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## The Batak Protestant Christian Church

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# Concordia Theological Monthly



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# Concordia Theological Monthly

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## The Batak Protestant Christian Church

By JOSEPH ELLWANGER

WHEN the Batak Protestant Christian Church in Indonesia applied for membership in the Lutheran World Federation in 1951, one of the largest Christian church bodies in the non-West was catapulted out of relative obscurity into a limelight position on the stage of world Lutheranism.

Some were quick to question the Lutheran character of the Batak Church. Chiefly they asked these questions: How can the Batak Church be Lutheran when it was founded by the Rhenish Mission Society, a combination of Lutheran and Reformed elements? And how can the Batak Church be Lutheran when it has not officially adopted the 16th-century Lutheran Confessions?

But for all its importance on the scene of world Lutheranism the Batak Church is little known among Lutherans, especially among Lutherans in America. This article is an attempt to acquaint the reader with this body of Christians in Batakland.

### THE LAND AND ITS PEOPLE

The Bataks are a vital, energetic people numbering some 2,000,000, whose tribal home is the region about Lake Toba in Northern Sumatra. (Sumatra is the large, westernmost island of Indonesia, comprising a land area greater than that of Missouri, Illinois, and Indiana together.) Untouched by Muslim influence until very recently, they maintained their tribal culture, in which cannibalism played a part, and were subdued by the Dutch only at the beginning of the century.<sup>1</sup>

The dynamic aggressiveness of the Bataks can be seen in every

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<sup>1</sup> Carl E. Lund-Quist, ed. *Lutheran Churches of the World* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1957), p. 202.

area of their life. This virility of the people is reflected, for instance, in their present program of colonization. The indomitable courage with which they leave their homeland, move hundreds of miles, and then clear the matted jungles and begin life all over again has been compared with the aggressive courage of the early American settlers.<sup>2</sup>

The wholesome climate and the high altitude of Batakland probably account for much of the vitality of the people. Also, the location in the inaccessible interior of a great island has enhanced their racial solidarity and their cultural and political independence (ibid, p. 416), making for strong-willed, free-thinking people.

The fact that the Bataks have never been swept along with the waves of the Eastern higher religions that have covered Indonesia during the past centuries has meant that the Christian message has found all the readier the ears of an animistic people.

#### EARLY LIFE OF BATAK CHURCH

The first attempt to reach the fierce Batak tribes with the Gospel was an abortive effort by two American missionaries, Lyman and Munson, sent out by a church in Boston in 1833. Both men were killed as they approached the first Batak village.

The first missionary to make a successful entry into the interior of Batakland was Ludwig Nommensen, sent out by the Rhenish Missionary Society. The son of a sluicekeeper on an island off the west coast of the isthmus connecting Germany and Denmark, Nommensen entered the land of the Bataks alone in 1864.

During his first year among the Bataks, Nommensen was made to feel as unwelcome as possible. They secretly put poison in his food. (One man who did this and saw that Nommensen did not die was so moved that he listened to the Gospel and became one of the first Batak Christians.) They came in large groups to his bush house and slept with him at night just to be a nuisance. They threatened to burn down his house, and Nommensen retorted that he would simply build it up again.

At a pagan festival held in Nommensen's village it was rumored that Nommensen was to be the human sacrifice that it was cus-

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<sup>2</sup> Merle J. Davis, *The Economic Basis of the Church* (London: Oxford U. Press, 1939), p. 447.

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tomary to offer up. Nommensen's three or four friends warned him not to attend the festival. The missionary felt, however, that to avoid the festival would be to show a lack of faith in his God. So he attended. When it was announced that it was time for the human sacrifice, Nommensen stood up and said:

The spirit that summons you to death couldn't possibly be your grandfather, who loves you; for a grandfather does not wish death for his grandchildren. The sacrifice is rather from the devil, who is delighted when men butcher one another. But God loves you and wants to save you from all your misery.<sup>3</sup>

The Bataks were so impressed by this forthright message of God's love that they offered up no human sacrifices at all.

Nommensen's persistent display of *agape* gradually drew individuals to him who listened to his message. And on August 27, 1865, four men with their wives and five children were baptized. This Baptism took place only after a thorough study of Luther's Small Catechism and of the Bible. These converts were quickly tested in their young faith. They were driven from their rice fields, their gardens, their orchards, their villages, for leaving the tradition of their elders (*ibid.*, p. 136). This sort of trying persecution was waged also against succeeding converts.

But as in the New Testament days, the severe persecutions purified the young Batak Church, and wherever these young Christians went they witnessed to their Lord Christ.

Nommensen furnishes important clues to his missionary approach in one of his descriptions of a Sunday service:

On Sunday we gather together early after eating and consider with one another a section of the Bible as long as we can until we are disturbed by others. There is no sermon, but instead an edifying hour where each may speak. With song and prayer begun and ended. Afterward the baptized and the catechumens go together into some village in order to speak with younger companions about their soul's salvation. [*Ibid.*, p. 137]

Gradually the growth of the young Batak Church gained momentum. In 1877, though the church was still small in number, Nommensen had the faith and the foresight to establish a theo-

<sup>3</sup> Arno Lehmann, *Gottes Volk in Vielen Ländern* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1955), p. 135.

logical training school. In 1878 he completed a translation of the Batak New Testament. By 1894 the Rev. P. H. Johannsen had published a Batak translation of the Old Testament.

At the death of Nommensen in 1918 the little Batak Church had grown to include about 180,000 baptized members. The 510 schools had an enrollment of 32,700 pupils. And the church was led by 34 ordained nationals, 788 Batak teachers, and 2,200 elders. (*Ibid.*, p. 143)

It may be stated that no one man helped shape the Batak Church more than did its pioneer missionary Nommensen, who guided it for 54 years. The conviction, the courage, the sympathy of this man still burn strongly in the minds of the Batak Christians. Nommensen's picture is found in nearly all the churches of Batakland today.

In attempting to list the human factors involved in the remarkable growth of the Batak Church, a report for the Madras meeting of the International Missionary Council in 1938 states:

The people are endowed with qualities that mark them as a superior race. Energy, independence, self-confidence, aggressiveness, and a direct approach to the problems of their environment are traits which ensure the progress of the people in the Christian life.

The salubrious climate and the high elevation of their country has undoubtedly contributed to the energy of the Bataks and their capacity for action.

The location in the inaccessible interior of a great island has enhanced their racial solidarity and their cultural and political independence.

The primitive, animistic nature of the religion of four-fifths of the population, as contrasted with the Islamic faith and culture of their neighbors.

The honoring by the church of the customary law of the people and its incorporation with Christian teaching and practice.

The early recognition that the support of the church was their responsibility and that the Rhenish Mission was a source of spiritual and not material aid.

The policy of protection and aid on the part of a sympathetic government.

The church is the cultural as well as the spiritual home of the community.

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The activity of the layman in the life of the church.

The genius for colonization.

The missionary enthusiasm of the Batak Church and missionary qualities of the people. [Davis, p. 416]

All of these human factors that combined to create a growing church are, of course, gifts of an almighty and loving God. But God used Nommensen to help produce at least five of these factors. It was Nommensen who first honored the people's customs and laws that agreed with Scripture. It was Nommensen who led the people to see their responsibility to support their church. It was Nommensen who urged the people to continue their folk dances and folk songs. It was Nommensen who encouraged from the very beginning much lay and missionary activity.

In 1930 the church was given a constitution. The Ephorus (a bishop with a limited term) was, however, a German missionary until 1939, when the outbreak of war brought tremendous changes to the church. The German missionaries were withdrawn, and in the testing fires of war, Japanese occupation, and several years' unrest and fighting in the Indonesian war for independence, the Batak Church became a truly independent church. (Lund-Quist, p. 203)

### PRESENT LIFE OF THE BATAK CHURCH

The Batak Protestant Christian Church is now the largest Lutheran church body outside the Western world. It numbers almost 700,000 bronze Christians, with over 1,100 congregations, 160 ordained ministers (ibid.), 1,500 teacher-preachers and catechists, 40 Bible women, and about 9,000 elders.<sup>4</sup> Its present head is the revered Ephorus Dr. Justus Sihombing, whose headquarters are in Tarutung, in the heart of rice-farming Batakland.

In 1956, 60 men graduated from the theological training institution of the church, which has been relocated and is now being developed, with LWF, Rhenish Mission, and Batak staff, in Siantar. The seminary project is one of several reconstruction and development programs which are being carried out with LWF aid. (Lund-Quist, p. 203)

Rhenish mission policy and Batak hunger for education has made

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<sup>4</sup> Abdel Ross Wentz, ed., *The Lutheran Churches of the World, 1952* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1952), p. 263.

the Batak school system the most extensive in Indonesia. Batak teachers are found throughout the nation. In 1954 the Batak school system was capped by the establishment of Nommensen University. (Ibid.)

The Batak Church applied for membership in LWF in 1951. Although Luther's Small Catechism had always been used by the Batak Church and although the Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism had been included in the 1930 constitution as confessional bases, the Batak Church chose to draw up its own confession for admission into LWF. The *Confession of Faith of the Huria Kristen Batak Protestant*, adopted by the Great Synod in November 1951, at Sipoholon-Tarutung, was the first indigenous Asian confession ever drawn up.

#### INNER LIFE OF BATAK CHURCH

A German pastor who visited the Batak church shortly after World War II stated that many things "indicate that a rich inner life pulsates in these congregations." (Lehmann, p. 144)

To bear out his observation the pastor points to a prominent youth activity that is far more than mere activity:

A large number of younger girls and fellows have founded a youth organization for themselves. "Tools of Christ" they call themselves. They are taught in an evening on a special topic. Chiefly Bible knowledge of the Old and New Testaments is shared. Along with that, church history is studied to a great extent. Then they are instructed practically on how one invites heathen and lax Christians to God's Word. On Sunday evenings these young people go through villages that are close to them and invite people to visit the worship celebration. Also in the week they go into houses and tell of the Lord Christ. It is astounding with what eagerness and devotion they carry out this service as tools of Christ. [Ibid.]

Fredrik Schiotz, visiting the Bataks as one of two LWF representatives in 1949, reported that the Ephorus, in his messages to the pastors and the people, reflected "an alert concern for the life and faith of his people."<sup>5</sup> For instance, the Batak Church head stressed the necessity for the faithful use of the family altar and sounded an alarm against the tendency to revert to paganism.

<sup>5</sup> Fredrik A. Schiotz, "A Visit Among the Bataks in Indonesia," *Lutheran World Review*, II (July 1949), 48.

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In the very early days of the church the practice of ringing the church bell at regular intervals each day to remind the people to meditate and pray was conscientiously observed. Wherever the people were when the bell rang—in the field, at home, on the road—they would stop and pray. But this custom has fallen into disuse in most communities.

Church attendance is very high—from 90 to 95 per cent of the people every Sunday.

The church leaders in 1938 felt compelled to limit the celebration of the Lord's Supper to only two or three times a year "in the effort to keep these as holy days and to avoid their secularization" (Davis, p. 442). Reportedly recent converts from paganism often regard the elements of the Eucharist as magical medicine for sin.

## MISSIONARY OUTREACH

The Batak Church has been a witnessing church from the beginning. Part of Nommensen's Bible and catechetical study was an actual sending out of the young Christians to witness to their Lord Christ.

In 1899 a Batak missionary movement was begun in the Samosir Island, Simalungun, and Dairi districts, where Christians are still a minority. Since 1921 this movement has been called the Zending Batak (Batak Missionary Society). It is now the foreign mission agency of the church, with a field in the Mentawai Island group west of Sumatra. The older mission fields have gradually been assimilated into the Batak Church as districts. (Lund-Quist, p. 202)

In 1938 Merle Davis reported to the IMC that the Batak Church had caught a vision of the whole Batak race under the sway of Christ and that they were pressing toward this goal. At that time 50 to 60 Batak missionaries were being supported from the annual missionary budget of over 20,000 guilders. (Davis, p. 449)

Numerous examples of remarkable witnessing have been recorded in various sources. During the Japanese occupation, for instance, a village suspected by the Japanese to contain an Allied informer was lined up before a firing squad and given five minutes to divulge the information. The Christians of the village instinctively fell upon their knees and calmly commended their souls in prayer to the grace of God. The example made such an impression on the

pagans of the village, who pleaded with the Christians to pray for them, that after the Japanese miraculously did not fulfill their threat, 500 of the pagan villagers began their baptismal instruction. (Lehmann, p. 144)

In the following report the mission challenge that confronts the Batak Church is clearly described.

You might almost say that the Batak church stands today where the early church stood at the Jerusalem Council: a homogeneous, tribal church standing on the threshold of moving out into the Gentile world. It is a one-people, one-language, one-*adat* community, but as *the* Christian body in Sumatra, destined to become something more.

It may be that in facing this cultural revolution and, even more, in accepting her missionary responsibility for those outside the tribal boundaries, the Batak church may be forced into a theological era. Up to now, as with most younger churches, theology has been an imported commodity. But a living theology cannot be imported; in fact, it is doubtful it can be taught. It simply arises when the church confronts the world, when she seeks to express her faith in intelligible terms for the edification of her own constituency and for proclaiming the truths of Jesus Christ to those outside.<sup>6</sup>

#### CLINGING ANIMISTIC AND PAGAN BELIEFS

The problem of recurring animism plagues the Batak Church everywhere, but especially in certain communities where "mass" conversions have taken place and the instruction has been rather superficial. The remedy that the Batak Church was applying to this situation in 1938 was

to place the best trained Batak ministers among these people for personal teaching in their homes, for Bible study classes and the training of the children. All who wish to be confirmed must attend classes twice a week for a whole year. These classes give instruction in the nature of Christianity, in personal and community conduct, and in the Bible. [Davis, p. 441]

In the matter of parental discipline the tenacity of animistic beliefs seems especially clear. It is probably the result of these beliefs that so many Batak parents do everything their children

<sup>6</sup> Keith Bridston, "A Younger Church in Stormy Seas," *Lutheran World*, II (Spring 1955), 74.

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demand or desire and consequently the children do not obey their parents.

According to animistic belief the soul is pre-existent, self-willed, and will continue to live after the death of the body. To offend a child's desires therefore is to offend the child's soul, and this offense might cause the soul to leave the body for spite, resulting in the child's sickness or death.<sup>7</sup> Christian parents, of course, without holding to the animistic belief, may easily continue the pattern of pampering.

## THE "ADAT"

The unwritten ethical code of conduct for the Bataks is called the adat. With slight changes in the adat it became possible to put the seal of Christ upon these rules of conduct. Church organization, attendance, and discipline, the prerogatives and duties of the pastor, church official, and member, have all found their way into the adat, along with the ancient Batak sanctions. That the German missionaries decided to Christianize the adat and to use it as a basic moral code has been hailed as a "notable decision, since under it the Batak people could be brought into the church without severing them from their inheritance." (Davis, p. 119)

Christianizing a pagan moral code seems like a process plagued with the pitfalls of syncretism. But two characteristics of the *adat* made it fairly safe for the missionaries to Christianize it. Unlike most pagan codes of conduct, the Batak adat hardly touched on idol worship and sacrifice to the gods and enjoined fidelity in the marriage relationship and provided a strict code of public morals. (Ibid., p. 637)

The adat was considered by Rhenish missionaries as a divine revelation — marred by man's sin. And the Bataks themselves saw very clearly that it fell far short of God's revelation in Scripture and in Jesus Christ.

When the Bataks first heard the Ten Commandments, while admitting their superiority, they remarked on their similarity to the common law. When told of the saving power of Christ, they said: "Our *adat* tells us to do this and not to do that but gives us

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<sup>7</sup> Andar Lumbantobing, "Christian Education in the Batak Church," *Lutheran World*, II (Autumn 1955), 293.

no power to follow its commands. Christ's *adat* is like ours, and even more exacting, but He gives men power to obey." [Ibid.]

In its *Confession of Faith* the Batak Church states very clearly: "We also oppose the idea that the church should be based on the *adat*." (Art. VIII, Sec. A, Par. 4)

As carefully, however, as the missionaries apparently purified the *adat*, the people undoubtedly did not forget some of the discarded portions of the *adat*. Julia Sarumpaet-Hutabarat, leader of Batak Christian women, in addressing an assembly of Batak women in 1955, warned them not to take seriously the disgrace which the *adat* heaps upon mothers without sons and urged the women to understand the freedom that women have in Christ:

We women — we refuse to be used by the *adat* as a tool for the enlargement of our tribe. We are free people, redeemed by Christ. We do not want to be tools used by men, since we are now to be handmaids of the Lord, to praise His name, to do His will, and to expand His kingdom.

This makes us worthwhile — this is an honor above all things which cannot be taken from us by anyone.<sup>8</sup>

Though the pastors and leaders of the Batak Church are very certain about the difference between the old *adat* and the *adat* of Jesus Christ, the ongoing problem of the church is to make this distinction clear in the minds of the people.

### THE YOUTH

In their visit to Batakland in 1948, two LWF representatives noted especially among the younger pastors and teachers an anxious concern for the youth in their parishes and for the young men who serve in the army. (Schiotz, p. 48)

In 1938 Merle Davis of the IMC could confidently assert that "some are drifting away, but on the whole the Batak Church is holding its youth." Davis observed that when the youth leave their family environment, where they are often indifferent or hypercritical toward their faith, and meet Mohammedans and Roman Catholics, they become more serious about their faith. These new contacts compel them to think and to examine the basis of

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<sup>8</sup> Julia Sarumpaet-Hutabarat, "Women under the *Adat*," *Lutheran World*, I (Summer 1955), 125.

their belief. "Until they have to fight for their faith, they find it easy to be indifferent or skeptical of its value." (Ibid.)

Andar Lumbantobing, writing for the *Lutheran World* in 1958, gives a firsthand, up-to-date picture of the church's task of holding the youth:

During the Japanese occupation youth work suffered so grievously that only ruins remained. The new system claimed the time of young people to such a degree that their strength and all their interest had to be devoted exclusively to the new ideas. Thus the youth became indifferent to all religion. Dissolution spread when the fight for liberty with the Dutch government began. Indonesia's freedom demanded all one's thought and time. [See fn. 7 above]

This same Lumbantobing was so distressed about the pitifully low Bible knowledge among the Batak youth that he felt even four years of confirmation instruction, instead of the usual two, would not likely remedy the situation. He noted, too, that many of the teachers, since the Japanese occupation and independence, have drifted from the church. (Ibid.)

#### FINANCES

Though the Batak Church has met its financial needs for many years, the problem of progress in this area is pressing. The financial needs cannot but grow as the progressive Bataks emigrate from their mountain valleys to the cities and the church becomes progressively urban. At present no less than 100 churches are under construction or repair, without aid from abroad. (Lund-Quist, p. 204)

The LWF has assisted the Batak Church in its financial problems, especially to help make possible Nommensen University with its three faculties — theology, economics, and technology.

A special strain was placed on the financial program of the Batak Church soon after the war for independence, when the church was forced to support one of two mission hospitals and 28 clinics which previously had been supported by the Dutch government.

#### LEADERSHIP

The pattern of leadership in the Batak Church has been basically the same since the beginning. Now the ordained pastor serves 8 to 14 congregations, but each congregation has its own teacher-

preacher, who serves in the capacity of a pastor except for administering the Sacraments. Lay presbyters work very closely with the teacher-preacher in each congregation in making calls, taking care of finances, and the like. The 1,100 congregations average about 625 baptized members apiece.

Rajah B. Manikam, in his report on the Asian Lutheran churches in *Lutheran Churches of the World*, believes that the lay leadership of the Batak congregations that has worked so well in the past will not be satisfactory in the future (ibid.). The development of Nommensen University's theological faculty promises to help meet the need for an increased number of trained ministers.

Up to the present the teacher-preachers and the other teachers have been trained in college for three years. The best of these teachers are then selected, after ten years' experience, for a special theological training of two years. After this time they are ordained and placed in their parish of 8 to 14 congregations. A few of the pastors have studied six years at the theological college in Djakarta.<sup>9</sup>

#### NATIONALISM

A thread that can be seen running through all the facets of the life of the Batak Church is nationalism. The fight for freedom has drawn the attention of the youth. The freedom movement has lured many Christian teachers away from their faith in Jesus Christ to faith in rational enlightenment and in self-government.

The surge for independence ran high in the minds of the Bataks even before 1935. By that time a group of 75 congregations had broken away from the Batak Church because the people felt that the missionaries were desiring to hold them back.<sup>10</sup>

It seems clear that the leaders of the Batak Church have not been swept off their feet by the radical tide of nationalism. They consider themselves Christians first and Indonesians second. The church leaders went out of their way to make two representatives of the LWF welcome right in the midst of the fierce, emotional war for independence. The church stood the risk of being labeled "pro-Western" and "procolonial" in welcoming a Westerner at that freedom-pitched time.

<sup>9</sup> *The Growing Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), p. 134.

<sup>10</sup> Alexander McLeisch, ed. *The Netherlands Indies* (London: World Dominion Press, 1935), p. 121.

But nationalism is not only a problem for the Batak Church. It is also an asset. The drive for independence by Indonesians that spilled over into the life of the Bataks was well channeled into a drive to become a self-supporting, self-propagating, and self-governing church.

#### EXTENT OF REFORMED INFLUENCE

To say that the life and teachings of the Batak Church have not been influenced at all by the Reformed elements in some of the Rhenish missionaries is to be blind to the inevitable. Winburn Thomas stated recently that "each of the missions operating in Indonesia has had a strong 'Reformed' base," including the "Rhenish mission, which was the parent of the Batak Church."<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, Merle Davis, writing his own impressions of the Batak Church's theology as part of a report to the 1938 Tambaram conference of the IMC, stated that "the influence of Lutheran theology is evident in the work of the mission." (Davis, p. 420)

In order to determine the extent of Reformed influence on the Batak Church, it is not really valid to try to find out how much Reformed theology has rubbed off on some of the people and their pastors. This testing of the theology of individuals would find any Lutheran church body short of Lutheranism. Rather one must study the confession of the church, its standard of teaching: *Confession of Faith of the Huria Kristen Batak Protestant*, adopted in 1951.

It is true that some churches have token symbols that are not taken seriously and therefore cannot be used as criteria for judging the church's actual teachings. But there is no indication that the Batak Church considers its symbol lightly. On the contrary, its confession stresses the fact that it is to be used as a basis in preaching, teaching, and public life and as the basis on which to "reject every false doctrine and heresy that is contrary to God's Word." (Preamble, Pars. 3, 4)

Concerning the Scriptures, the Batak confession states that "the words written in the Bible . . . are certainly words of God." It emphasizes the doctrine that "the Holy Scripture is completely

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<sup>11</sup> Winburn T. Thomas, "Indonesia and the Indonesian Church in Today's World," *Occasional Bulletin*, IX (Feb. 10, 1958), 6.

sufficient to reveal God's being and His will and . . . instruct what to believe to gain eternal life." (Art. IV)

The *Confession of Faith* states emphatically that it rejects "the doctrine that the Holy Spirit can descend upon somebody through his own preparation beyond the Gospel." (Art. III, Sec. C)

The sacraments are regarded very highly. According to the confession the second feature of the true church, after the pure preaching of the Gospel, is "the proper administering of the sacraments ordered by the Lord Jesus" (Art. VIII, Sec. D). The second aspect of the church's service, after the preaching of the Gospel, is "the administering of the two sacraments." (Art. IX)

The confession speaks of the sacraments as means of God's grace in these terms: "The Lord Jesus Christ has ordered them for His congregation in order to grant His invisible grace, namely: remission of sin, redemption, life and glory, which are to be won by faith, through visible signs." (Art. IX)

The sacramental presence of Christ in the elements of the Eucharist is affirmed by the confession: "The holy communion is the eating of the bread by means of which we are given the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the drinking of the wine by means of which we are given the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, whereby we receive redemption from sin, and life, and glory." (Art. X, Sec. B)

Contrary to the unionistic latitudinarianism common to some Reformed churches, the Batak confession stresses as one of the responsibilities of the church "the preserving of pure doctrine, the exercise of proper discipline and the opposing of false doctrine." (Art. IX)

The confession rejects many false teachings that are assaulting the Batak Church, including the errors of animism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Mohammedanism, legalistic sectarian bodies, and Roman Catholicism. It also maintains a Scriptural stand on church unity:

There is one Church. The basis is Ephesians 4:4; 1 Cor. 12:20  
There is one body, that is the Church, and even though there are many members, there is but one body.

This unity of the Church is different from secular unity, because it is a spiritual unity. (John 17:20,21)

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According to this doctrine we reject any separations of churches that are not based on differences of faith, but only on external reasons. (Art. VIII, Sec. D)

In matters of ceremony the Batak confession breathes the true Lutheran spirit of freedom. And instead of a Reformed deprecation of ceremony the confession encourages observance of the church year and the use of "a church order [apparently an order of service] which is based upon the Holy Scriptures." (Art. XI)

It is true that the confession of the Batak Church nowhere rejects Reformed theology. Nor is it an exhaustive treatment of the doctrines of Christianity. In certain places the meaning of the terminology or the import of the statement is not very clear-cut—due in part, undoubtedly, to translation difficulties and also to the non-Western cultural background against which it is written.

But as a confession written by a church less than 100 years old against the assaults of extreme nationalism, animism, perverted Roman Catholicism, and legalistic sectarianism, the Batak confession seems to be a remarkable Biblical assertion of the Christian faith according to the Lutheran tradition—untrammelled by Reformed theology.

WHY NOT OTHER LUTHERAN SYMBOLS?

The Batak confession in its preamble subscribes to the three ecumenical creeds as confessional bases, but the confession makes no mention of the 16th-century Lutheran Confessions. Why not? Paul C. Empie, executive director of the National Lutheran Council, speaking on behalf of LWF, explained it this way:

When the Batak church first applied for membership [in LWF], its application was denied on the ground that its constitution did not contain a doctrinal basis in harmony with the Lutheran Confessions. After some years of study the Batak church revised its constitution, incorporating the essential elements of the Lutheran Confessions as its doctrinal basis, phrased in its own terminology. For obvious reasons it preferred not to use Western terminology at a time when in many parts of the Far East resurgent nationalism looks with suspicion on churches which have ties with the West and at times accuses Christianity of being merely the religious expression of Western colonial nations. The LWF Membership Committee chaired by the late Bishop Hans Meiser studied this

constitution carefully and reported its judgment that although the explicit language of the Augsburg Confession is not used therein, the essential substance is in fact there so that the Batak church may be regarded as meeting the requirements of LWF membership.<sup>12</sup>

Empie claims that the Batak Church in accepting the LWF constitution, which includes the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and the other confessions of the *Book of Concord* as confessional bases, "has officially indicated its acceptance of the historic Confessions of the Lutheran Church." (Ibid.)

The drive for freedom in Southeast Asia and the aggressive independence of the Batak people is advanced as a reason to explain why the Batak Church drew up its own confession. It also reflects a desire for a living, indigenous confession, which speaks the church's faith to the problems and culture of its environment. It is furthermore urged that the omission of the 16th-century confessions should be considered in the light of the non-West's reaction against everything peculiarly Western and of the Batak Church's concern not to throw a Western block in the way of the universal Gospel.

#### A LIVING CHURCH WITH A MISSION

The foundations of the young, virile Batak Church were well laid by Nommensen and other pioneer missionaries. Bible study, active lay witnessing, and prayer are trademarks of the Batak Church. The church has declared itself Lutheran and has drawn up a confession to meet its own needs. Now it has a mission to perform. In the face of radical nationalism, clinging animism, Roman Catholicism, Adventist and Pentecostal legalism, and on-rushing Mohammedanism, the Batak Church stands poised to carry the Gospel to all Indonesia and into the rest of the world.

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<sup>12</sup> Paul C. Empie, "Comments on the Missouri Synod's Study Outline Re the LWF," *American Lutheran*, XLI (June 1958), 8 f.

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