverance to him (and his wife) by the relatives of his wife.

A tuqu dedication celebration usually is held during the dry season of the months of May, June and July. These months actually are also the time of the annual school vacation in Indonesia. This, then, certainly allows the migrant Bataks to participate in the celebration at their own home-villages. During the months of June and July 1987 I was informed that in the Samosir area there were at least nine tuqu celebrations. I could attend only four out of them. The relative short proper time (two or three months) for organizing tuqu celebration has made it possible for people in the (local) Toba Bataklands easily to recall and compare one marga's celebration with another. In one celebration I attended, I listened to a person who noted that there were some cars with Jakartan plate numbers parked in the village. In another tuqu dedication sponsored by the owner of one of the bus companies in Medan, not only photographers but also a video cameraman recorded the celebration. One marga host even provided batik jacket uniforms for their dongan tubu participants. As I noted, people usually make comparisons as to how much bigger or smaller the offering buffalo (and/or cattle) is which later will be slaughtered and distributed as the jambar. A male Batak villager told me in one of the tuqu celebrations that "You cannot have this kind of celebration unless you use your head (he pointed his finger to his forehead) to make your living." He was recalling a common Batak parents' wish

for their youngster to "makes money with his head, rather than using a hoe all his life."<sup>15</sup>

Many Bataks have acknowledged that their notion of high competitive spirit (toal) has been very prevalent in their social lives. In his articles, "The Role of The Batak Culture in A Pluralistic Society," BA Simanjuntak, the director of the Center for Documentation and Research in Batak Culture in Nommensen University, Medan, writes:

We often hear about the characteristics of TTLE destroying the harmonious social relationship among the Bataks in the Batak rural areas as well as in the urban and migratory areas.<sup>16</sup>

The acronym TTLE actually has been very commonly used by the Bataks, addressed to their own fellows as I myself often heard. TTLE is an acronym for the Toba words of teal (boast), toal (pride), late (hatred) and elat (jealousy). Despite the shortcomings of my knowledge of the notion of marhata among the people of the Toba Bataklands, these "bad habits" punned (PUNctuated?) in TTLE, seem to me are neither religiously nor morally weighed. The acronymizing of the four words has blurred each word's independent meaning. No wonder, then, that the notion of "harmless" TTLE has often

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<sup>15</sup>. See also, D. George Sherman, Social Organization Of Samosir Batak Livelihood In Relation To Their System Of Beliefs And Values. Ph.D. thesis, Cornell University (1982), p.245.

<sup>16</sup>. See, A.A. Sitompul and Arne Sovik (eds.) Horas HKBP! Essays For A 125-Year-Old Church (Pematang Siantar: STT-HKBP, 1986), p.171.

been quoted as the cause of the mushrooming practice of tugu dedication in Toba Bataklands.

Realizing the fact that the building of tugu practiced by their fellow (dalihan na tolu) people has been difficult to stop, some of my informants (who are against it) suggested that the money should have been used to establish a public service institution which could be dedicated to the honored ancestor's name. Regarding the tugu case and based on socio-economic considerations, Pasaribu clearly stated that he is against its practice. He writes,

Perhaps, the Batak people love to build tugu and consider it as a necessary activity which has to be done; or, maybe, they consider it as something good to continue because it has already been done and by so many people.<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, he also proposed that, in terms of a socio economic approach, the form of a tugu can be changed. He writes,

In the future, perhaps, a tugu will not necessarily be built in a form of a human being who sits under an umbrella or rides a horse constructed sometimes smaller than its rider. If they still want to do it, let us (kita) build tugus in forms of schools, hospitals, public halls, churches and so on which can last tens of generations, be artistic, have architectural and cultural values, be useful and needed not only by the present-day generation but also by coming generations.<sup>18</sup>

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17. Amudi Pasaribu 1986, op.cit. p.189.

18. Ibid. pp.189-190.

Regarding the "dispute", I will point out an important factor: the Batak marhata, which, I believe, has made the competitive practice of tugu celebration possible.

As is indicated in Pasaribu's article, there is a real tugu constructed as a statue of a man and a woman sitting under an umbrella. This tugu which has often been a subject of public talk among the Bataks can be found easily by travelers on their way from the town of Siborong-borong to the city of Tarutung. At the time this tugu was dedicated in 1965, no umbrella was constructed on its top. The picture of the pre umbrella tugu shown on page 339 was taken and published by Schreiner.<sup>19</sup> Several Batak informants who spoke to me about this changed tugu (before I came across it) unfortunately never mentioned the time when the umbrella was added.<sup>20</sup> As one of my dealings with my local research sponsor in Pematang Siantar, I gave a talk on my research experience to the Batak Catholics, lay people as well as religious. In my talk I also mentioned the case of the umbrella tugu to support my argument on the notion of Batak marhata. About a week after my talk, one of the audience, a lay Batak Catholic who belongs to the marga who owns the tugu sent me a letter. He wanted to inform me about the

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<sup>19</sup>. Lothar Shreiner 1978, op.cit. p.190.

<sup>20</sup>. When I was still in my research site, in fact, I was not inspired to look for the information about its exact date.



tuğu, and as far as I may appreciate his right of marhata, here is my translation of his letter (written in Indonesian).

May 1987

Dear Father Budi,

There is no intention to undermine your opinion and definition, perhaps, about simin in Tapanuli and in North Tapanuli in particular, which you found from your research and interview. The interviews which were conducted with experts or perhaps, with some people whom you just accidentally encountered at the given simins.

In my humbleness as one of Tuan Sirumonggur Nababan's descendants and a member of the Catholic Church, I would like to try to explain or to correct their answers properly (meluruskan jawaban yang tepat). My parents joined the Catholic Church in 1936. My father had been a local congregation leader since 1939. I was born March 16, 1945 and graduated from the Catholic Teacher Training School in Balige in 1965. I was employed at a Catholic school in the same year of my graduation. My opinion, very possibly, is different from someone's who is not a Catholic or someone whose Christianity somehow is shallow, generally speaking.

I was surprised with the reason mentioned by your informant regarding the umbrella built for the statue of Tuan Sirumonggur Nababan. His reason is by no means right in my own opinion, at least, or, perhaps, to all descendants of Tuan Siromonggur Nababan in general, especially to them who have tasted Christian education or whose Christianity has been quite deep.

To analyse a little bit further, if I do not miss, the answer given to you by the informant who asked: "why do you leave your grandparents be caught in the sun and in rain everyday?" In Batak, maybe was said as "boasa pasombuon muna Ompung muna i didadang las ni ari dohot ditinggang udan?" Based on the sentences questioned by the informant, we still need to know for example:

# Is the informant really a faithful Christian? This matter is important to know because his question suggested likely that the statue is something living. If it is so, he is certainly wrong and according to the Christian beliefs it is also wrong. The statue actually is no different than a picture drawn upon a sheet of paper, framed and covered with glass so that it can be seen clearly, last forever and keep the dust away.

# Maybe the informant only made a joke or, perhaps, a mockery because one of Tuan Sirumonggur Nababan's descendants had misunderstood that the statue could give blessings or good fortunes.

# It seems that the informant did not belong to Tuan Sirumonggur Nababan's kinspeople because it can be known from his word 'muna' (you) said in his question.

Indeed in the daily discourse in the area the statue is located, the word muna can also be said by one of the Nababans. But, (if it does so) it seems then, the informant has thought the person he talked to had more responsibility for the building of the statue. Therefore, we (kami) want to tell the real reasons why the iron umbrella was added later after the tuqu (monument) was dedicated a couple of years before. Here are the reasons:

# The time the statue was done, it was painted in a color similar to a human skin, cream-colored. Because the paint was not weatherproof and also because of the sun and rain, the color of the statue changed from its original one. Consequently, the statue was quite often repainted in the original color.

# Since the statue is not owned only by certain people (in fact, many Nababans own it) and the cost to paint was quite expensive, then, whenever it would be repainted a negotiation would be organized to collect the fund.

# Because of the inconveniences mentined above, an idea came and proposed to build the umbrella which could protect it from sunheating and rain. Moreover, it was always burdensome to gather people to negotiate and collect the fund.

# Considering the fact that in every gathering to

do the negotiation there was always disagreement even on small matters and because of a fear that it could cause even dissension among the same descendants - which in fact was in contrast to the original intention of dedicating a tuqu. These are the reasons for building the umbrella and not because of the talk of people.

We (kami) are not comfortable, if not upset if the answer of the informant you interviewed had been the main answer of all the Nababan descendants. We object to the answer because it can mean:

\* All of the Nababan descendants then will be labeled as people with narrow and wrong opinions in regard to the dedication of a tuqu or a statue.

\* All of the Nababan descendants will be considered as people who have very shallow and even misleading believes in Christianity, Catholicism inclusive. Even it can be worse, if it is related to the accusation of the Protestants to the Catholic Church that the Catholics have deified a statue. Actually, the chief of the organizing committee of the tuqu dedication (the late L. Pangarambang Nababan) was a devoted Catholic.

Based on the descriptions mentioned above, perhaps you will clearly understand the original reasons or at least you may make a comparison based on them. Through this letter, we humbly ask you to correct the answer of the person you interviewed or at least to make it up into an answer which you consider more proper since you are a Christian, a Catholic person in particular.

Dear Father, maybe you would like to know what is the main intention or at least the closest main intention of dedicating a tuqu, the tuqu of Tuan Sirumonggur Nababan in particular. Without undermining the intentions mentioned in your lecture in the conference hall of the School of Philosophy and Theology (in Pematang Siantar) we shortly argue:

As you might know, there are stages - simin and tuqu type tombs inclusive - in the Batak burial practice, among the Tobas in particular. I give the examples:

- tanoman ganjang (long grave)
- tambak si tolu bukki (a three level grave)
- tambak na timbo (a seven high level grave)



- batu na pir (tuqu?)  
 - simin (this term is new for the Batak grave)  
 The graves exemplified above are so various because the batak adat has had certain requirements to bury a dead person on the basis of his/her human status (kemanusiaan). A grave of a child is certainly different from the one of a married adult person who had grandchildren from all of his/her married sons (and daughters). A grave of a baby only a couple hours old or of an aborted baby (belum cukup umur) used to be different from a grave of a child of a couple years old. However, since the Bataklands have been Christianized, the difference is not really observed as it used to be, especially in referring to Catholic Church teachings.

Even a married man who had children and grandchildren will not deserve the same tambak as a man with the same status who already mangqarar adat (paid the adat tribute) or mangalean adat na gok (sponsored a full accomplished adat rituals) to the rajas and the elders. (Please remember that every Batak claims himself a descendant of a certain marga raja) Maybe, you also already know the difference between tambak na timbo and batu na pir as well as the requirements and levels of each of them.

Regarding the prescribed levels and after listening to the decision of the adat rajas and bius (village) rajas of the surrounding areas, all of Tuan Sirumonggur Nababan's descendants considered that:

+ Since his descendants have had many offsprings, have been wealthy and revered from the point of view of the local adat and village rajas, then a tuqu (tambak na timbo as well as batu na pir) was agreed upon to dedicate to Tuan Sirumonggur Nababan.

+ Since thousands of his descendants have been spread in every corner of Nusantara (?)<sup>21</sup>, a communal work was needed in order to show the unity of all of his descendants.

+ The descendants of Tuan Sirumonggur Nababan considered that they have same fate and do same effort in their lives. In order to show their

21. sic. "Nusantara" has been a poetic term of "Indonesia."

unity, the big expense (to build a tugu) was shared among them.

+ The descendants of Tuan Sirumonggur certainly organized the final and highest adat ritual in front of the adat and village rajas. Please remember that the Bataks have had the so called toal (pride); it has not been considered as a wrong competition: if other people can do it, why can we not?

+ His bones were put inside the tugu although it might be only as an adat requirement.

If we are questioned : does the Christianization (Catholicization inclusive) of the Bataklands help to minimalize the costly burial ceremony and its adat rituals? We surely answer: yes! (pardon me, it is only my personal opinion). My answer is supported by some data. Because, it has been often heard the so-called Christian adat which is observed by people. It is more or less, if somebody is previously buried according to the Christian Church's ritual, there will be no obligation to observe the adat (secondary) burial. Whoever is able to do it is pleased to do it according to the usual adat regulations. Whoever is unable, well, nothing else can be done! There is a saying, "Sijalo adat dohot Sigarar adat" (to get the adat you have to pay for it). It sounds, then, that there is an obligation; thus, only people with certain levels will be buried according to the adat.

In the case of an aborted baby, according to the elders, because he/she was not old enough, in the past no other people would know where he/she was buried. It is not clear if it was due to a fear that the baby would be used as a charm.

Dear father,

If you consider that simin is one of the official burial levels, well, I cannot give my comments anymore. The facts have shown that many tombs for children are cemented (concrete made) also. Concrete tomb has not been exclusively for parents and adult people. Your term simin, then, is not distinctive and cannot be categorized in the notion of martarombo yet as the terms of tambak and batu na pir do so.

Consequently, the term simin needs to be explained further. What it really is. It is not the same as



the term tuqu you have defined so far.

Going back to the case of Tuan Sirumonggur Nababan's tuqu, its multi-sided walls which can be seen from its front side as well as from its right and left sides means that his children are many. The cross on the front wall symbolizes that almost all of his descendants are Christians.

Dear Father,  
This is all I can offer to you. Hopefully, it can contribute at least a sentence for your research. Thank you so much for your willingness to read this letter and finally our best regards to you.

One of your faithful folks.

I have shown the Toba Christians' arguments on the practice of tuqu dedication. Since a tuqu (tambak, or simin) in fact is an image, it has hardly ceased to yield meanings given by interpreters who have interests in it. The notion of tuqu argued by the Toba Christians I have described is that it is similar to a photograph taken by someone for his/her family photo album. On photography Beloff writes,

When life is flooding over us with new and strange experiences, when we are surrounded with myriads of strangers - as people were in the new city life of the nineteenth century - we want to possess images both to halt and to order the flood, even though in the end the mass of images doesn't help. Through photography we can hold people, events, places. But the images themselves become a flood.<sup>22</sup>

He also mentioned that photography actually "is evaluated not only by our friends but by our enemies. It becomes part

<sup>22</sup>. Halla Beloff, Camera Culture (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), p.20.

of our history."<sup>23</sup> He clearly reminded us, however, that "our personal histories are not contained in family albums but are validated by them."<sup>24</sup> As I have described in the earlier pages of this chapter, not only the adat tradition of ancestral worship, but also the existence of (wealthy) urban Bataks, the dominant Christian religious beliefs among the Toba Bataks and the encroachment of Indonesian nationalism are the factors which facilitate the practice of tugu dedication. These factors, I believe, allow the recent practice of tugu dedications among the Bataks to be analysed in the notion of photography argued by Beloff.

The writers and some of my informants acknowledged that the mushrooming practice of tugu dedication has been caused also by the "bad habits of the Batak," TTLE.<sup>25</sup> The habits which are considered also as "healthy" high competitive spirits (semangat kompetisi tinggi yang sehat). If the practice of tugu dedication can really, among others, accomplish the (imagined) competitive spirit, I believe, the notion of spirit here is similar to Sontag's description of the desire to taking photographs. She writes,

Desire has no history, at least, it is experienced in each instance as all foreground, immediacy. It is aroused by archetype and is, in that sense,

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<sup>23</sup>. Ibid. p.158.

<sup>24</sup>. Ibid. p.179.

<sup>25</sup>. See, BA Simanjuntak, in Sitompul (eds.) 1986, op.cit. p.171.

abstract.<sup>26</sup>

However, since the Tobas (mostly) have been Christianized the Toba Christians somehow have hooked their past into the universal and chronological history institutionalized by the Christian Church(es). As an image, a tugu is one of the most potential (and acceptable) hooks which can be implanted into the Church's historicity. Consequently, the instance of Batak competitive spirit, then, has been religiously as well as morally weighed in view of the Christian Churches. The Batak tarombo neatly recorded and tailored by Western scholars and government officials early in the twentieth century<sup>27</sup>, the graphic tarombo drawn by a Batak and published in 1941 in Medan<sup>28</sup>, and several workshops held recently in North Sumatera as well as in Java to restructure a given marga genealogy<sup>29</sup>, moreover, have been the other images provided to continue the practice.

Sontag, however, also argues, "To possess the world in the form of images is, precisely, to reexperience the

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<sup>26</sup>. Susan Sontag, On Photography (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1978), p.16.

<sup>27</sup>. See, Lance Castles, The Political Life Of A Sumatran Residency: Tapanuli 1915-1940. Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University (1972).

<sup>28</sup>. O.H. Sihite Panderadja

<sup>29</sup>. See, for example: E.H. Tambunan, Sekelumit Mengenai Masyarakat Batak Toba Dan Kebudayaan. Sebagai Sarana Pembangunan (Bandung: Tarsito, 1982), pp.214-223.

unreality and remoteness of the real."<sup>30</sup> As it is in the case of the tuqu of Singamangaraja the twelfth which was intended by the central government in Jakarta to promote the notion of Indonesian nationalism, the other isms (marqaism, Catholicism, etc.) also have been promoted by the other tuqus. The possible interests of outsiders: travelers, tourists, anthropologists, missionaries, etc. who have visited the Toba Bataklands certainly have not been ignored in the mushrooming practice of tuqu dedication. The preference for locating a tuqu as near as possible to the main road or as high as possible on a hill explains that its owners anticipate not only their "enemies" but also outsiders will give their interpretations, their marhata.

Some time in 1965, because of the mushrooming practice of "vernacular" sarchophage dedications, a certain marga in Toba Batakland built a tuqu. Many reasons and arguments - some of them probably not be disclosed by the letter translated above - for that tuqu dedication were simply manifested in an image. The tuqu owner's marhata first of all was simply reduced into a (pre umbrella) tuqu. After the days of its celebration, it seems to me that many spectators friends, "enemies" and "outsiders," used their marhata rights to postulate their various comments which caused another image (an iron umbrella) to be added to the tuqu.

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<sup>30</sup>. Ibid. p.164.

The marhata discourses with my informants and my research notes as well as the letter I received after my lecture in 1987 in Pematang Siantar, cannot resolve the "dispute" on the tuqu and its contradictions. There is no "nonsense" in this unresolved "dispute." A tuqu which portrays meaningful images has been one of the Batak answers to the contradictions questioned by the modern Christianized Batak societies. It is an answer to a contradiction, not by its resolution, not by remembering it, but by presenting an image on the basis of marhata discourse. This multi-image tuqu has been one of the marhata ways in dealing with the Batak "struggling (hi)stories" caused by the coming of modern plantation business, Protestantism, Catholicism, nationalism and other "isms" into the lives of dalihan na tolu (and its related matter) people. The Batak Catholics who own tuqus, however, have realized that some of their marga brothers and sisters observe Catholic religious lives. Related to a certain (imagined) Community with its idiosyncrasies, these Batak religious people have been the living representations of the tuqu's images.



Illustration 4.  
A changed tuqu (ancestral monument)



**Appendix 1.**

INVITATION AND ANNOUNCEMENT

Dear Sir,

With this letter, we are coming before you in order to announce and invite all of you: the rajas ("kings") of dongan tubu, hula-hula, dongan sahuta (neighbors), boru, pariban (mother's brother's daughter) and friends. Would you allow your steps together with your most honored "queens" to come at a blessing celebration of our daughter:

TARULI br. NADAPDAP  
with her spouse  
ERIKSON LUMBANRAJA

He is a son of our lae (brother in law) Ompu Peggi Lumbanraja who was born by our sister Ompu Peggi Hutabalian of Siarsam (Onan Runggu). The blessing will be celebrated on:

Day : Wednesday  
Date : July 8, 1987  
Time : 10:00 West Indonesian Time  
Place : SIBISA (SOSOR PEA)

After the blessing, we will together go to the house of the host in Sibisa (Sosor Pea) for accepting their healthy food and refreshing water; and then, asking and delivering the adat according to (our) beliefs.

May our celebration be enlightened by our God, and our prayer will protect all of us from misfortunes. Before hand, we would like to thank you very much for your coming.

**WE WHO ARE INVITING:**

- |   |                  |        |
|---|------------------|--------|
| 1. Op.Sondang Nadapdap/<br>Op.Sondang br. Manik   | Parents          | Sibisa |
| 2. Op.Tionggung Nadapdap/<br>Op.Tionggung br. Sirait(+)<br>N.Pulo br. Manurung                          | Father's brother | Sibisa |
| 3. Op.Rugun Nadapdap(+)/<br>Op.Rugun br. Manik  | Father's brother | Sibisa |
| 4. A.Tual Nadapdap(+)/<br>N.Tual br. Manurung(+)<br>N.Samosir br. Samosir(+)<br>N.Purnama br. Sitindaon | Father's brother | Sibisa |
| 5. Op.Eva Nadapdap(+)/<br>Op.Eva br. Manik  | Father's brother | Sibisa |

- |   |         |             |
|---|---------|-------------|
| 6. A.Sondang Nadapdap/<br>N.Sondang br. Napitupulu<br>N.Komman br. Manurung | Brother | Sibisa      |
| 7. BROTHER Hubertus Nadapdap  | Brother | Pangururan  |
| 8. A.Manta Nadapdap/<br>N.Manta br. Sihotang                                | Brother | Lubuk Pakam |

And all of our older/younger brothers in laws.

BORU:

- |   |                              |             |
|---|------------------------------|-------------|
| 1. A.Sabar Sirait/<br>N.Sabar br. Manurung          | Older brother                | Lumban Rang |
| 2. Op.Aman Butar-butar(+)/<br>Op.Aman br. Nadapdap  | Father's sister              | Sibisa      |
| 3. Op.Floria Mahombar(+)/<br>Op.Floria br. Nadapdap | - " -                        | Sibisa      |
| 4. A.Maruhum Samosir/<br>N.Maruhum br. Nadapdap     | Father's sister's<br>husband | T.Balata    |
| 5. A.Bete Sijabat/<br>N.Bete br. Nadapdap<br>Utusan | - " -                        | R.Maligas   |
| 6. A.Mery Sirait/<br>N.Mery br. Nadapdap            | Older brother                | Sibisa      |
| 7. A.Saudur Panjaitan/<br>N.Saudur br. Nadapdap     | Older brother                | Aek Kanopan |
| 8. A.Rosanti Sirait/<br>N.Rosanti br. Nadapdap      | Older brother                | Sibisa      |
| 9. A.Melan Malau/<br>N.Melan br. Nadapdap           | Younger brother              | P.Siantar   |

And all their children.

TULANG (mother's brothers):

- |  |                  |              |
|--|------------------|--------------|
| 1. A.Maruhum Manik(+)/<br>N.Maruhum br. Gultom | Mother's brother | Jongginihuta |
| 2. A. Ronal Manik/<br>N.Ronal br. Manurung     | Mother's brother | Jongginihuta |

And all their hula-hula.

## Appendix 2.

### A CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF SOME PUBLISHED UMPAMA AND UMPASA

1903: Umpama. Angka na masa di Habatahon (Umpama of various uses in the Batakness). A booklet published by the Rhein Mission Press in Pematang Siantar. It has 1190 sayings.

1933: J.C. Vergouwen, a former Dutch government official in the Tapanuli Residency, in his book The Social Organization And Customary Law of The Toba-Batak of North Sumatra, listed 109 umpamas which he thought talked about legal issues. He was appointed as the chief of the highest Customary Courts (Rapat na Bolon) there from 1927 - 1930.

1935: Oempama Ni Halak Batak. Bagian I (Umpama of The Batak People, volume I), compiled by H.B. Siahaan, Gelar Mangaradja Asal (Balige). It was published in Pematang Siantar and Balige. When he published this umpama compilation, he was 34 year old and a teacher of ethnology in the public high-school in Balige. He mentioned that at that time whenever there was a dispute among the Bataks, it would be brought into the traditional jural court (Kleine Rapat) or/and the government court (Groote Rapat). The umpamas, then, would be utilized a lot in the "Kleine Rapat." He argued that since people had difficulty to remember only by the way of listening, it would be better if they also could read. He compiled his work based on interviews with many "radjas." He collected 1324 umpamas which were categorized into 43 topical chapters in 3 volumes.

1936: Oempama Ni Halak Batak. Bagian IIA, by H.B. Siahaan. In his introduction, he mentioned that explanations were added into this volume so that "whenever there is a dispute, the disputants can know what were really exercised by their grandfathers before; nowadays, it is the so called law." This volume consists mostly umpamas needed to settle a dispute and make a peaceful solution. Not less than 40 letters of recommendation were printed in the first pages of this volume. They came from the 38 district chiefs (Kepala Negeri and radja) of Toba, Silindung, Toba Plateau and Samosir in the Bataklands as well as from some Batak Protestant Church's officials. The 222 umpamas in this volume are organized alphabetically.



1938: Adat Batak ditingki pantoeaon ni natoea-toea, by H.B. Siahaan. This volume consists umpama which would be utilized during rituals and ceremonies to revere the Batak elders.

1938: Adat Batak taringot toe Anak Sorang, by H.B Siahaan. This is a manual book of umpama quotations needed for rituals and ceremonies to officiate a new family affairs such as engagements, marriages, entering a new house, etc.

1939: Umpama Ni Halak Batak. vol.IIIA, ABD-GHI-LMN, by (H.B. Siahaan) Mangaradja Asal. This volume has 160 umpamas. Siahaan mentioned that since the Dutch as well as the Malays have had their annotated umpamas, this book was alphabetically published in order to make it easier to be learned at schools and by people who wanted to study Batak language. In addition to the 1936 edition's letters of recommendation, there are more recommendations from J.de Jong, the government inspector for native education, from Dr.E. Verwiebe, the Ephorus (archbishop) of the Rhenish Mission Church. The inspector suggested that this book would be read by the radjas, school-teachers and civil-servants so that they knew their own traditional laws.

1939: Umpama Ni Halak Batak. vol.IIIB, NOP-RST-etc. by Siahaan. This volume has 164 umpamas. Similar to the volume IIIA, it is also alphabetically edited. An index is added.

1955: The two manual books of the 1938 edition above was republished by Saptadarma publisher in Jakarta. It was titled Adat Batak.

1964: Siahaan edited 343 selected umpamas and gave their meanings, utilizations and goals. The book was published and reprinted 4 times in Medan by Bin Harun publisher. New letters of recommendation from the inspectors of grade-schools in the Bataklands, the head pastor of the Toba district HKBP were added. Siahaan noted that this book was republished in favor of all Siradja Batak's (Batak king's) descendants who have lived all over the Indonesian archipelago. Hopefully they would love the Batak arts and cultures which certainly were the indigenous cultures of the Republic of Indonesia.



1966: Adat Batak . Taringot tu ruhut ni partuturan (Dongan Tubu - Hula-hula - Boru - Dalihan Na Tolu), by Siahaan. This edition specialized in umpamas utilized in Batak discourses according to the Dalihan Na Tolu regulations. He reminded the young (readers) to follow the Batak ways of discoursing as it has been observed by their ancestors so that what they wish would be gained. "It would be nice in peace and nothing good of fighting each other. If Dalihan Na Tolu fails to be observed, certainly, jealousy, hatred, arrogance and dispute would happen," he noted.

1976: Umpama Batak dohot lapatana. (The Batak Umpama and its meaning) by A.N. Parda Sibarani. This edition has an introduction by the Ompu i (the grandfather) Dr.J. Sihombing, the archbishop of HKBP. This book edited umpamas alphabetically. The editor noted that there are four kind of umpamas namely on: philosophy, manners, law and public affairs.

Early 1980s: Jambar Hata. Dongan Tu Ulaon Adat (Speech Portion. A Manual to Adat Ceremony). by T.M. Sihombing, published in Jakarta by Tulus Jaya. This Toba Batak ritual manual gives the readers certain appropriate umpamas needed for various life-cycle rituals. Although it was published in Jakarta, it was available in most big bookstores in Pematang Siantar and Medan. It seems that this manual book has been one of the Batak best seller books.

1987: Orientasi Nilai-nilai Budaya Batak. Suatu Pendekatan Terhadap Perilaku Batak Toba dan Angkola - Mandailing. (Batak Oriented Cultural Values. An Approach to The Toba and Angkola - Mandailing Bataks' Behaviors). It is written by Basyral Hamidi Harahap and Hotman M. Siahaan. Published in Jakarta by Sanggar Willem Iskander. A chapter of this book lists 300 Toba umpamas and 300 Angkola-Mandailing umpamas. Based on a survey, the Toba umpamas, then, are categorized in 9 most important values namely: kinship (34.33 %), religion (17.25 %), hagabeon (12.32 %), law (12.15 %), progress (6.87 %), conflict(sic.) (5.28 %), hamoraon (4.58 %), hasangapon (3.70 %) and providence (3.52 %). In its introduction given by a Batak major general, it was written that this book among others, would help the Indonesian government to realize the maduma (prosperity) development program in the Bataklands started a half year before the 1987 national general election.

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## GLOSSARY

Boru	: Daughter (lit.). One's son-in-law and his nearer <u>dongan sabutuha</u> . Wife-receiver party.
Dalihan na tolu	: Three cornered hearthstone (lit.). The three functional parties ( <u>hula-hula</u> , <u>boru</u> , and <u>dongan sabutuha</u> ) which form the Batak society.
Dongan sabutuha	: Womb companion (lit.). All male descendants of a common forefather and those of the same <u>marga</u> .
Hamoraon	: Wealth
Hagabeon	: Have many children
Hasangapon	: Dignity
Halak	: People
Hata	: Word
Hula-hula	: One's father-in-law and his nearer <u>dongan sabutuha</u> . Wife-giver party
Jambar	: Portion, share
Marga	: Patrilineal clan
Marhata	: Batak traditional discourse
Martarombo	: Relating each other's <u>tarombo</u>
Sahala	: Blessing, power, charism
Tarombo	: All Bataks' genealogical tree
Tona	: Ancestor's message or instruction which is binding on all concerned
Tugu	: Modern ancestral monument
Ulos	: Sacred ceremonial cloth
Umpama	: Proverbial legal maxim
Umpasa	: Proverbial blessing maxim