

INTRODUCTION

As a result of the initiative of various mission boards, the involvement of the church in the field of education or schooling has been part of the Indonesian scene practically speaking, since the onset of the church's presence from early part of the 19th century. The personnel of the mission boards were present in particular social, cultural, political, economic and religious contexts peculiar to their time. These were not only different from the contexts of their church and country of origin, but had their own distinctive complex variations in Indonesia as well.

Like it or not, the mission personnel were challenged to interact with these different and complicated contexts. For purposes of this study, such interaction will be called *encounters*. Each encounter could have had different results, harmonization or also conflict. In any case, one thing was certain, dialogue occurred in the encounter which in turn issued in something new or in change both to the mission personnel themselves and to the individuals and also to the community encountered in the course of their ministry of mission as well.

The Batak tribe was one of the many tribal groups in Indonesia experiencing this encounter; the main partners to the encounter were German personnel from the Rhenish Mission Board (*Rheinische Missions-Gesellschaft*, RMG) who had organized educational opportunities since the beginning of their presence in the Batakland.

Before we analyze details related to the two parties of the encounter and the content of the encounter itself, we need to sketch the social and political situation of the Bataks at the time of the encounter and the beginning of the work of the mission boards in this region.

The Batak people who dwelled in the area around Lake Toba for thousands of years form one tribal group made up of several members: Toba, Mandailing-Angkola, Simalungan, Karo and Pakpak.¹ Each of these has its own distinctive characteristics, such as language or dialect, tribal law

¹ Researchers are not all in agreement as to the division of the Batak tribe. Some hold that the Gayo-Alas group in southeast

and social structure, yet they also share similarities as well, such as clan traditions, patterns related to the basis of the family, i.e. *dalihan na tolu*, and belief systems which formed a unity with all aspects of life.²

Aceh form one group; others say that the Pardembanan Batak who live in the Asahan-Labuhanbatu area are a separate tribe; others separate the Mandailing from the Angkolan and even the Sipirok from Angkolan. However this writer will use the classification mentioned in the text, but with primary emphasis upon the *Toba Batak*.

² A rather extensive analysis of *Habatahon* (tribal law, social-political structure along with various aspects of Batak culture) will be made in Chapter II in connection with the Batak traditional educational system.

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Traditionally, their region of residence was known as *Tano Batak* (Batak Land) but it was not identical with the residency of Tapanuli and the Bataklands District (*afdeeling Bataklanden*), the administrative region established by the Dutch Colonial government³, but goes beyond them.

Although the Batak society, especially in the hinterlands, lived in relative isolation until the beginning of the 19th century, others lived in coastal areas or were on borders with other tribes, and these had contact with the outside world, including the western world, for quite some time.⁴

Intensive contact with the West began in the 19th century with the coming of missionaries and representatives of the colonial government.

As far as can be determined, the first western missionaries to the Bataks were R. Burton and N. Ward from the English Baptist Board who came in 1824. In addition, there were various relationships begun due to the effort and policy of Lieutenant Governor Raffles, an officer of the English colonial power which continued to exercise authority in Sumatra at that time. In 1834, H. Lyman and S. Munson from the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions came to the Batak area. Their presence cannot be divorced from the effort of the Dutch military which began to occupy the southern part of the Batak region in the 1830s and which encouraged the coming of missionaries. Not long after Lyman and Munson were martyred, the same board sent J. Ennis as their successor.

Even though they were not successful in gaining converts from the Bataks, and did not found schools (but there was a plan to that effect), yet their efforts were not entirely in vain. Their travel notes, tracts and translations of parts of the Bible were of great value for those who followed.⁵

After 1857, several missionaries either came on their boards initiative or in cooperation

³ The Dutch colonial government established the Tapanuli residency in 1842 as a part of the Sumatran West Coast Province. After 1906, the Tapanuli residency became an autonomous region divided originally in to two areas: (1) the Batakland District which included Dairi, Samosir, Barus, Toba Habinsaran, Toba Hasundutan and Silindung, and (2) the Padang Sidempuan District involving Angkola, Sipirok, Padanglawas, Natal and Mandailing. See M. Joustra: *De Residenten van Tapanoeli*, in *Neerlandia* no. 6, June 1917, p. 117 and L. Castles, *The Political Life of a Sumatran Residency: Tapanuli 1915-1940*, (1972), pp. viif.

⁴ Paul B. Pedersen, *Batak Blood and Protestant Soul, The Development of National Batak Churches in North Sumatra*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, (1970), pp. 16-18, and W.B. Sidjabat, *Ahu Si Singamangaraja*, Jakarta: Pustaka Sinar Harapan (1982), pp. 31-58. Both books portray contacts of the Bataks with neighboring societies and kingdoms as well as with influences from other parts of Asia and also from the West before the arrival of missionaries.

⁵ L. Schreiner, "The Church in Northern Sumatera: A Look at Its Past and Future" in W. J. Danker (ed.), *The Future of the Christian World* (1971), p. 66.

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with the Dutch East Indies government. Among those who could be mentioned are G. van Asselt and W.F. Betz, who were sent from a mission group from the small Dutch city of Ermelo and worked in the Sipirok area and surroundings, that is, the area controlled by the Dutch. In addition to evangelization, they founded schools also. After several of the missionaries joined the Rhenish mission on October 7, 1861, management of the schools was placed under the RMG also.

In addition to the missionaries, a linguist, H.N. van der Tuuk, was sent by the Dutch Bible Society. He conducted research among the Bataks for eight years (1849-1857), especially in and around the Barus area. He succeeded in writing about the Batak language, its system of script and literature, composed a Batak-Dutch dictionary, Batak grammar, translated parts of the Bible, and made a collection of folk stories and documents written in the Batak script.⁶

After 1840, the Dutch Indies colonial government itself through its local officials initiated the organizing of elementary schools in the areas it controlled.⁷

In 1861, personnel from the Rhenish mission came to work in the midst of this Batak community which had had intensive contacts with the outside and had come to be acquainted with a western style of education.⁸ But RMG missionaries, especially Nommensen, realized quickly that their efforts would not bear fruit if they worked only among the coastal Bataks, or those living in areas dominated by Dutch authority, because a large percentage of them were Muslims. Accordingly, they decided to work in the interior, in the heart of the Batakland which the colonial government had called an area of independence (*onafhankelijk gebied*). This heartland was relatively unaffected by outside influences so that the missionaries were able to encounter Batak society in its original shape and expression, including its educational approach.

When the RMG missionaries initiated their work in Batakland, they possessed certain understandings and general ideas already about education and matters connected with it which had

⁶ Although Van der Tuuk was not a missionary, but rather a humanistic linguist, nevertheless his works helped RMG missionaries very much later, including organizing of their schools, especially during the earliest years. In fact, several missionaries learned the Batak language from him; see *BRMG* 1861, p. 10; 1882, p. 69. See also Chapter II and IV below. Guillaume, a missionary, in his essay *Regierung und Mission* [Government and Mission] (1908), p. 2, acknowledged Van der Tuuk as one of the pioneering missionaries to the Bataks.

⁷ I.J. Brugmans, *Geschiedenis van het Onderwijs in Nederlandsch-Indië* [A History of Education in the Netherlands Indies] (1938), p. 239.

⁸ The RMG had worked in Kalimantan (Borneo) from 1835-1859, before coming to the Batak area.

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been communicated to them in their seminary preparation especially in Barmen. Based upon the understandings and ideas received, they set out to fashion a strategy and program of education.

Arriving at their field of ministry, i.e. Batakland, the missionaries encountered Batak society with its own social, political, cultural, religious and educational systems. They did not come rapidly to an accurate comprehension of the Bataks' system of education along with the philosophy which formed its foundation. Therefore, the RMG missionaries began to apply the ideas and presuppositions brought from Germany. But through the process of encounter lasting some time, and learning from others, both missionaries and non-missionaries, they gradually came to a truer understanding of the Batak systems mentioned. Based upon this new understanding, they set about to compose a new approach and policy for their work, including education. But they did not discard their original thinking in its entirety; some parts were maintained, in fact strengthened, until they ended their work among the Bataks.

But the effects of the encounter were not one-sided. For their part, the Bataks, too, experienced changes as a result of meeting with the missionaries. On the one hand, they became more consciously aware of what they had and needed to defend; on the other hand they realized that there were elements in their system which could no longer be supported. The Bataks saw that much of what the missionaries brought and offered were more beneficial and more fully answered their needs. But not all ideas and practices brought by the missionaries were acceptable. They were adept at demonstrating an attitude of rejection and opposition for whatever failed to fit into their way of life.

Accordingly through the actual teaching or the organizing of mission schools among the Bataks, interaction and dialogue occurred between the missionaries and the Bataks; this process did not always result in adaptation and adjustment, but rather clashes. What is clear, however, is that each side learned from the other member of the encounter and was enriched through the process involved.

In order to present a complete picture of the encounter, this writing is divided into three major

sections.

Part One presents an overview of the context and background of the encounter including a general description of each party involved. This part is divided into three chapters: Chapter One summarizes the history of education in Indonesia. Its purpose is to show the degree that missionary education in Indonesia in general and the educational system of the RMG in Batakland in particular were not only connected with but were dependent upon the Dutch Indies colonial government's system of education. Chapter Two gives a brief description of Batak society before and during the coming of the missionaries, with emphasis upon its traditional educational system. This chapter will help us see which aspects and elements of the Bataks' traditional educational system could be maintained in the RMG educational system or on the contrary rejected, and the reasons for either action on the part of the mission personnel. Chapter Three sketches the details of the educational philosophy which they held and developed, before and after working among the Bataks, and how that philosophy was bequeathed to them before they arrived in Batakland. In addition, we shall attempt to show what other actors played a part in building and enriching the educational philosophy and policy of the missionaries. All this should help us gain an understanding of the educational effort, philosophy and policy developed by the RMG in Batakland. At the same time, this should assist in seeing whether there were any influences and contributions from the RMG-Batak encounter which confirmed the RMG educational philosophy in its homeland.

Part Two analyzes the educational efforts of the RMG during the time of its work among the Bataks, i.e. from 1861 to 1940, and also shows the twists and turns of the process of encounter with Batak society. This time-frame is sufficiently long to be divided into three periods or sections based upon characteristics and themes prominent in each period. But it must be emphasized that these divisions are not absolute, because what happened or was related to one period was not really unique to it and therefore could be separated or differentiated from the period before or the one which followed. Structuring this history according to time periods is meant to help discern issues which were prominent in each period, but at the same time the whole period of time from 1861-

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1940 must be seen as an historical unity from beginning to end.

The first period (1861-1882) to be analyzed in Chapter Four was a time of pioneering and of foundation-laying for the educational system and network. At this time the Rhenish missionaries did not have a clear and firm philosophy of education. The second period (1883-1914) studied in Chapter Five attains the high-water mark of educational development both quantitatively and qualitatively: the number of schools and pupils affected increased, and the philosophy of education became more stable after a time of intense struggle on the part of missionaries to develop an educational system fitted to the needs of Batak society. The third period (1915-1940) discussed in Chapter Six describes the crisis which engulfed the Rhenish mission in general and its educational ministry in particular due to overwhelming problems and developments within as well as outside the Batak area. This second part concludes with an *Epilogue* in Chapter Seven which presents a brief explanation why the Rhenish mission was forced to end its activities among the Bataks with its impact upon the entire educational effort and network of schools which had been built up for almost 80 years.

This writing ends with *Part Three* comprising an evaluation, conclusion and reflection on the process of encounter with its collateral complex of problems. Chapter Eight summarizes various impacts of the Rhenish mission's educational work, especially on the Batak people, and also shows the fruit of the educational ministry for both parties, formerly and presently as well.

Finally, several technical notes need to be made to make it easier for the reader to understand and evaluate this rather lengthy writing.

1. As reflecting the rifle, there must be information and data presented in a balanced form from the side of the mission boards, especially the Rhenish mission, and also from the Bataks. But information from the latter is very limited, whether in the form of written documents or through interviews with older informants. However, sources from the mission boards are extensive and preserved in an orderly fashion in the mission files. Added to these are writings by westerners as well as those found in the colonial government archives. Accordingly, the portion of information

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and data from the mission boards and westerners are much more extensive. Even so, we assume that the information and data attributed to Bataks themselves as set forth in western writings are true. At a minimum, in western writings we can infer what was said by Bataks even though we must interpret their remarks beforehand.

2. This writing may be characterized as descriptive and analytical, rather than interpretive. The choice of this methodology for reporting the history described is based on the awareness that this book is but the result of a beginning study of the theme embodied in its title. Therefore, this book should be considered an introduction to a deeper study of the issues summarized here. Nevertheless, we have tried to present quantitative and informative data in balance with matters qualitative and analytical so that we do not just know the 'what' and 'how' of the subject studied, but also why something happened and what were the results for the development of subsequent history.

3. To simplify terminology and in harmony with usage by the Rhenish mission itself, we shall henceforth use the term Batakmission rather than "RMG in Batakland". This change is in harmony with historical development later because it is used to include the Batak Church after it had become independent following the third period of our study. Hopefully, this development will be noted when we see the usage of the term in this study.