

8 Conclusion

After a preliminary missionary attempt by Roman Catholic missionaries in 1832, which had been too short to result in any substantial encounter, Christianity did not again enter the life of the Ono Niha until the second half of the nineteenth century: through the agents of two Protestant missionary societies, the German Rhenish Mission (RM) and the Dutch Lutheran Mission (DLM), who began to work on Nias and on the Batu Islands, respectively.

8.1 TRADITIONAL NIASAN LIFE CHALLENGED BY CHRISTIAN MISSIONS

The original context of the Ono Niha, i.e., Nias and the Batu Islands, had been somewhat isolated until the second half of the nineteenth century. The Niasan worldview, which, as is common to cultures based on primal ('animist') religion, did not fragmentise reality into separate, distinct realms, such as religion, *adat*, and governance, had therefore been subjected to very little foreign influence. The *adat* was rooted in the primal religion and leadership was defined by the *adat*. This holistic pre-Christian Niasan identity was symbolized by the *adu*-images, particularly those of the ancestors (*adu zatua*). To the Europeans (German missionaries and Dutch administrators), however, who were used to separating the religious from the secular, the *adu*, as the visible expression of the primal religion, was synonymous with 'heathendom', and was regarded as the cause of all backwardness and insubordination. Such diametrically opposed views made a clash of cultures unavoidable.

The spiritual background of the missionaries had its roots in Pietism and Revivalism. Their theology was characterised by a personal faith, sanctification, biblicism, a sense of crisis awaiting the Second Coming of Christ, dualism between 'this world' and the coming Kingdom of God, and authoritarian thinking. Devotional books, such as the *Little Book of the Heart* (Gossner) and *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Bunyan), which had been very popular in these circles, as well as the dogmatic-eschatological works of Carl Ernst used in the seminary, were later translated into the Niasan vernacular and had a lasting impact on Ono Niha spirituality. The spiritual coercion experienced in the hinterland of the Rhenish mission sometimes erupted in extreme religious enthusiasm. The organisational structure of both missionary societies was strictly hierarchical, demanding the total obedience of the missionaries and their wives to the boards in Barmen or Amsterdam.

While the RM, which had (since the 1860s) developed rather Reformed tendencies, was careful not to transplant the confessional differences between its Lutheran and Calvinist supporting communities in Germany to its mission fields in Sumatra and Nias, the DLM was intent upon establishing an exclusively Lutheran church, first in the Pasemah Ulu Manna in Bencoolen, and then on the Batu Islands. Despite their disparate strategies, the DLM and the RM cooperated closely with each other. The difference in their confessional bases was less problematic than were the differences in size and national backgrounds. Whereas, until World War I, all the

DLM-missionaries to the Batu Islands had either been recruited from or trained by the Barmen Seminary, in 1917, the DLM began sending its candidates to the Dutch School of Mission of the Cooperating Mission Agencies, in Oegstgeest, The Netherlands. Concerning their respective differences in attitude toward non-Western and non-Christian cultures, 'Oegstgeest' was significantly more knowledgeable and appreciative than was 'Barmen'.

During the 'difficult beginnings' of the Christian mission on Nias (1865-1890), no really radical social changes occurred within the Niasan society. The missionaries invited the Ono Niha to their services as guests, treating them with small gifts. The missionaries provided their medical skills free of charge. Medical aid and Western education were the most effective strategic measures supporting their proclamation of the Gospel.

As long as colonial control extended only as far as the *rapatgebied*, the missionaries were in a fairly weak position. For protection, they were dependent on the colonial authorities, whereas for their communicational skills (especially for learning the vernacular) they were dependent on Ono Niha. The very fact, however, of their being students of culture under the guidance of the Ono Niha, seems to have helped them gain a more positive appreciation of Niasan culture. Later, when the missionaries felt less dependent on the Ono Niha, and were at the same time more strongly supported by the colonial establishment (i.e., Ethical Politics), they often treated the indigenous people and their cultures with disdain. This was particularly the case for those who had come under the influence of the imperialist views of Fabri (inspector of the RM from 1857 until 1884).

Missionary achievements (i.e., gaining a foothold in certain villages and baptizing the first fruits) were largely dependent on the support of influential Ono Niha. Some of the latter, such as Ama Mandranga (in East Nias), Ama Gahonoa (in West Nias), and Fija Wanaetu (on the Batu Islands) even served as missionaries in their own right. Only recently, historians have begun to focus on the key role played by missionaries' wives in establishing Christian congregations among the Ono Niha. While the missionaries, by virtue of their leading positions and close ties with both the colonial and indigenous authorities, usually had not very close relations to the common people, their wives spent much time with the Niasan women and children, often developing close relationships. They also helped develop important services such as the Sunday schools. Despite these missionary efforts, adherence to the primal religion, symbolized by the *adu*, was still very strong during the first 25 years of missionary work on Nias.

In the 1890s, with the intensification and continuing spread of colonisation, the mission spread to areas beyond the *rapatgebied*. Due to a shift in the missionary strategy, the appreciation for the indigenous culture increased. Fabri's emphasis on individual conversion and on a 'total break' with the 'heathen' culture was gradually replaced by Warneck's 'Christianization of nations'. The goal was, through the evangelising and civilizing impact of the missions, to transform entire ethnic entities into Christian ones.

In 1889, a second mission area was opened by the DLM on the Batu Islands. In many ways, the work of the DLM on the Batu Islands resembled that of the RM on Nias during these years. But there were also some distinct differences. The Lutheran character of Christianity on the Batu Islands was (and still is) visible in the decorated interiors of the churches, often including a crucifix, stained glass windows, and an altar situated prominently in the liturgical centre. Of more import,

however, was the significant role played by noble women, such as Fija Wanaetu and Lai Hulandro, in spreading Christianity on the Batu Islands. The medical service of the DLM on the Batu Islands was developed faster than that of the RM on Nias. Concerning the preparation of new converts for baptism and the development of a church organisation, however, particularly during the first phase of missionary work on the Batu Islands (1889-1919), the DLM lagged behind the RM. This was due to the indifference concerning responsible membership and the participation of the laity in church governance common to German Lutherans (from where the DLM recruited its missionaries) at the time.

Around the turn of the century, the cooperation between the mission and the colonial government increased significantly. In 1899, RM Inspector Schneider called on the colonial authorities for the use of force in order to 'pacify' areas on Nias not yet under colonial rule. The introduction of Ethical Politics in 1901 significantly strengthened the position of the missions. The year 1908 marked the beginning of the complete surrender of the Ono Niha to Western dominance, both physically and spiritually. The foundations of the primal religion had by now been seriously shaken. This, in addition to the yoke of colonialism, resulted in a spiritual vacuum in the communal psyche of the Ono Niha and paralysed the *adat*.

The experience of total powerlessness triggered a crisis of identity among the Ono Niha. While not denying its religious factors, the outbreak of the Great Awakening (*fangesa dödö sebua*) at the end of 1915, must also be understood from a sociological perspective as a survival strategy. For the Ono Niha, choosing Christianity was now no longer a step towards modernisation (joining the world of the Western authorities), but much more a substitute for the primal religion as the core of Niasan cultural identity.

As well as being a spiritual revival, the Great Awakening was also an indigenous missionary movement. The Ono Niha ardently carried Christianity to the remotest of villages, while the missionaries anxiously tried to regulate and limit the scope of this dynamic movement. In this context, mention must be made of the key role played by the 'new' Niasan ministries, the *sinenge* and *pandita*, as well as that of women. Both the missionaries and the *guru*, who were paid by the government, were not very supportive of the Great Awakening. The most significant result of the *fangesa dödö sebua* was that the primal religion, as an institutional system of beliefs, was shattered. Many Ono Niha experienced this as the birth of a new eschatological awareness. The conversion from belief in the ancestors (*adu*) to faith in Jesus Christ transformed the view of time and history from the traditional, cyclical world view with its golden era in the past (Teteholi Ana'a), to a linear view, with the Kingdom of God in the future.

8.2 FROM MISSIONS ON NIAS AND THE BATU ISLANDS TO NIASAN CHURCHES

After 1930, by which time the Great Awakening had cooled down, the Protestant church on Nias was taking concrete steps towards ecclesiastical independence. An autonomous synod of the BNKP was established in 1936, but full independence was only reached when, due to World War II, the missionaries left in 1940/1942.

On the Batu Islands, beginning in 1919, a new generation of Dutch Lutheran missionaries had gradually developed a less authoritarian, more presbyterial type of organisation, established church councils, resolved rules and regulations for the

congregations, begun to publish a church magazine and other devotional literature, and, in comparison with their German predecessors and colleagues, introduced a more pastoral approach in their missionary work (e.g., 'mission chat'). Financially, Batunese Christianity became almost self-supporting. Concerning the development of human resources, however, the progress here was slower than that on Nias. A Batunese minister was, albeit without proper prior training, appointed just before the missionaries had to leave due to World War II. On 16 August 1945, a day after the Japanese occupiers had left the Batu Islands, the Batunese church (BKP) was called into being.

8.2.1 Local Developments

While, in the early 1930s, the preparations for ecclesiastical independence were motivated strongly by the financial malaise of the RM, the theological basis was the 'three-self' principle: 'self-governing, self-supporting and self-extending'. The first church order of the BNKP, decided upon by the first synod (1936), was based on presbyterial-synodal principles, combined, however, with a strict top-down structure with the *ephorus* at the pinnacle. This Episcopalian element was first introduced on Nias by Fries (draft 1921), and can be traced back to Fabri, who introduced a similar structure in the Batak church order of 1881. This centralist nature of the church was not in accord with the traditional Niasan social structure of *banua*, which, although hierarchical, was nonetheless decentralist in nature. This structure of the BNKP resembled, to some extent, the organisational structure of the RM and its supporting German churches at the time. It may be argued that a more 'Congregationalist' rather than 'United' type of church order would have been more fitting to the *banua*-centred character of Niasan society.

By the time the BNKP was founded, the vast majority of Ono Niha had become Christian, but the primal religion, although shattered, had not completely disappeared. Vestiges of ancient Niasan beliefs and values, which had either been stigmatised as evil (e.g., venerating the ancestors and traditional medicine), or not been adapted by the church (e.g., traditional music and traditional social structures), continued to play a significant role in everyday life, especially in times of hardship, such as illness and natural disaster. To this day, whenever the quality of Christian devotion declines, the demand for pre-Christian religious practices often tends to increase.

While missionaries' accomplishments (both in the RM and the DLM) in education, medical service, empowerment of women, and even in enhancing economic development cannot be underestimated, they failed to meet the theological challenge prompted by the encounter between Gospel and culture. In principle, the missionaries (including, as of 1904, deaconesses) and, to an even greater extent, their faithful Niasan protégés, disseminated a specifically Western form of Christianity, using the Niasan vernacular. Association with traditional symbols and beliefs considered part of the primal religion were neglected, avoided or even discouraged. Everything that hinted of paganism was considered dark, dirty and devilish.

One rare exception to this general approach was the one taken by Steinhart, missionary for the DLM on the Batu Islands from 1924 until World War II. Steinhart busied himself in an extraordinary manner with traditional Ono Niha culture, including the primal religion, believing that the authentic religious experience of a

people was the best starting point for Christian mission. Through dialogue (e.g., 'mission chat'), points of contact between the primal religion and Christianity had to be established. This method, based on the Bible (Acts 17:22-23), involved the Ono Niha as partners in the process of Christianisation, rather than as objects of a missionary conquest.

Both on Nias and the Batu Islands, Christianity did not die out during World War II, even though the churches became orphaned with the loss of its missionaries and suffered extreme deprivation and persecution under Japanese occupation. When, in 1948, the DLM wanted to resume its missionary work on the Batu Islands, this was, albeit possibly under the pressure of Republican officers, rejected by the BKP. On Nias, the RM-missionaries, who had returned to Nias in the early 1950s, were no longer in positions of leadership, but merely advisors (*penasihat*) to the synod.

During the struggle for independence (1945-1949), most members of the Batunese BKP and of the Niasan BNKP embraced Indonesian nationalism. While the churches, as institutions, cannot be regarded as having actively supported the struggle for liberation, some ministers had become pro-Republican political activists. Gradually, Niasan Christians became involved in political life, a realm considered dangerous and 'dirty' by the missionaries.

In 1955, at the first general elections of the Republic of Indonesia, the Christian Party, *Parkindo*, gained a majority among the Ono Niha with the support of the Niasan churches. Between 1955 and 1965, incited by the anti-imperialist rhetoric of Soekarno, a small elite of the BNKP developed a very critical attitude towards the Western missions. Under the influence of the national ideology of *Pancasila*, and driven by the fear of 'cultural imperialism', some church leaders demonstrated a new appreciation for indigenous local cultures and ancient values.

In the early 1960s, in confrontation with some of the missionaries, who feared a resurgence of paganism, fiery discussions were held at the synod assemblies concerning the acknowledgement of traditional elements of the Niasan culture in the church discipline (*amakhoita*). The missionaries had received their training at the Barmen seminary, which had positioned itself on the side of the anti-Nazi 'Confessing Church' during the Hitler regime. However, the 'dialectical theology' (Barth, Eichholz, and others), prevalent in 'Barmen' at the time, resulted in a general suspicion of any kind of ideology, which did not further the appreciation of Indonesian nationalism in the young churches.

On the part of the Ono Niha, however, some leading members and church workers of the BNKP began to sympathise with the leftist concept of *Nasakom*. It was not until after the so-called Communist *coup d'etat* (G-30S / PKI), on 30 September 1965, that the BNKP dismissed all employees and office-bearers with leftist leanings and distanced itself clearly from the challenge of Communism.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the Roman Catholic mission operated with increasing success on Nias and the Batu Islands, focusing mainly on regions (or remote islands) where Protestantism was not firmly rooted, on minorities such as the Chinese or on former Protestant schismatics (e.g., the Fa'awösa). The rapid growth of Roman Catholicism, however, created fears among the Protestants, not the least among the missionaries. These fears also had a cultural dimension. Even before the second Vatican Council (1962-1965), Catholics were much more permissive in matters relating to traditional Niasan culture, including elements of the primal religion. Whereas this was not unattractive to many Ono Niha, the fact that the Catholic missionaries, just like their counterparts from the RM and the DLM, came

from the Netherlands and Germany, was quite confusing to them. In order to 'explain' the differences, both sides resorted to aggressive propaganda. Nevertheless, for a substantial number of Ono Niha, as well as Chinese, on Nias and the Batu Islands, Roman Catholicism offered either a first opportunity to embrace Christianity, or a welcome alternative to the Protestant churches and sects.

In June 1960, after a visit the previous year by a delegation of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the Lutheran BKP chose to merge with the BNKP. Although they could have joined the HKBP, which, by then, was a member of the LWF, the *Ono Niha Keriso* of the Batu Islands decided that their cultural ties with Nias were more important than their confessional ties with the HKBP.

During the post-colonial period, the BNKP was faced with serious internal problems, such as schisms and heresy. The church schisms of both the AMIN in 1946 and the ONKP in 1952 indicated an unwillingness to submit to the centralist structure of the BNKP, and must be seen as the resurgence of traditional Niasan social structures. On the other hand, in a situation marked by existential fear and extreme hardship, the BNKP, in its worship services, teaching and pastoral care, failed to serve the needs of many of its members. As a result, new expressions of charismatic enthusiasm appeared, spreading rapidly from West Nias to other parts of the archipelago. These movements accommodated religious practices prohibited by the BNKP, such as prophecy, dream interpretation, speaking in tongues etc.

Unfortunately, the BNKP, as other young churches in Indonesia, did not enter into constructive theological dialogue with these charismatic groups, but, as in the case of Ama Haogö, denounced their teachings as heresy. Instead of dealing with this creatively and from a pastoral perspective, all discussion was stifled through reference to the *amakhoita*. Nevertheless, the BNKP failed to solve the problem of accommodating or modifying traditional practices such as dowry, mixed marriages, the *adat* burial rites, etc. The problem of polygamy also never became a topic for serious theological discourse, even though it was still quite a common practice among Ono Niha in the 1960s and the biblical arguments, for example of the AFY and SDA, could not easily be proven wrong. Instead, in all these matters, the BNKP stuck rigidly to its pre-World War II missionary heritage, namely, the strict rule of the church discipline, or *amakhoita*. Whoever infringed the *amakhoita* was in serious danger of being excommunicated and treated as an alien (*niha baero*), equivalent to being considered a 'heathen'.

Despite its authority, however, the *amakhoita* had (and still has) some limitations stemming from its lack of flexibility and legitimisation. According to ancient Ono Niha culture, renewal of the law could only be guaranteed by the solemn vow-taking *fondrakö* ceremony. In modern times, respecting the division between church, *adat*, and government, an institution such as *fondrakö* can not be revived. But, the church, having a prominent position in Ono Niha society, has the duty, on the basis of the Bible and in constant dialogue with its own cultural context, to develop a theology and practice which offers ethical and moral orientation in times of transformation in all spheres of life.

8.2.2 Participation in National and International Networks

Although the origins of the BNKP are on Nias and the Batu Islands, from the nineteenth century on *Ono Niha Keriso* have also lived outside the region. Alongside the congregations in Padang, the Niasan diaspora expanded to such places

as the Sumatran regencies of Tapanuli, Medan, Padang Sidempuan, Pekanbaru, Palembang, and Java (Jakarta, Bandung, Surabaya, etc). Rather than join other Protestant churches in the diaspora, the *Ono Niha Keriso* prefer to set up their own local tribal church (*gereja suku*). While this contributes greatly towards maintaining tribal identity (e.g., by using the Niasan vernacular), the exclusive nature of the BNKP makes it even less accessible than other Indonesian churches to outsiders.

Despite its tribal character, the BNKP was one of the founding members of the Indonesian Council of Churches (DGI / PGI). Therefore, the BNKP has not only a local but also a national presence. Through its membership in the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), the United Evangelical Mission (UEM; successor to the RM), the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the World Council of Churches (WCC), the BNKP is also involved in a range of international ecumenical movements. If asked, however, about the role the BNKP has played in national and international ecumenical organisations, the answer must be: 'quite a passive role'. Also in its relations to other religions, the BNKP has maintained an attitude which, although not provocative, has been rather indifferent. In the political sphere, especially in the Soeharto-era (1966-1998), the BNKP adhered to the policy of participation in development (*partisipasi dalam pembangunan*) set out by the national government. Although the BNKP is easily the largest social organisation on Nias, its political influence up to now has been very limited.

8.3 DOING THEOLOGY IN THE CONTEXT OF NIAS AND THE BATU ISLANDS

Regarding the future of Niasan Christianity, it must be asked, 'What kind of theology do Niasan churches need to meet today's many challenges? How can churches best serve the presence of the Kingdom of God among the Ono Niha, specifically, and in national and international contexts in general?' Presenting a holistic Niasan theology would exceed the scope of this study, but based on the results of the historical and sociological research undertaken by the study's authors, certain co-ordinates must be established if a local Niasan theology is to be constructed.⁶²⁵

8.3.1 Gospel and Traditional Culture

The missionaries' paradigm divided Niasan culture into three distinct levels: eagerly accepted culture (i.e., the Niasan vernacular); tolerated culture (i.e., the *adat*, purged of all elements deemed conflicting with the Gospel and/or Western 'civilization'); and condemned culture (i.e., the primal religion). In sharp contrast to the highly valued Niasan language, the primal religion was considered to be absolutely useless, if not indeed an abomination to God. But the *adat* was also never fully integrated into the Christian status quo.

In 1918, after the annual conference for teacher-preachers held in Omböлата, Fries was asked the following question by an Ono Niha: 'Which new laws (*amakhoita*) have been decided this year?'⁶²⁶ The missionary answered that many old laws (*huku fōna*) remaining on Nias had to be rooted out. Practices such as huge

⁶²⁵ Cf. Ch. 7.3.3 and Ch. 7.4.

⁶²⁶ *Toeria*, 11/4 (1918), pp. 42-43.

pig feasts, manufacturing gold jewellery, burial rites, teeth-filing, genital incision, etc., were prohibited and to be replaced completely by the new Christian law. To illustrate his answer more clearly, Fries referred to the twin parables of 'the piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak' and 'The new wine in old wineskins' (Mt 9:16-17, cf. Mk 2:21-22), and used these verses to demand that anyone following Jesus must take the decision to abandon all the old traditions, as the old has passed away, and the new life in Christ had already dawned. Old and new should not be mixed. The old law of the Ono Niha was of no use in the new life in Christ. The *Ono Niha Keriso* now had to walk on the new path: is the path of the new law (*amakhoita si bohou*).

Fries' approach was not only directed against the primal religion of the Ono Niha. It was also a categorical rejection of all aspects of the *adat* that did not conform with western standards of civilization. According to Fries, who, as *ephorus* of the Nias mission, represented the prevalent missionary attitude towards culture at that time, the new wine of the Gospel did not fit the old wineskins of traditional Niasan culture. However, Fries failed to question whether the old wineskins of Rhenish and Westphalian Protestantism were fit to convey the Gospel within the Niasan context. The missionaries also did not question Dutch colonial rule, with its practices of forced labour (*rodi*), heavy taxation, forced removals of whole villages etc. Was this the new wineskin of civilization, in which the Ono Niha could cherish their freedom as Christians? The missionaries did not doubt that Western Christian civilization was the highest possible form of culture, even though it had just brought the most terrible of wars to the world.

In the post-colonial era, the same uncompromising, legalistic approach taken by the missionaries – and their indigenous protégés – towards the ancient culture of the Ono Niha, was also taken by the BNKP towards contemporary cultural expressions, such as youth culture. Even after 1965, and up to the present day, its approach towards culture was legalistic rather than theological. All kinds of cultural phenomena had to pass through the filter of the *amakhoita*, but there was no creative biblical reflection on how to deal constructively with culture. The church cannot, a priori, consider certain cultural expressions taboo or contrary to the Gospel, as this would deprive it of any relevance or influence, as happened, for example, in the case of *famoni* in the primal religion, contemporary youth culture, and politics.

From today's perspective, it is understood that the Gospel is never devoid of culture. In Jesus Christ, the Word of God itself entered a specific human reality (Jn 1:14), i.e., Jewish society in Palestine under Roman occupation in the first half of the first century. Jesus challenged this reality, demanding a change of life, speaking out against injustice and falsehood, wanting people to make peace, forgive, love, and be free. But he neither raised one culture over another, nor did he seek to conquer other cultures; and he definitely did not attempt to destroy the cultures in which he lived.

In principle, the Gospel can enter every culture; but it will certainly also challenge it. The yeast permeates the dough, transforming it from within, so that it becomes bread (cf. Lk 13:20-21, 'Parable of the Yeast'). But the yeast does not destroy the dough. Of course, there are elements or trends in any culture, which cannot be reconciled with the teachings of the Bible. For example: on Nias and the Batu Islands, it was traditionally the rich and prosperous who benefited most from the *adat*. Everything was directed towards their achieving *lakhömi*. For the slaves or indebted commoners, not even the *fondrakö* could bring any relief. For the poor

there was no *lakhömi*. This is incompatible with the Gospel, but, alas, seldom challenged by the church.

8.3.2 Gospel and Modern Culture

In constructing a contextual theology for Nias and the Batu Islands, it is not enough to concentrate only on the traditional Niasan culture, but also contemporary cultural influences must be taken into consideration. The future paradigm of a local Niasan theology must always take into consideration four basic principles that shape the life of the Ono Niha: the strong ethnic identity, the extreme poverty and underdevelopment of the region, the pluralistic nature of Indonesian society and the influences of globalisation.

Within the scope of the above-mentioned new paradigm, the challenge to the BNKP is to become more relevant and more significant for the community it serves. The Niasan church should develop an attitude of humble service, entering the realms of this world (e.g., *adat*, politics, economy), not to destroy but to change them from within; to transform and reconcile reality and to realise justice, peace and the integrity of creation. In doing so, the church must be prepared to suffer. But there is also hope that in the end, God's will be done.

The question is: 'how can the church become a blessing to its own context?' For the Ono Niha, blessing (*howuhowu*) is the goal of life. Only with *howuhowu* is life meaningful. In contrast, poverty, injustice, conflict etc. are a curse or *fangelifi*. Hence, all the activities of the Ono Niha – religious, cultural and political – must be directed towards banishing *fangelifi* and attaining *howuhowu*. For Niasan Christians, keeping the *adat* together with believing in Jesus Christ holds the promise of *howuhowu*. The *adat* is characterised by the constant repetition of unchanging ancient patterns that can be traced back to the ancestors. The Gospel, on the other hand, teaches that the Holy Spirit, while reminding believers of the Word of God, looks to, and opens up, a new future. It is, however, neither constructive nor fair to characterise the *adat* as being backward, while praising Christianity for being progressive. We must remember that, in the past, the *adat* of the Ono Niha also had the potential for renewal through the *fondrakö*, while Christianity has been largely conservative and often lacking the dynamics to respond to social realities.

For the future, faced with extreme hardships and challenges, the Niasan churches will have to develop a 'theology of *howuhowu*', which re-integrates the different dimensions of the fragmented reality of life. Modern society, however, cannot simply return to the holistic worldview of the pre-Christian culture.⁶²⁷ But, at least as far as the Niasan context is concerned, very close co-operation between the institutions of the church, politics and *adat* is required. Study of the primal religion, *adat* and traditional government can make an important contribution to developing a stronger identity for the Niasan churches. But the *adat* also must be modified in certain key areas. The struggle for *lakhömi*, which in the past excluded the poor, must now also be directed towards them. The dignity of every man and woman, of Christians and people of other faiths, must be honoured. A Christian society must acknowledge all human beings as children of God with equal rights. In order to

⁶²⁷ Cf. F. Huber, *Das Christentum in Ost-, Süd- und Südostasien sowie Australien*, 2005, p. 58. Huber refers to the Indian context and the study of Wati A. Longchar, *The Traditional Tribal Worldview and Modernity*, Jorhat, 1995.

ensure this, the BNKP and other churches on Nias and the Batu Islands must improve and coordinate their diaconal services. With a concerted effort, truthful to the Niasan identity but inspired by the vision of the Kingdom of God, Niasan Christianity may then also serve as a *howuhowu* to the whole of creation.