

## From Conflict to Reconciliation: The Case of the *Gondang Sabangunan* in the Order of Discipline of the Toba Batak Protestant Church

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*Since German missionaries arrived in the Batak Lands in the early 1860s, the Toba Batak Protestant Church has struggled with its relationship to the indigenous cosmology and belief system known as adat. Using the performance of ceremonial music and dance as a case study, this article explores the impact of continuing local respect for adat on the development of Church policy over 140 years.*

The purpose of this article is to explore the history of and consequences for Toba Batak Protestant Church policy of 140 years of contact with the indigenous Toba cosmology and belief system known as *adat*. While many studies of culture contact emphasise the effect of the imported on the indigenous belief system, this article explores what Lorraine Aragon calls the importance of local agency, that is, the extent to which the converts were able to influence and effect changes to a foreign religious orthodoxy.<sup>1</sup> It is also concerned with the Church's efforts to impose and enforce its discipline. The impact of Christianity on the *adat* practice of contemporary Toba Protestants is the subject of a separate study;<sup>2</sup> my focus here is on the history of the Church's response to conflicts arising through an interaction between divergent worldviews, belief systems and cultural practices.

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1 Lorraine Aragon, *Fields of the Lord: Animism, Christian minorities, and state development in Indonesia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), p. 36.

2 See Maully Purba, 'Gondang *sabangunan* among the Protestant Toba Batak people in the 1990s', *Context*, 23 (2002): 5–22.

Together with the Dutch colonial administration, the Lutheran Christian missionaries of the Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft (RMG) from Wuppertal-Barmen, Germany, left a deep imprint on Toba Batak culture; indeed, they were the primary agents of social change. They introduced the people to a new religion and culture, including a new educational and legal system, commercial goods, life-style, music and instruments as well as a different system of administration. Christianisation and colonisation simultaneously contributed to the major cultural transformation of Toba society beginning around the 1860s and extending to the present time. Though the aims of Church and government were not always congruent, Christianity was colonially protected and the Protestant Church enjoyed a virtual monopoly on missionary activity until the 1930s. So successful were the German missionaries in proselytising in the Toba region that from the end of the nineteenth century a motto spread to the effect that 'to be Toba Batak means to be Christian', meaning that Toba Batak identity included being Christian.<sup>3</sup>

The Toba Batak Protestant Church is now one of the largest Christian denominations in Southeast Asia and a significant Christian presence in a predominantly Muslim country. Excluding people who belong to other Christian denominations such as Catholics, Methodists and Pentecostals, almost 2 million Toba Batak people are registered today as members of the two biggest Protestant Church institutions, the Huria Kristen Batak Protestan (Protestant Christian Toba Batak Church, HKBP) and the Gereja Kristen Protestan Indonesia (Protestant Christian Indonesian Church, GKPI, founded by a breakaway group of dissident HKBP Toba Batak ministers in Pematang Siantar in 1964).<sup>4</sup> At the time of my fieldwork in 1994, the HKBP had 2,548 churches with 1,598,346 members while the GKPI owned 895 churches with 239,258 members.<sup>5</sup> The Church's policy is set out in the *Order of Discipline of the Church* (known in the Toba Batak language as *Ruhut-ruhut Paminsangon*); this is the official pronouncement of the Church Synod (an administrative body) about the rules and disciplines, based on Christian teachings, which regulates appropriate behaviour for congregations and carries the force of law. There have been seven *Orders of Discipline* to date; the current *Order of Discipline*, with its partial accommodation of *adat*, was formulated in 1987 (HKBP) and 1982 (GKPI).

It is not my purpose here to discuss the reasons why Toba Bataks accepted Protestant Christianity with such enthusiasm. More important, from the Church's point of view, is the question of why, notwithstanding their veneration for the Protestant God, the people's loyalty to certain aspects of their ancestral cosmologies and belief systems (known collectively as *adat*) has proved to be so tenacious. The particular focus of this

3 Paul B. Pedersen, *Batak blood and Protestant soul: The development of national Batak churches in North Sumatra* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1970), p. 69; F. H. Sianipar, 'Suatu problem tentang metode theologia dalam ketegangan yang dialami oleh masyarakat Batak Kristen masa kini', in *Syarat tulisan/pidato dibacakan Pada Upacara Pengangkatan Guru Besar dalam Ilmu Theologia Sistematika di Fakultas Theologia Universitas H.K.B.P. Nommensen Pematang Siantar Pada tanggal 22 Oktober 1973* (Pematang Siantar: Lembaga Penelitian dan Studi, Universitas H.K.B.P. Nommensen, 1973), p. 8; A. Lumbantobing, *Makna wibawa jabatan dalam Gereja Batak*, ed. K. M. Lumbantobing *et al.* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 1992), p. 79; Lothar Schreiner, *Adat dan injil*, tr. P. S. Naipospos *et al.* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 1994), p. 11.

4 According to Pedersen (*Batak blood*, p. 177), the GKPI has the same confessional as the HKBP but established its own polity and organisations.

5 See *Almanak Huria Kristen Batak Protestan 1993* (Tarutung: Kantor Pusat H.K.B.P., 1994), p. 380 and *Almanak Gereja Kristen Protestan Indonesia 1994* (Pematang Siantara: Kantor Pusat G.K.P.I., 1994), p. 521.

study is the Church's changing attitude towards the performance of Toba ceremonial music and dance – the *gondang sabangunan* and *tortor* respectively – and the survival of these traditions despite a 59-year civil ban (from 1879 to 1938) and continuing Church prohibition. A study of the Church's efforts to come to terms with this single problematic element of *adat* and the congregants' efforts to accommodate the Church's dicta can serve as a paradigm/case study for the dilemmas arising, in Aragon's words, from an encounter 'piloted by different spiritual and political forces whose invisibility to the other was inexplicable as well as frustrating'.<sup>6</sup> For whereas the traditional view saw *gondang sabangunan* as an integral part of *adat* ritual whose purpose was inseparably tied to worship, the Church could only find it acceptable if it were recontextualised in a framework of Christian teaching.

Toba Batak individuals and social groups adhere to a variety of religious beliefs, ranging from wholly *adat*-oriented animist groups to wholly Christian-oriented groups with a range of negotiated accommodations in-between. The tenacity of the *gondang-tortor* tradition at *adat* feasts in contemporary Toba Batak society is due to the continuance of strong *adat* values and practices; this attachment is not purely an emotional one, it is also political and ethnic.<sup>7</sup> This study distinguishes three eras in the history of contact between Christianity and *adat* over the question of *gondang sabangunan* and *tortor*: colonial conflict under the German missionaries (1860s to 1940), reconciliation under the Toba Batak ministers (to the 1970s) and the continued survival of pre-Christian *adat* and musical performing arts in the modern world (the 1980s to the present).

### Pre-Christian religious belief

Why did Toba Bataks practice *adat* before they embraced Christianity? Originally, a person's individual social life was pervaded with religious meaning, directed by religious motives and surrounded by supernatural concepts about the gods. Traditionally, Toba Bataks believed that these supernatural powers had passed *adat* on to them and could bestow blessings on them; its authority was enforced and reinforced by the spirits of the ancestors.<sup>8</sup> The three foremost blessings were *hasangapon* (community respect, authority and prestige); *hagabeon* (having many children); and *hamoraon* (prosperity). To obtain blessings one had to maintain a good relationship with the gods, the ancestral spirits and relatives in one's wife-giver group (*hula-hula*). Thus the main purposes of practising *adat* were to attract blessings (restoration of harmony, assurance of fertility and protection of the welfare of villages and towns and their inhabitants) and avoid *adat* sanctions. Disobedience toward *adat* was believed to result in infertility, disease, disaster and crop failure.<sup>9</sup>

When *adat* is practised at celebrations, it is called *ulaon adat* or *pesta adat* ('*adat* feasts'). *Adat* feasts can be divided into two categories on the basis of the participants: *horja* and *pesta bius*. In general, *horja* are associated with ceremonial feasts performed at the clan (*marga*) level. At a *horja*, participants consist of the male descendants of a clan (*dongan sabutuha*) as well as those who 'give' their daughters or sisters in marriage

6 Aragon, *Fields of the Lord*, p. 16.

7 On the paradoxical outcomes of government policy, see Purba, 'Gondang sabangunan', p. 6 and note 3.

8 Pedersen, *Batak blood*, pp. 23, 31.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 36; the blessings are discussed in Philip O. L. Tobing, *The structure of the Toba-Batak belief in the High God* (Amsterdam: South and South-East Celebes Institute for Culture, 1963), pp. 132–3.

(*hula-hula*) and those who ‘receive’ wives in marriage (*boru*). (In Toba Batak the relationship between these three parties is known as the *dalihan na tolu* [‘three hearth stones’]). The central purpose of the *horja* is the strengthening of social relationships and the worship of ancestral spirits.<sup>10</sup> The people usually refer to the *pesta bius* as a communal sacrificial ceremony (*mamele* or *pamelean*) in which the participants worship gods. A *pesta bius* is organised by an indigenous religious council (*parbaringin*) and led by the *pande bolon*, the leader of the *parbaringin*. It is attended by members of several different villages, the federation of which is known in Toba Batak as *bius*.<sup>11</sup> At a *pesta bius*, various communal religious ceremonies such as *mangase taon* (an annual sacrificial ceremony celebrating the year of rice-growing season) and *mamele sombaon* (a ceremony invoking ancestral spirits that are believed to become gods) are performed and the role of the three kinship parties (*dalihan na tolu*) is ignored. At present the Toba Batak people still perform *horja*, but no longer practise *pesta bius*.

*Adat* feasts are formal, distinctive social events governed by traditional laws. Exclusive, highly organised and structured, they are part of daily social life, but they do not happen every day. They have specific functions – to celebrate a wedding day or conduct a funeral; to welcome a newborn baby; to start erecting a new village or house; to celebrate moving into a new house, the rice-growing season or the harvest; or simply for religious expression, to worship the ancestral spirits, gods and other supernatural powers. Unlike routine daily life, participants at feasts communicate or interact with each other through formal *adat* speeches, exchange ceremonial gifts such as the traditional shawl (*ulos*), and consume consecrated meals and drink (*sipanganon namarhadohoan*) to the accompaniment of the *gondang* and the *tortor*. At *adat* feasts, participants also communicate with supernatural powers by uttering ritual prayers (*tonggo-tonggo*) and presenting offerings of foods, slaughtered livestock and incense.

Scholars paid little attention to *adat* until about three decades or so after the publication of J. C. Vergouwen’s 1933 book *The social organisation and customary law of the Toba Batak of Northern Sumatra*. From the late 1950s Toba Batak *adat* began to attract attention in books, articles and monographs.<sup>12</sup> Most importantly for this study, *adat* was also introduced as a topic for Church seminars. Today, it remains a social issue that generates

10 Situmorang, *Toba na sae* (Jakarta: Pustaka Sinar Harapan, 1993), further observes that the *horja* was usually led by clan elders, sometimes including the *datu bolon*, a professional medicine-man who is qualified in magic practices as well as in spirit invocation (p. 114).

11 Discussion of the term ‘*bius*’ as a territory and a communal sacrificial ceremony can be found in J. C. Vergouwen, *The social organisation and customary law of the Toba-Batak of northern Sumatra*, tr. Jeune Scott-Kemball (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), pp. 88–91; Batara Sangti, ‘Hakekat kebaktian di dalam masyarakat Batak’, in *Studi pemribumian liturgia dan kebaktian* (Pematang Siantar: Indonesian Regional Asia Program for Advanced Studies, 1977), p. 15; D. George Sherman, *Rice, rupees and ritual: Economy and society among the Samosir Batak of Sumatra* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 80–90 and Situmorang, *Toba na sae*, pp. 56–80. Lance Castles, ‘The political life of a Sumatran Residency: Tapanuli 1915–1940’ (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1972) refers to the *bius* as ‘the key institution of established paganism’ (p. 87).

12 See, for example, Tobing, *Structure of the Toba-Batak belief*; Edward M. Bruner, ‘The Toba Batak village’, in *Local, ethnic, and national loyalties in village Indonesia: A symposium*, ed. G. William Skinner (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies Cultural Report Series, 1959), pp. 52–64; R. P. Tampubolon, *Pustaka tumbaga holing: Adat Batak-Patik/Uhum* (Pematang Siantar, n.p., 1964); N. Siahaan, *Sejarah kebudayaan Batak* (Medan: C. V. Napatipulu and Sons, 1964); and Schreiner, *Adat dan injil*.

discussions by many local and foreign scholars, *adat* practitioners and ministers. Often these discussions in local newspapers and magazines become quite polemical.<sup>13</sup>

Writers from different disciplines have proposed various definitions of *adat*. Each of the definitions makes reference to different details, yet all of them indicate that the concept of *adat* includes the implementation of the pre-Christian Toba Batak belief system. The most useful definition is that *adat* is a continually changing system of social, ethical and religious principles and practices that governs the social and religious life of a community. Thus, *adat* includes civil laws, social ethics, markers of stylistic identity and lifestyle and norms of religious and ritual performance practice. Legally, it controls people's use and occupation of unused lands, management of their farms and irrigation systems, the system of inheritance and the tradition of marriage.<sup>14</sup> In terms of social ethics, it directs people as regards proper behaviour towards their kinfolk and their environment, and it also includes the kinship system. As a marker of stylistic identity in the arts and lifestyle, it governs ritual, music, dance and social behaviour – as practised, for example, at weddings, pre-funeral ceremonies and exhumation of bones ceremonies. *Adat* is realised in the indigenous religion, which Christian missionaries and Christianised Toba Batak refer to as *hasipelebeguan* (spirit beliefs [paganism]).

The *gondang sabangunan* was, and still is, the musical symbol of *adat*. Its performance was/is an integral part of traditional Toba Batak religious and cultural practices, serving not only to accompany the ceremonial dancing of *tortor* at all *adat* feasts but, most importantly, as a communicative medium that strengthens relationships between individuals, groups of people, the gods (e.g., Mula Jadi Na Bolon, Batara Guru, Soripada, Mangala Bulan, Saniang Naga Laut, Boraspati ni Tano) and the ancestral spirits. For centuries Toba Bataks practised *gondang* and *tortor* as part of their religious observances, applying specific social and religious rules known as *adat ni gondang* (rules for performing *gondang* and *tortor*). These rules guided the ceremonial participants, who comprised ensemble players (*pargonsi*), ceremonial dancers (*panortor*) and ceremonial hosts (*hasuhuton* or *suhut*).

*Gondang sabangunan* consists of *taganing* (five single-headed, conical, tuned braced drums – individually named *tingting*, *paidua ni tingting*, *painonga*, *paidua odap* and *odap-odap* – hung from a wooden beam and struck with a pair of wooden sticks), two bass drums (*gordang* [single-headed drum] and *odap* [double-headed-drum]), four suspended gongs (*oloan*, *ihutan*, *panggora* and *doal*), a *sarune* (double-reed aerophone) and a *hesek* (a metal or glass idiophone beaten with a wooden stick or metal rod).<sup>15</sup> Traditionally, one musician is required for each instrument, except for the *taganing* and the *odap*, which are played simultaneously by the *taganing* player.

*Adat* maintains relationships between living human beings, the ancestral spirits and other gods and guides ritual communications between them. Rituals and religious ceremonies formalise these relationships when the *tortor* is performed, accompanied by

13 Polemical articles that discuss the practice of contemporary *adat* can be found, for example, in the monthly magazine *Bonapasogit*, published by the Toba Batak community in Jakarta.

14 Bruner, 'Toba Batak village', p. 55; Situmorang, *Toba na sae*, pp. 42–5; on the scope of *adat* see also Schreiner, *Adat dan injil*, p. 217.

15 For a complete description of the structure and function of the instruments of the *gondang sabangunan* ensemble, see Mauly Purba, 'Gondang sabangunan ensemble music of the Batak Toba people: Musical instruments, structure, and terminology', *Journal of Musicological Research*, 21, 1–2 (2002): 28–45.



the *gondang sabangunan*. Vergouwen, a former Dutch officer who observed the practice of *adat* and *gondang sabangunan* among the people in the early 1920s, wrote that:

The *gondang* is . . . played when the spirits of the ancestors, the *sumangot ni ompu*, are summoned at ceremonial occasions of all kinds when the presence, benediction and assistance of the revered ancestors are invoked. It is played on the adoption of a name; when a house is consecrated; when sickness and calamities have to be warded off; when the bones of one of the ancestors are reburied, etc.<sup>16</sup>

The late Batak musicologist Liberty Manik observed that ‘in all *adat* and religious feasts the *gondang sabangunan* has a central role to play. The use of the *gondang* is restricted to celebrations that have to do with *adat* and religious practices.’<sup>17</sup>

These opinions were confirmed during my fieldwork. The well-known poet, scholar and activist Sitor Situmorang observes that the *gondang sabangunan* was integral to every pre-Christian Toba Batak *adat* and religious celebration, where it served as a ‘ritual language’, presumably a means of communicating with the gods through music. Amani Bunga Sinaga, a *sarune* player from Palipi, likewise maintains that the performance of the *gondang sabangunan* is restricted to the context of ceremonial events and would otherwise be socially unacceptable.<sup>18</sup> *Gondang* music is definitely not a subordinate constituent of *adat* and religious practices; it is essential for – indeed, inseparable from – the ritual practices involved and may not be performed unless it accompanies a ritual ceremony, where it must be used exclusively to accompany ceremonial dancing. The German theologian Lothar Schreiner argued that *gondang* and ceremony are inseparable from the social life of the people and from ancestor worship.<sup>19</sup>

Traditionally, performing *gondang* music expressed *adat* and/or religious requirements, as did the invitation to the musicians (*pargonsi*) to perform. The musicians were always called the *raja na ualu* (‘the eight kings’), a status attributed to them only on the occasion of their performance of the *gondang sabangunan*. Although they were and are, of course, ordinary people, the musicians become important when performing the *gondang sabangunan* and must be respected and treated as experts. This is why *gondang* musicians are always addressed by the title *pande nami* or *partarias na malo* (‘*gondang* expert’). In pre-Christian times they were even called ‘*batara guru*’, the name of a deity credited with being the source of life and having a deep knowledge of *gondang* music. When people addressed the *pargonsi* by this name, they actually believed the musicians were deified. Ceremonial participants believed that the *pargonsi* could communicate with the deities. Thus *gondang* musicians had a high religious function as persons who could convey the people’s requests to the gods through their music. As Artur Simon writes, the *pargonsi* is a ‘mediator between gods and people’.<sup>20</sup>

16 Vergouwen, *Social organisation*, p. 34; cf. Schreiner, *Adat dan injil*, p. 46 and Sangti, ‘Hakekat kebaktian’, pp. 16–18.

17 Liberty Manik, ‘Suku Batak dengan “gondang Batak”nya’, *Peninjau* [journal published by Lembaga Penelitian dan Studi DGI in Jakarta], 4, 1 (1977): 71–2. All translations are by the author, except where otherwise stated.

18 Sitor Situmorang, personal communication; Amani Bunga Sinaga, interview, October 1994.

19 Lothar Schreiner, ‘Gondang-Musik als Überlieferungsgestalt altvölkischer Lebensordnung’, *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, 126 (1970): 400–28.

20 Artur Simon, ‘Gondang, gods and ancestors. Religious implications of Batak ceremonial music’, *Yearbook of Traditional Music*, 25 (1993): 82; Manik, ‘Suku Batak’, pp. 14, 71.

*Gondang sabangunan* and *tortor* must be performed simultaneously; a *gondang* performance without *tortor* is regarded as incomplete and inconsistent with traditional practice as expressed in the *adat ni gondang*. As the musicians mediate between humans and deities, the purpose of *tortor* is to reinforce social relationships between participants. Like the music, the *tortor* is a ritual language-like means of communication whose purpose is to venerate the gods and the ancestral spirits in religious ceremonies, to honour the wife-giving party at *adat* feasts and to signal respect and blessings. It is a fundamental expression of social and religious organisation.<sup>21</sup> Each person present at an *adat* ceremony – normally hundreds of people – usually has the right (*jambar tortor*) to perform the *tortor*. However, as the *tortor* is normally performed collectively and never solo, the participants divide into groups. A group may represent a particular territory or clan association, or constitute one of the three kinship statuses in the *dalihan na tolu*. Groups usually perform the *tortor* one after the other, in what can be called the ‘*tortor* sequence’. While one group is dancing, other groups usually wait their turn, standing around the arena. Both spectators and musicians become dancers when it is their turn to perform the *tortor*; likewise, when spectators wish to play *gondang* instruments, they may join the musicians. Not many can play difficult instruments such as the *sarune* and the *taganing*; accordingly, those who wish to participate usually choose to play the *ogung* or *hesek*. Thus no clear line can be drawn between musicians, dancers and spectators.

The *tortor* is a spiritual expression; its body movements are performed not for art’s sake, but as offerings (*pelean*) to the deities. Gestures and body movements have symbolic meanings which are understood by the participants. These movements are governed by rules that guide performance behaviour, governing the movement of the parts of a *panortor*’s body, especially the eyes, hands, heads, mouth and feet. The *panortor* must dance in a respectful manner so that the ceremonial participants or spectators (*painondur*) are not offended.

Simon has briefly explored the nature of the social and religious functions of the *gondang sabangunan* and *tortor*. He argues that the performance of music and dance strengthens kinship relationships and further, that in spirit belief practice (*tondi* cults), both *gondang* and *tortor* function as tools to express religious feelings and help dancers achieve possession. Simon admits that the nature of the belief systems as well as the inner intention of the dancers are fundamental to the process of spirit possession, but he believes that the structure of *gondang* music, especially the rhythmic pattern of the *ogung* (‘gong’), actually encourages dancers to achieve possession.<sup>22</sup>

Paul B. Pedersen (a Lutheran pastor), quoting M. L. Siagian (an HKBP elder and head of the steering committee for a 1968 seminar on *adat*, to be discussed below) as late as 1967, identifies *gondang* as one of four instances of conflict between *adat*-sanctioned traditions and Christian responsibility: ‘In the heat of celebration, accompanied by the hypnotic rhythm of the *gondang* gongs, you will sometimes hear the name of the High God, *Ompunta Debata Muladjadi Nabolon*.’ Like his nineteenth-century missionary predecessor, Gustav Pilgram, whose brief but important personal report describes the use of *gondang* and *tortor* in pre-Christian Toba society, Siagian could not

21 Ibid., p. 72; Castles, ‘Political life’, p. 82.

22 Artur Simon, ‘Social and religious functions of Batak ceremonial music’, in *Cultures and societies of North Sumatra*, ed. Reiner Carle (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1987), pp. 337–49.

accept the *gondang-tortor's* traditional religious association though he acknowledged its social value.<sup>23</sup>

The missionaries feared the power of *gondang* to induce spirit possession and to lure converts back to *hasipelebeguan*. They therefore banned the use of *gondang sabangunan* and the *tortor* among Christians. The case of the *gondang sabangunan* is particularly apposite since, as Pedersen notes, in general the missionaries avoided Europeanising Batak Christians except in the area of music, where they substituted hymnody (one of the symbols of Western Christianity) and brass bands for traditional tribal music, which they viewed as 'heathen music'.<sup>24</sup> Churches thus served not only as centres of Christian practices but also a place for European musical practices. German hymns, compiled into the book called *Buku Ende* ('Song Book') and translated into different Batak dialects, have been the main constituents of the liturgy since the late 1870s. Congregations sang these hymns in every Sunday service, some with the accompaniment of a reed organ (*poti marende*) (lit., 'singing box'), others with a brass band. In addition, Article X, No. 6 of the 1907 Order of Discipline of the Church instituted by the RMG, required that every *guru huria* ('leader of a congregation') should be able to play a *poti marende*. Like hymns, choir singing in Sunday service became part of the liturgy from the early 1900s.<sup>25</sup> Some choirs performed works of local composers; others performed works of Western composers such as Beethoven, Mozart, Haydn and Bach. Reinforced by Western music lessons in mission schools, the privileging of European music for worship became a channel through which Western music culture could be diffused throughout the mission field.<sup>26</sup>

### The era of conflict: The mission field

Prior to the arrival of the Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft in the 1860s, there had been several attempts to Christianise the Batak.<sup>27</sup> The VOC (Vereenigte Oost-Indische Compagnie) established a Christian congregation in Padang as early as 1679, but without attempting to convert the local people. Actual missionary activity began in the nineteenth century. In the early 1820s Thomas Stamford Raffles authorised three missionaries from the Baptist Mission Society of England to evangelise in Sumatra. The three missionaries gathered in Tapian na Uli in 1824, but as they were about to start their work, the Dutch colonial government forced them to leave. The 40 years between their departure and the arrival of the RMG missionaries in the 1860s saw a number of abortive attempts to proselytise the Toba Batak. Two missionaries sent by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) of Boston in 1834 were allegedly eaten by the local chieftain of Lobu Pining, Raja Pangalamei, and his followers, though this

23 Pedersen, *Batak blood*, p. 85. Siagian's views will be cited again later in this article. Although Pilgram could not tolerate *gondang-tortor's* association with spirit beliefs, he acknowledged and approved its social function; in this he disagreed with those who sought its destruction. See the translation of Pilgram's 1885 paper on 'Referat über heidnische Musik und Tanz' by Lumbantobing in *Parsorion (riwayat hidup) ni missionar Gustav Pilgram dohot harararat ni hakristenon di Toba* (Pematang Siantar, 1981), pp. 97–108.

24 Pedersen, *Batak blood*, pp. 63, 71.

25 J. R. Hutauruk, *Kemandirian Gereja* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 1993), p. 84.

26 J. S. Aritonang, *Sejarah pendidikan Kristen di Tanah Batak* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 1988), pp. 247–54, 259–60.

27 For details of these early efforts, see Pedersen, *Batak blood*, pp. 47–56.



claim has been disputed. Despite all these attempts, early nineteenth-century Christian missionaries were unable to achieve their goal of converting large numbers of people.

From 1861, four RMG missionaries began to proselytise among the Batak of Sipirok, a small town located in South Tapanuli whose inhabitants had recently been converted to Islam. Their effort, however, resulted in only two baptisms.<sup>28</sup> In 1864 another RMG representative, Dr I. L. Nommensen, took over the leadership of the Mission and moved its headquarters from Sipirok to the Silindung area, where Islam had not yet spread. During the first year of his work, Nommensen struggled not only to proselytise but also to find a place to stay. The Batak of the Silindung valley conceived of all so-called *sibontar mata* ('white-eyes' or 'white-men') as being people who failed to observe or disobeyed *adat*, and believed that *adat* non-observance could cause natural disasters such as epidemics, crop failures or earthquakes.<sup>29</sup>

Despite such beliefs, Nommensen converted four men, four women and five children in 1865.<sup>30</sup> Together with P. H. (Heinrich) Johannsen, another German RMG missionary who came to the Silindung valley in 1866, Nommensen converted less than a hundred Toba Bataks within the next two years. In doing so, however, he brought the people who resided in the Silindung valley into social conflict with each other, and this gradually developed into a profound breach of traditional social relationships, dividing the new converts from those of their relatives who retained their spirit beliefs. Formerly they had all practised the same kinship traditions, celebrated the same ritual and religious events, worshipped the same gods, believed in the same ancestral spirits and performed the same music and dance. Now, those who converted were excluded from their villages and from communal sacrificial ceremonies; their own relatives expelled them from clan or village religious associations.<sup>31</sup>

Converts lost their rights to own houses and rice fields in their villages. Nommensen gathered them in a small protective village called Huta Dame ('Peace Village') which had become his headquarters, containing a small church, a school building and several houses. Congregational Sunday services, Bible study and Christian hymns were substituted for the old, now-forbidden sacrifices or other ritual and religious ceremonies. Nevertheless, Nommensen allowed the converts to practise traditional marriage, to maintain kinship and housing systems and to use their language and written scripts.<sup>32</sup> Thus they did not completely lose their Toba identity.

In 1992, Andar Lumbantobing, a former leader of the GKPI, traced the growth of the Church between 1861 and 1954 according to the statistics provided in the *Jahresbericht der Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft* (1861–1954), as follows:<sup>33</sup>

28 On these first conversions see Hendrik Kraemer, *From missionfield to independent church*. (The Hague: Boekencentrum, 1958), pp. 46–7; Susan Rodgers, *Adat, Islam and Christianity in a Batak homeland* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Southeast Asia Program, 1981), pp. 2–3; Theodor Müller-Krüger, *Sejarah Gereja di Indonesia*, 2nd edn (Jakarta: Badan Penerbit Kristen, 1966), p. 211; and A. Lumbantobing, *Makna wibawa jabatan*, p. 69.

29 Pedersen, *Batak blood*, pp. 36, 60.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 61.

31 Sitor Situmorang, *Guru Somalaing dan Modigliani 'Utusan raja Rom': Sekelumit sejarah lahirnya gerakan ratu adil di Toba* (Jakarta: Penerbit Grafindo Mukti, 1993), p. 45; Lumbantobing, *Makna wibawa jabatan*, p. 71.

32 Pedersen, *Batak blood*, p. 63; Aritonang, *Sejarah pendidikan*, pp. 405–39.

33 Aritonang employs the same source for the statistics of the growth of Christian converts and schools in the Batak Lands (*ibid.*).

**TABLE 1:**

The growth of Christian converts in the Toba Batak Protestant Church 1861–1954

Year	Christian Converts
1861	2
1867	115
1870	849
1871	1,250
1877	2,173
1881	5,988
1892	21,779
1898	40,723
1911	103,538
1923	210,416
1940	429,531
1954	601,156

Source: *Lumbantobing*, Makna wibawa jabatan dalam Gereja Batak, p. 74.

The table shows that after small growth in the 1860s there was a dramatic increase from the 1870s onwards. According to Clark Cunningham and Schreiner, who studied the growth of converts after 1954, the total number had increased to 700,000 by 1957 and to 900,000 by 1960. The spectacular success of the RMG after Nommensen's initial difficulties and the rapid conversion of Toba Bataks under his leadership have been noted in the literature: Hendrik Kraemer describes it as belonging 'to the finest results of missionary activity in modern times'.<sup>34</sup>

### **Christianity and *adat*: The Orders of Discipline of the Church**

During the early stage of Christianisation, Nommensen had yet to understand how deeply Toba Bataks were committed to *adat*.<sup>35</sup> As mentioned earlier, *adat* gave religious meaning to life in pre-Christian Toba Batak society and governed its established socio-cultural and religious practices in a unified and indivisible system. Performing ancestor worship rituals to the accompaniment of the *gondang sabangunan* was not only a major *adat* religious practice, it was also the people's way of achieving social harmony. The missionaries, on the other hand, conceived of *adat* as a divisible system. Attempting to separate 'custom' from 'religion', they distinguished between social occasions (e.g.,

34 Kraemer, *From missionfield*, p. 43. Statistics are from Clark E. Cunningham, *The postwar migration of the Toba-Bataks to East Sumatra* (New Haven: Yale Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1958), p. 178 and Schreiner, *Adat dan injil*, p. 9.

35 N. Arne Bendtz, 'Some reflections about the Batak people and their beliefs', in *Horas H.K.B.P.*, ed. A. A. Sitompul and A. Sovik (Pematang Siantar: Sekolah Tinggi Teologia-Huria Kristen Batak Protestan, 1986), pp. 34–5; Schreiner, *Adat dan injil*, p. 64.

weddings, pre-funeral ceremonies as well as inheritance practices) and ritual occasions involving spirit worship and sacrificial ceremonies to the accompaniment of the *gondang sabangunan*. The former were acceptable to the missionaries; the latter were not. The missionaries' proselytising strategy was to 'rupture *adat*' by dividing it into three categories: anti-Christian, neutral and pro-Christian.<sup>36</sup> They prohibited *adat* practices that they labelled as anti-Christian and allowed those classified in the other two categories.

The missionaries supposed that by instituting and applying civil laws they would be able to Christianise the acceptable elements of *adat* and simultaneously prevent Toba Bataks from practising their traditional religion.<sup>37</sup> Thus as early as 1866, two years after the establishment of the first Christian community in Huta Dame, the German missionaries introduced their prohibitions in the form of an *Order of Discipline for the Church*, intended to govern the religious life of the people. In 1867, they introduced the so-called Civil Law for Christians. Its exact content cannot be accurately outlined, as the relevant documents have not yet been found, but Schreiner surmises that it mainly contained rules regarding marriage, inheritance and disciplinary action to punish gamblers and thieves. It is not clear whether or not the 1867 Civil Law officially included the prohibition of the *gondang sabangunan* and *tortor* performance, even though we have evidence that they were forbidden to the first converts. The fact remains, however, that the 1867 Civil Law was the first institutionalised attempt to Christianise *adat* practices among the Toba Batak.<sup>38</sup> The 1867 Civil Law was revised again in 1879 (in conjunction with the colonial government) and (by Johannsen) in 1892.

These rules notwithstanding, many Christians found that they were unable to give up their attachment to pre-Christian *adat* practices. The sources show that some converts used the *gondang sabangunan* and *tortor* in the pre-funeral ceremony for an elderly person (*saur matua*) in the early 1870s in the Toba District. Although Nommensen disciplined those who participated on this occasion, the practice of the pre-funeral ceremony with its accompanying *gondang sabangunan* and *tortor* remained intact among the people. As a result, the missionaries insisted that converts must not be allowed to perform pre-funeral ceremonies on the basis of *adat*. This issue became the main consideration in a meeting of the missionaries in 1872; the result was a regulation that Christianised people were not allowed to participate in any ritual ceremonies to the accompaniment of the *gondang* and *tortor*.<sup>39</sup>

Nommensen perceived the traditional religious organisations – the *parbaringin* (local religious leaders) and *bius* (local religious-political units) – and *adat* practices such as *pesta bius* with *gondang sabangunan* and *tortor* accompaniment, not only as containing the seeds of social conflict but also as interfering with Christianisation. Accordingly, when the Dutch took over the Silindung valley in 1879, Nommensen persuaded the colonial government to ban them. The colonial government, which also saw the *bius* as

36 Ibid., pp. 52–60 and Aritonang, *Sejarah pendidikan*, p. 439; the phrase 'rupture *adat*' is taken from Aragon, *Fields of the Lord*, p. 160.

37 Schreiner, *Adat dan injil*, p. 67 and Aritonang, *Sejarah pendidikan*, p. 405.

38 This information is drawn from the discussion in Hutaauruk, *Kemandirian Gereja*, pp. 50–6 and Schreiner, *Adat dan injil*, pp. 63–72. In 1913, the Dutch officer J. C. Kielstra listed civil laws in his *Beschrijving van het bijzondere Adatrecht van de inheemsche Christenen in het Batakland* [List of Adat-law for Christian Toba Batak in Batak Lands] (Schreiner, *Adat dan injil*, p. 71).

39 Ibid., pp. 52–3.

an impediment to its political aspirations, enforced the Civil Law banning these traditional practices. The law applied equally to Christianised people and to those who retained their spirit beliefs.<sup>40</sup> To the missionaries such a prohibition meant the destruction of the traditional belief system and its practice. To the colonial government it meant the destruction of traditional political organisations (*bius* and *parbaringin*), while to the people it signalled a death sentence to their religion.<sup>41</sup> As Church leader Nommensen, who had been appointed 'Ephorus' (leader of the Protestant Toba Batak Church) in 1881, extended the application of the Civil Law to areas outside Silindung valley. Thus the prohibition was applied in Balige in the 1890s and on Samosir Island in 1918.<sup>42</sup>

In response, those people who remained devoted to *adat* established religio-political organisations to confront the expansion of 'white-men' and to maintain *adat* practices, including the *gondang sabangunan*. The most powerful of these organisations was the Parmalim, which was established in the 1870s and led into the early 1880s by Guru Somalaing Pardede, a Toba Batak from Balige and a well-known religious leader and medicine-man who resisted both Christianity and the influences of colonialism. Despite the Civil Law, members of Parmalim continued to practice such traditional sacrificial ceremonies as *pesta bius* (to the accompaniment of the *gondang sabangunan*) in the years between 1890 and 1897.<sup>43</sup>

In the early 1890s this religio-political organisation divided into different sects: Parmalim, Parsitengka, Nasiakbagi, SiSingamangaraja and Parhudamdandam. Some sects syncretically absorbed Christian entities such as Jehovah, Jesus and the Virgin Mary into their religious vocabulary. Similarly, others, especially the Parhudamdandam, integrated some Islamic influences.<sup>44</sup> While efforts to resist colonialism and the proselytising activities of the Christian Church were largely unsuccessful, Parmalim did survive (it was officially recognised by the government in 1980), and succeeded in preserving a knowledge of pre-Christian Toba ancestral practices and beliefs. Many pre-Christian aspects of the *gondang-tortor* performance are preserved in the Parmalim's religious ceremonies to this day.

Between 1896 and 1897, Dr Johannes Warneck proposed a general *Order of Discipline of the Church*; it included about 200 regulations in which all forms of *gondang sabangunan* and *tortor* performance, the deifying of *gondang* musicians and any kind of magico-religious practice were identified as serious transgressions. Christians who

40 See Situmorang, *Guru Somalaing*, pp. 45, 65. Castles, 'Political life' says that the Dutch colonial government began to control Silindung in 1878, about 14 years after the arrival of the German missionaries in the area (p. 31), but according to Situmorang (p. 66), it was 1879.

41 The colonial government's perspective is mentioned in Situmorang, *Guru Somalaing*, p. 45; Tobing, *Structure of the Toba-Batak belief*, p. 27, discusses the popular perception of the law.

42 Pedersen, *Batak blood*, p. 66 (Nommensen as 'Ephorus'); Vergouwen, *Social organisation*, pp. 85, 115 (Balige); on Samosir, see N. Siahaan, *Sejarah kebudayaan Batak* (Medan: C.V. Natipulu and Sons, 1964), p. 43 and Situmorang, *Toba na sae*, pp. 142–3.

43 Situmorang, *Guru Somalaing*, pp. 63, 85, 94.

44 *Ibid.*, pp. 81, 85 and Castles, 'Political life', pp. 76–9. The religious practices of those sects influenced by Islam included frequent trances while reciting Arabic phrases, while in everyday life they avoided eating pork (Castles, pp. 83–4). Guru Somalaing was introduced not only to Catholicism but also to Muslim leaders living on the Asahan River in 1890 by an Italian Catholic botanist, Elio Modigliani, whom he accompanied on a trip to the Batak Lands (Castles, p. 74); see also Situmorang, pp. 3–24.

transgressed the rules were to be punished by being excluded from Holy Communion.<sup>45</sup> At about the same time, the missionaries introduced 162 Dutch and German hymns to Toba Batak congregations; the number was increased to 277 in 1904.<sup>46</sup>

In 1899, a Christian Toba Batak chief requested permission to perform the *gondang* and *tortor* at a pre-funeral ceremony. After missionaries, Church ministers, Christian Toba Batak chiefs and Dutch officers discussed the request, they decided not to approve it on the basis of the 1897 *Order of Discipline*.<sup>47</sup> Two implications may be deduced from this: firstly, *adat* ceremonies within the Christian community remained important, especially in a pre-funeral ceremony for an elderly person, and such a ritual had to be accompanied by the *gondang sabangunan*. Secondly, the Church authorities strengthened their determination to separate Christianised people from the practice of the *gondang* tradition.

The 1907 *Aturan ni Ruhut di angka huria na di tongatonga ni Halak Batak* (Order of Discipline of the Church among the Bataks), the first for which a text survives, did not include any reference to or explanation of the *gondang sabangunan*, *tortor* and *adat* practices such as *pesta bius*, for reasons that are not clear. It consisted of 13 sections, each subdivided into several articles. Some sections included instructions on such matters as how to conduct a Sunday service, Holy Communion, baptism, confession and conversion as well as how to run a funeral ceremony. The articles outlined rules on marriage, and explained how teachers and ministers should behave in school and how Christians could become evangelists.<sup>48</sup>

### **Towards reconciliation: The autonomous Toba Protestant Church**

The death of Nommensen on 23 May 1918 and the defeat of Germany in the First World War affected the authority of the RMG missionaries in Tobaland, especially with regard to the attempt to impose a Civil Law and to Christianise the practices of *adat*. The Dutch colonial government, which was already resisting the idea that missionaries should be involved in the formulation of civil laws, had revised the 1892 Civil Law in 1911 and 1914, reducing the sphere of influence of the Church. Disputes between the missionaries and the colonial government over the revision of the Civil Law continued until 1923.<sup>49</sup> Eventually Nommensen's successor, Dr Johannes Warneck, admitted that the former Civil Law had lost its power.

The missionaries' role changed from the 1920s onwards. No longer did missionaries demand involvement in writing Civil Law, or otherwise seek to regulate the social and religious life of the non-Christian Toba Batak society.<sup>50</sup> They gave up issuing bans and sanctions against non-Christians who performed religious ceremonies to the accompaniment of the *gondang sabangunan* and *tortor* – as was evident in the celebration of a *pesta*

45 Schreiner, 'Gondang-Musik', p. 296 and Schreiner, *Adat dan injil*, p. 76, n 2; the ban is mentioned in Hutaaruk, *Kemandirian Gereja*, p. 52.

46 Ibid., p. 60.

47 Schreiner, 'Gondang-Musik', pp. 296–7.

48 See *Aturan ni Ruhut di angka huria na di tongatonga ni Halak Batak* (Nirongkom di Pangarongkoman Mission di Si Antar – Toba, 1907).

49 Schreiner, *Adat dan injil*, p. 78.

50 Schreiner, 'Gondang-Musik', p. 297; Schreiner, *Adat dan injil*, p. 78.



*bius* in Limbong (a village in the foothills of the Pusuk Buhit) in 1923.<sup>51</sup> Instead, the missionaries concentrated on reformulating the previous *Order of Discipline of the Church*. The 1924 version (*Oehoem Parhoeriaon Siingoton ni angka Hoeria Kristen Batak*) reaffirmed the Church's attitude towards *adat* practices by Christians, decreeing that Protestants would commit a sin if they were to return to *hasipelebeguan* by performing such pre-Christian *adat* and religious practices as invoking the spirit of a deceased person, ancestor worship, making offerings to ancestral spirits, asking blessings from the deceased or dancing *tortor* around the corpse or bones of the deceased to the accompaniment of the *gondang*. They also stated that the Church would regard the surreptitious practice of pre-Christian *adat* as sinful. Anyone who wanted to hold an *adat* ritual to the accompaniment of the *gondang sabangunan* and *tortor* was required to obtain permission from the Church Synod beforehand. Those who broke these rules would be called transgressors (*sipinsangon*) and would be punished, for example, by being excluded from Holy Communion or from ecclesiastical tasks among the Church congregation.<sup>52</sup>

How far this *Order of Discipline*, the last to be written by the German missionaries, succeeded in restraining Toba Christians from performing *adat* rituals and *gondang-tortor* is unclear. There is evidence that some people continued to preserve their *adat* and the *gondang* musical tradition despite these regulations. For example, it is documented that in 1925–26 many Toba Batak in the Toba and Samosir areas performed the *gondang* and in 1929 people in Silindung presented a water buffalo and an *ulos* (ceremonial shawl) to a Dutch officer to the accompaniment of the *gondang* and *tortor*.<sup>53</sup>

Additional pressures for change were coming from within the Church itself. From 1864 to 1940, the Protestant Toba Batak Church – formerly called Huria na Ditonga-Tongan ni Halak Batak (Church of the Batak) – operated exclusively under the leadership of the German missionaries, who managed matters associated with finance, schools and churches (including discipline, music and the liturgy), the Synod and its meetings. However, the missionaries could not stop the rise of the *hamajuon* ('progress') movement in 1917, led by a Balige choir association known as Zangvereeninging Hadomuan (Union Choir), the members of which were mostly teachers and workers at government institutions. They demanded that an independent Toba Batak Church institution be established.<sup>54</sup>

The movement took about 13 years to reach its goal: leadership was not transferred from the missionaries to the Toba Batak ministers until 1930. From this time on, the Huria Kristen Batak Protestan – the new name approved at the 1929 Synod meeting – was supposed to become an autonomous Church, no longer under the direction of the RMG. However, this did not occur at once. Toba Batak ministers were responsible for the welfare of the congregation, controlled the structure of the Church council and even took over the financial administration of the institution. Despite this, German missionaries still held positions of authority in the Church council and retained the power of

51 Situmorang, *Toba na sae*, p. 142.

52 *Oehoem parhoeriaon siingoton ni angka Hoeria Kristen Batak* ([H.K.B.P.] n.p., 1924), pp. 5 (*adat* practice as sinful), 7 (punishment).

53 Schreiner, 'Gondang-Musik', p. 298.

54 Hutauruk, *Kemandirian Gereja*, pp. 73–87; Aritonang, *Sejarah pendidikan*, p. 294. The name 'Huria na ditonga-tongan ni Halak Batak' appears in the title of the 1907 and 1924 *Orders of Discipline of the Church*, which were constituted by the Batak Mission.

veto.<sup>55</sup> Decisions taken reflected a continuation of mission policy, though there were signs of a softening of attitude towards *gondang-tortor*.

In 1933 some Christians applied to the Church Synod for permission to use *gondang* and *tortor* in *adat* feasts.<sup>56</sup> In response to this appeal, the Synod issued a new policy in which two classifications of *gondang* performances were introduced: those that were forbidden and those that were permitted. Any ceremonies associated with pre-Christian religious practices, such as pre-funeral and bone exhumation ceremonies and other types of ancestral worship, were strictly prohibited. Permitted ceremonies included *gondang* and *tortor* performances given to honour respected people or to celebrate the construction of a new house or village or the birth of a baby. These were called *gondang riang-riang* ('joyful feasts'), and referred to performances that were not ritually bound.

In this way the Synod tried to shift *gondang* and *tortor* away from their religious function. Yet the boundaries between the two classifications – including their rules and manner of performance, structure and repertoire – were obscure. Dancers might experience possession in either type of *gondang* performance and therefore either might lead participants to the forbidden *hasipelebeguan*. Because of this the Synod warned that the hosts of *gondang riang-riang* had to assume responsibility for the performance becoming associated with the practice of *hasipelebeguan*.<sup>57</sup>

After studying the general report of the 1937 Synod meeting, Schreiner reported that the issue of permitted and forbidden *gondang* and *tortor* performances was still on the agenda with some Toba Batak pastors requesting that no *gondang* practices be permitted, including *gondang riang-riang*, because Church members still used the *gondang* to call spirits of the dead.<sup>58</sup> The 1937 Synod meeting failed to achieve a unanimous decision on the matter and the problem remain unsolved. However, V. E. Korn, the Dutch provincial head of Tapanuli, officially lifted the civil ban against the performance of *gondang* in 1938, whereupon the people of Sihotang (a village on the south-west shore of Lake Toba) performed a *pesta bius*, which Korn attended.<sup>59</sup> The Church's ban continued for those who had already accepted Christianity.

Autonomy came to the HKBP in a single historical moment when the Dutch colonial government interned the German missionaries on 10 May 1940 as a consequence of the Nazi invasion of the Netherlands. True independence for the HKBP was only achieved in 1940 after the *Pendeta* ('minister') K. Sirait was elected to be the first Toba Batak Ephorus.<sup>60</sup> He, together with other Toba Batak ministers, became responsible for all matters associated with the Church and its congregations.

While the Toba-led HKBP focused the identity of Batak Christians, it was never able to unify all the Batak congregations and it disintegrated into a plurality of ethnic churches. This was partly because of an internal conflict that occurred in the late 1940s among the Simalungun Batak, the Karo Batak, the Pakpak Batak and the Mandailing

55 Johannes Keuning, *The Toba Batak, formerly and now*, tr. Claire Holt (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 1958), p. 15. The veto power is mentioned in Pedersen, *Batak blood*, p. 98.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 98.

57 *Ibid.*, pp. 298–9.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 299.

59 Situmorang, *Toba na sae*, pp. 142–3.

60 Pedersen, *Batak blood*, p. 96.

Batak congregations. (The linguistically and culturally related peoples of the North Sumatran interior generically classified as Bataks comprise six sub-groups, of whom the Toba are the most populous.) Each ethnic group requested that it be allowed to establish its own autonomous church organisation. This situation was complicated by the fact that other church institutions and evangelists (e.g., Catholic, Methodist, Pentecostal and Adventist) had begun to proselytise in the area in the early 1920s. Their presence minimised the opportunity for the HKBP to preside over a single Batak Church.<sup>61</sup>

The transformation of leadership brought a new era to the HKBP congregations, though not immediately. Even after Toba Batak ministers began to manage it autonomously, disharmony continued between the Church and some Protestants regarding *adat* and the *gondang* tradition, since the Church Synod maintained the same attitude as that of the former German missionaries.<sup>62</sup> In 1942 *Pendeta* K. Sirait was replaced by J. Sihombing, whose 20-year tenure witnessed a decade of violent political turmoil that included the Japanese Occupation, the struggle for Indonesian Independence and the exit of missionaries from Batak Lands in the mid-1940s.

Nonetheless, at the time of the HKBP's acceptance as a member of the Lutheran World Federation in 1952, its council had formulated a new *Order of Discipline*. This moved towards an accommodation of some local *adat* practices, to the extent that the Protestants could perform pre-funeral and bone exhumation ceremonies to the accompaniment of the *gondang-tortor* tradition.<sup>63</sup> This is clearly recorded in Section Three of the pronouncements, which read as follows:

In pre-funeral ceremonies, participants must not partake of portions of uncooked meats (*jambar*) unless the deceased has been buried. It is encouraged that participants should not place baskets (*jual*) beside the deceased.<sup>64</sup> Nor may participants dance the *tortor* around the deceased. Communications with ancestral spirits, especially during a meeting of family elders, are strictly prohibited. In the pre-funeral ceremonies, participants are allowed to perform *gondang sabangunan* and *tortor* only if the deceased has had some grandchildren. Prior to the performance of the *gondang* the Church must be informed about the performance procedure. The host must also declare that during the *gondang* performance there will be no request for blessings from the deceased.<sup>65</sup>

61 Pedersen (*ibid.*, pp. 201–2) notes that 40 church institutions were registered by the Department of Religion in Medan in the 1970s. Unlike in the West, where the divisions among Protestant churches are based on religious interpretation (e.g., Methodist, Pentecost and Lutheran), among the Toba it is only a matter of the language used in the services. Those that emphasise a sense of ethnicity (such as the HKBP) use the relevant vernacular, while those that emphasise a sense of nationalism (such as the GKPI) more often use the Indonesian language. Most members of the Toba Protestant community belong to one of these two Churches.

62 Yoshiko Okazaki, 'Music, identity, and religious change among the Toba Batak people of North Sumatra' (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1994), pp. 158–9; for the missionaries' attitude see Schreiner, 'Gondang-Musik', pp. 299–300.

63 Pedersen, *Batak blood*, pp. 96–100, 186; see also Cunningham, *Postwar migration*, p. 178.

64 A *jual* is usually filled with rice-paddy, *sanggar* (*Anthistiria arguens*), *ompu-ompu* (*Haemanthus pubescens*) and the leaves of the *hariara* tree (*Ficus*).

65 *Ruhut paminsangon di Huria Kristen Batak Protestan 1952* (Tarutung: Kantor Pusat H.K.B.P., 1968), p. 13.

Section Four deals with the exhumation of bones ceremony as follows:

The Church allows performances of the exhumation of bones ceremony as long as participants do not include any pagan practice in them. Exhumed bones must be removed directly from the old burial ground to the newly prepared burial place. Participants must not dance the *tortor* in front of the exhumed bones nor give offerings such as betel nut to the bones. All exhumation of bones ceremonies must be carried out under the supervision of Church ministers.<sup>66</sup>

Section Five details the performance of *adat* practices to the accompaniment of the *gondang sabangunan* and *tortor* as follows:

Only the performance of the *gondang riang-riang* is permitted. Ceremonies accompanied by the *gondang* for the purpose of requesting blessings from the deceased, freeing someone from a curse or grief, or calling for a lost *tondi* [soul] to repossess its bearer, are strictly prohibited. Protestants who want to perform a ceremony to the accompaniment of the *gondang* music must consult the church ministers beforehand, and the church ministers will judge whether or not approval will be given. Church ministers will supervise any *gondang* performance in *adat* ceremonies so that no spirit practices will be involved. Congregations must not practise remnants of *hasipelebeguan*.<sup>67</sup>

It is not clear whether the 1952 *Order of Discipline* accomplished its aim. Nonetheless it constituted a new strategy. There is evidence that in the 1950s and early 1960s many Protestants continued to perform ancestral worship practices for reasons of *adat* obligation. So, for example, traditional ceremonies took place in 1953 that were dedicated to the late Toba charismatic leader SiSingamangaraja XII, during the course of which his bones, together with those of his two sons, were taken from their graves in Tarutung and placed in a monument located in Saposurung, Balige.<sup>68</sup>

The people's attachment to *adat* was not purely an emotional one; it was also political and ethnic. In the immediate post-Independence period, Indonesians sought to assert their own cultural identity as a nation with a philosophy based on the motto 'Unity in Diversity'. Thus in 1960, President Sukarno decreed that the nation should reject anything foreign and return to its diverse ethnic roots and local cultures (Indo. '*penggaian kebudayaan*'), in order to build up a unique combination of Indonesian cultures.<sup>69</sup> This included, in paradoxical defiance of Church policies and in spite of the fact that the Protestant Church was one of the State's five official 'world religions', the building of ancestral monuments or *tugu*, which Sukarno referred to as 'food for the soul'. Many Toba Bataks celebrated the building of such monuments with family feasts accompanied by *gondang-tortor* performances, especially from 1960–65 when the Sukarno era was

66 Ibid., pp. 13–14.

67 Ibid., p. 14.

68 Schreiner, *Adat dan injil*, p. 182; the family of SiSingamangaraja XII had in fact been Christianised as early as 1910 (p. 184).

69 M. P. M. Muskens, *Sejarah Gereja Katolik Indonesia I* (Ende-Flores: Arnoldus Press, 1974), p. 253; Edward M. Bruner, 'Megalith, migration and the segmented self', in Carle, ed., *Cultures and societies*, p. 137; on *penggaian kebudayaan* see Sianipar, 'Suatu problem', p. 9.

coming to an end.<sup>70</sup> Hundreds of ancestral monuments can still be seen along the roads between Pematang Siantar and Tarutung and in many villages on Samosir Island, some belonging to Catholic Toba families and others to Protestants.

The Toba Batak pastor F. H. Sianipar reported that while Church leaders in many ways did not support the call to construct monuments, this could not stop the people from building them.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, although the 1952 *Order of Discipline* made room for Protestants to practice pre-Christian *adat*, it did not give instructions about how a ceremony could be performed to the accompaniment of the music and dance in a way that could be accepted both by *adat* and the Church. Hence the people performed their rites according to *adat* rules, not according to the *Order of Discipline*. The people believed that to disobey *adat* could lead to disaster – and in the here-and-now rather than the hereafter. Disobeying the *Order of Discipline*, on the other hand, could earn them discredit only from the Church, and there was also a way out, namely to confess their sins and be reaccepted into the congregation.

Edward M. Bruner, who visited Toba in the late 1950s and early 1960s, reported that all segments of Toba Batak society – including the *haji* (Moslem pilgrims), medical doctors, professors, farmers, linguists, poets and even Christian ministers – performed bone exhumation ceremonies and *tugu* feasts. A substantial number of urban Christians who, having obtained economic benefits since Independence, returned to their villages in Tobaland at this time, also built clan monuments and sponsored ceremonies of the exhumation of ancestral bones. Schreiner interprets this phenomenon as constituting a movement that awakened pre-Christian religious practices among the Protestants.<sup>72</sup>

### The seminars on *adat*

Before the 1966 Synod meeting of the HKBP, some members of the Church reported that many Protestants had performed *tugu* feasts and exhumation ceremonies to the accompaniment of the *gondang sabangunan* and *tortor* according to *hasipelebeguan*.<sup>73</sup> They insisted that the Synod take into consideration the apparent return of pre-Christian religious practices. In response, the Synod decided to hold a seminar on *adat*, in order to re-evaluate the 1952 *Order of Discipline* as well as to discuss ways of preventing congregants from carrying out pre-Christian religious practices. In July 1968 the Synod called for papers to be presented at the ‘Seminar Adat di HKBP’. Eight speakers spoke on seven topics associated with *adat* practices: the pre-funeral ceremony, the *gondang* tradition, inheritance, the *tugu* feast, the exhumation of bones ceremony, the *parjamberan* (partaking of uncooked meats) and celebrations for newborn babies. The results of the seminar were to be presented at a Synod meeting in 1968.<sup>74</sup>

Divergent views about *adat* and the *gondang-tortor* tradition were presented at the seminar, and although it failed to reach a unified view of *adat*, it did lead to a degree of

70 Ibid., pp. 9–10; Bruner, ‘Megalith, migration’, pp. 137–9.

71 Sianipar, ‘Suatu problem’, p. 9.

72 Schreiner, *Adat dan injil*, pp. 181–2; Bruner ‘Megalith, migration’, p. 137; D. P. Tampubolon, ‘Upatjara mangongkal holi di dalam transisi untuk menjadi suatu manifestasi penghormatan orang tua yang bersifat komemoratif’, *Seminar adat di H.K.B.P.* (Pematang Siantar: H.K.B.P., 1968), p. 1.

73 See M. L. Siagian, ‘Sungkun-sungkun marisi saran-saran tu tujuan ni seminar adat di H.K.B.P.’, in *Seminar adat*.

74 Ibid. and the speech by Lumban Gaol in the same volume.



reconciliation.<sup>75</sup> The participants in the 1968 event, who were mainly Protestant ministers and intellectuals, endeavoured to identify which *adat* practices could and could not be followed by Protestants. One speaker, M. L. Siagian, argued that the Church should allow congregants to invite *gondang* musicians to play and therefore to enjoy *gondang-tortor* performances in *adat* feasts, including the pre-funeral ceremony for an elderly person. Siagian's views on *adat* obligations and *gondang-tortor* performance at the *saur matua* ceremony merit consideration:

If the Church allows *gondang* performance at *saur matua* ceremonies, why should the Church prohibit people from using the *jual* and other symbolic materials as well as dancing the *tortor* in that ceremony? It is understandable that prior to the 1950s the Synod was concerned with the influence of the *hasipelebeguan*, but what about these days; why should we be afraid of it? Why should the Church prohibit people from dancing the *tortor* in front of the deceased? If the *tortor* should be prohibited, what should be substituted for it? When the previous *Order of Discipline of the Church* was changed in 1952, the Church still discredited the *gondang* tradition because many had formerly used *gondang* for spirit possession. But, should we not revise the *Order of Discipline*? Why should we not play the *gondang* in sorrow and happiness? When will our talented musicians be able to adapt the *gondang* and *tortor* in Christian practices?<sup>76</sup>

Another speaker, B. A. Simanjuntak, asserted that *adat* practices, including the *gondang sabangunan*, should be consecrated so that they could be used within Christian practices. The *gondang* tradition should be practised so that it is not forgotten, he said. Simanjuntak proposed that the demands placed on *gondang sabangunan* musicians at *adat* feasts should be only to accompany participants dancing the *tortor* as a way to express their respect, sorrow and happiness in general. Furthermore, participants should not request specific *gondang* pieces to honour the ancestral spirits, nor should they utter ritual prayers to evoke those spirits. Simanjuntak admitted that formerly many people danced the *tortor* while being possessed by spirits, but argued that such spirit possession was hardly ever found among present-day Christians. He suggested that Church ministers should always supervise *adat* practices involving the accompaniment of the *gondang sabangunan* and that they could immediately stop the performance should spirit possession occur. He concluded that, because the Synod had allowed Protestants to perform the *saur matua* ceremony to the accompaniment of the *gondang sabangunan*, it should also allow participants to dance the *tortor* in that ceremony. Simanjuntak recommended that each *gondang-tortor* sequence should be performed to three pieces only, namely *Gondang somba-somba tu amanta Debata* ('*Gondang* to honour the divine'), *Gondang Pangidoan taringot Disiulaon* ('*Gondang* to request blessings') and *Gondang Sitio-tio Hasahatan* ('*Gondang* to complete a ceremony').<sup>77</sup>

75 J. Pardede, 'The question of Christianity, Islam and Batak culture in North Sumatra', in Carle, ed., *Cultures and societies*, p. 245.

76 Siagian, 'Sungkun-sungkun', p. 2.

77 B. A. Simanjuntak, 'Hatorangan ni angka atjara na balga na binahen ni halak Batak pasangap natorasna, ditingki hahipason, parsahiton tu na marajung ngolu ni natorasna', *Seminar adat*, pp. 37–9 (consecration), 12 (used, not forgotten), 19–20 (musicians), 38 (specific pieces). For an explanation of these various elements, see Purba 'Adat ni gondang: Rules and structure of the *gondang* performance in pre-Christian Toba Batak *adat* practice', *Asian Music*, 34, 1 (2002–3): 67–110.

Another speaker, D. F. Panjaitan, agreed that the *gondang* tradition should be maintained by Protestants. The Church should, however, reject any *gondang* performance that was led by a *datu* (a professional medicine man possessing healing as well as magical powers) and was for the purpose of *hasipelebeguan*.<sup>78</sup> Members of the Church should act according to their sense of Christian moral responsibility and use the *gondang* for joyful feasts that reflect such a sense of responsibility. *Adat* ceremonies with *gondang* and *tortor* should be performed during daylight only, he suggested. In a *gondang-tortor* sequence, no more than three *gondang* pieces should be requested, namely, *Gondang Mula-mula* ('*Gondang* for Beginning'), *Gondang Bane-bane* ('*Gondang* for requesting blessings from God'), and *Gondang Hasahatan* ('*Gondang* for completion').<sup>79</sup>

D. P. Tampubolon then presented a paper on the practice of the exhumation of bones ceremony, reminding those who performed the ceremony to think of it as a commemorative event rather than an act of spirit worship. Should the *gondang sabangunan* and *tortor* be performed in the ceremony, it should be for the purpose of strengthening family and social relationships, not as a tool for honouring the ancestral spirits. Christians should begin and end any *gondang* performance with prayer and limit the length of a performance to a single day. Church ministers should always be present to supervise *adat* ceremonies so that no *hasipelebeguan* practices would occur.<sup>80</sup>

All of the participants expressed opposition to *hasipelebeguan* but without specifying details. Despite their objection, however, they did not entirely oppose pre-Christian *adat* practices; instead, they tried to find ways of legitimising *adat* so that it could be accepted. Some were convinced that these practices should be Christianised, for example by eliminating traces of *hasipelebeguan* terms or prayers and replacing these with appropriate Christian equivalents. *Adat* ceremonies should be held during daylight and should begin and end with Christian elements.<sup>81</sup> Thus the speakers at the seminar may be seen as having advanced the process of reconciliation by proposing that *adat* practices (including the *gondang-tortor* tradition) be reinterpreted and by asking the Church Synod to revise the 1952 *Order of Discipline*.

Recommendations from the seminar influenced the 1968 version of the *Order of Discipline of the Church*; Part A, Section Two reads as follows:

Performance of the *gondang* is permitted only in pre-funeral ceremonies [*sarimatua*]. Participants are allowed to dance the *tortor*, however *ondas* [dancers dancing while moving the palms of their hands up and down to symbolise the asking of blessings from the deceased] are strictly prohibited . . . [and] the ceremony must be opened and closed with Christian prayers.<sup>82</sup>

The next section explains some of the conditions that should be met in order to perform an exhumation ceremony; the same criteria must also be applied at *tugu* feasts:

78 On the traditional role of the *datu* in inducing most *gondang sabangunan* performances, see *ibid.*, pp. 76–8.

79 D. F. Panjaitan, 'Gondang', *Seminar adat*, pp. 9–10.

80 Tampubolon, 'Upatjara mangongkal holi', *Seminar adat*, pp. 21–3.

81 See *ibid.*, Simanjuntak, 'Hatorangan'; Siagian, 'Sungkun-sungkun'; and Panjaitan, 'Gondang'.

82 See 'Notulen Synode godang H.K.B.P. 3–10 November 1968', in *Ruhut paminsangon*, pp. 101–11.

The Church will allow Protestants to carry out an exhumation of bones ceremony under the following conditions: a grave has broken down; a grave is too close to a public residence; the ground where a grave is located will become an industrial location or there is an intention to unify several mausoleums from different areas. In any exhumation of bones ceremony, Church ministers will act as supervisors and will prevent participants from carrying out *hasipelebeguan* practices, such as dancing to the exhumed bones; presenting food and betel nut to the bones; crying to the bones; putting the exhumed bones onto the *ulos*, plate or basket; and putting a banana tree into the hole from which the bones have been unearthed.<sup>83</sup>

Part B of the pronouncement included some resolutions about the performance of the *gondang sabangunan* and *tortor* – specifying, for example, that when the adult male and female hosts (*suhut*) dance the *tortor* together at *adat* feasts, they should only request up to five *gondang* pieces to be played. However, each group of relatives should request no more than three *gondang* pieces when they dance the *tortor* together, deliver *adat* speeches or receive and give ceremonial gifts. The *gondang sabangunan* may be used to accompany the *tortor* in pre-funeral ceremonies, as long as it functions as a medium to express sorrow. Neither male nor female dancers are allowed to place their ceremonial shawls on their heads, nor to perform any hand movements symbolic of communication with the dead. When bones are being unearthed in an exhumation of bones ceremony, the *gondang* and *tortor* may not be performed. The same rule applies when Church ministers lead Christian services during the ceremony. In neither part of the ceremony may the *gondang* and *tortor* be performed except during daylight.<sup>84</sup>

Basically, the 1968 *Order of Discipline* maintained the status quo. However, it did contain a few new regulations, which attempted to control the duration of a *gondang* performance by restricting the number of pieces performed. It also removed some former restrictions on Protestants practising the *gondang* and *tortor* and at the same time narrowed the scope of the restrictions. There is also evidence that from the 1960s onward the *gondang sabangunan* and *tortor* were performed in non-liturgical Church functions.<sup>85</sup>

Two years after the Synod of the HKBP implemented its 1968 *Order of Discipline*, the GKPI initiated its own *Order of Discipline* called the *Hukum Siasat Gereja* (in Indonesian) or *Ruhut Paminsangon Dalan Manogunogu* (in Toba Batak). In some respects this resembled the 1968 HKBP version in that it allowed members of the GKPI to perform pre-funeral and exhumation ceremonies under the supervision of ministers. The pronouncement insisted that dancing before exhumed bones was strictly prohibited. It did not detail the use of the *gondang* performance in pre-funeral ceremonies but it prohibited performances associated with pre-Christian religious practices.<sup>86</sup>

Members of the GKPI who wished to perform *adat* feasts to the accompaniment of the *gondang* and *tortor* were instructed to seek permission from the Church. In 1977, the ministers of the GKPI did approve an exhumation ceremony to the accompaniment of the *gondang* and *tortor* that occurred in Panjaitan, a village located in the valley of Sagala.

83 Ibid., pp. 18–19.

84 Ibid., pp. 27–8.

85 Panjaitan, 'Gondang', p. 8.

86 Gereja Kristen Protestan Indonesia, *Hukum siasat Gereja* (Pematang Siantar: Kantor Pusat G.K.P.I., 1970), pp. 12–14.

The approval was given after the feast-giving party had signed a promissory note (*surat perjanjian*) in front of the ministers, the content of which George Sherman translates as follows:

I, who have signed below, that is, the principal of this feast of the *gondang* make everything in this endeavor subject to the rules of the Protestant Church of Indonesia (GKPI). And these rules are as written below.

1. We shall not carry out a spirit-worshipping endeavor, such as purification [with water from the source of a spring]; burning incense; putting up *Dracaena*, lemon leaves or *Gandarusa* above the door, nor anywhere else.
2. Making oblations [and] offerings to the spirits of ancestors will not occur, since there is no meeting [lit. agreement] of the dead and the living.
3. Bringing about possession so the spirits of the dead come will not occur. If someone is nevertheless possessed, then the orchestra will be stopped and they will be reminded, so that they do not continually get possessed. [If they are asked one last time] they will be taken to a more solitary place [forced to leave].
4. They cannot rejoin the feast at any time of its duration.
5. Only after they have been removed can the feast be continued [lit., can the orchestra resume].
6. If it is not done like that, the feast will be paid no more attention by the workers of the church at its conclusion. And we the principals, we will be put out, punished by the church, if we willfully engage in spirit worshipping.

Thus we undertake this letter of promise, this oath-taking, with a pure mind, in front of God as well as in front of the clergy of the church of the principals.<sup>87</sup>

In November 1976 an *adat* seminar was convened at Nommensen University in Pematang Siantar. Sponsored by the Indonesian Regional Asia Program for Advanced Studies, it discussed the role of the ‘three hearth stones’ in defining social relationships.<sup>88</sup> During the seminar, Anicetus B. Sinaga, a Catholic priest, explained the attitude of his Church towards *adat*, emphasising that it respected local culture. He asserted that the Catholic Toba Batak Church adapted selected *adat* practices, having consecrated them, and used them as tools to worship God.<sup>89</sup> This seminar had no effect on Protestant Church policy, however, and the 1968 rules remained unchanged.

In September 1977 another *adat* seminar, with the same sponsor and held in the same venue as the preceding one, discussed the possibility of establishing an indigenous Church liturgy. Such an idea probably resulted from the concept of ‘inculturation’ that was brought into existence within the Catholic Church by the Second Vatican Council. (It is probable that the concept of *pempribunian* [indigenisation] is the equivalent Protestant term for inculturation.) Some participants proposed that the *gondang*

87 Sherman, *Rice, rupees and ritual*, Appendix C (p. 331).

88 See the proceedings of the 1976 *Adat Seminar I*, including P. Sormin, ‘Fungsi social sihal-sihal berhubungan dengan dalihan na tolu dan lima saodoran dalam adat Batak’; G. Sherman, ‘Beberapa pencatatan terlambat untuk seminar adat Batak IRAPAS’ and A. B. Sinaga, ‘Pola pemikiran triade dan kwartade pada orang Batak dalam sihal-sihal’.

89 *Ibid.*, pp. 1–3; cf. Okazaki, ‘Music, identity’, pp. 183–92.

*sabangunan*, *tortor* and other *adat* elements – e.g., the ceremonial shawl and other aspects of the traditional costume and local terminology – should be incorporated into the Church liturgy so that it could take on a Toba Batak character.<sup>90</sup> Others, including members of the Protestant Church Synod, were reluctant to do so since they believed the existing liturgy to be quite satisfactory, thus seeing no need to incorporate *adat* elements or *gondang* music. The Protestant Church was concerned with the possible negative effect of the proposal. As Pardede noted, ‘for them [the Church] a return to original status means in every case an open gate for paganism’.<sup>91</sup> As those who opposed the idea of indigenising the liturgy still outnumber those who support it, it has never been done.

To the best of my knowledge (until the last day of my fieldwork in Medan in 1994), no performance of the *gondang* has ever taken place as part of a Protestant Sunday church service. No Protestant church has ever acquired a *gondang sabangunan* ensemble, let alone a group of *gondang* musicians. However, the Church openly welcomes the use of the *gondang* and *tortor* in other functions, such as church anniversaries (*pesta ulang tahun*), fund-raising events (*pesta pembangunan*), youth festivals (*pesta naposo*), the founding of a new church building (*pajonjong gareja*), and the celebration of a new church (*mangompoi*), which would occur once or twice a year. A *gondang* performance at Protestant church feasts serves various functions, primarily directed towards social ends: it provides entertainment, accompanies the congregation’s *tortor* activity and the presentation of donations, enlivens the atmosphere at a church auction and assists the function of fund-raising by encouraging the participants to make donations.

In this way, the traditional *gondang-tortor* performance has been neutralised. When the *gondang sabangunan* is recontextualised within Christian tradition in this way, certain of its traditional formal elements remain the same: the instrumentation; the musical items, which are mostly drawn from the traditional repertoire, though they avoid titles incorporating the names of ancestral spirits, sacred places and deities; and the ceremonial gifts of rice grains, ceremonial shawls, livestock, money, food and labour, which are now auctioned at church feasts to raise money. As Mary Steedly has written, quoting Church policy on the closely analogous situation in the Karo Protestant Church, ‘the form remains the same but the content and intention are changed from that which contains belief to that which is neutral’.<sup>92</sup>

According to the statistics of the HKBP, 74 church functions within Tobaland in 1985–86 involved the accompaniment of the *gondang sabangunan* and *tortor*.<sup>93</sup> During my fieldwork in Medan in 1994, all non-liturgical church functions that I attended were accompanied by the *gondang* and *tortor*. Indeed, the *gondang sabangunan* and *tortor* have become regular constituents of all church functions except for Sunday services. On the other hand, the Catholic Church has been using the *gondang* in both church functions

90 See the report of the 1977 *adat* seminar in *Lokakarya studi pemribumian liturgia dan kebaktian* (Pematang Siantar: Indonesia Regional Asia Program for Advanced Studies, 1977).

91 Pardede, ‘Question of Christianity’, p. 248. For a general summary of the liturgy debate see Pardede, ‘Permasalahan sekitar “pemribumian kabaktian/liturgi”, di gereja-gereja di Sumatra Utara’, in *Lokakarya studi pemribumian*, pp. 1–4.

92 Mary M. Steedly, *Hanging without a rope: Narrative experience in colonial and postcolonial Karoland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 70.

93 B. A. Simanjuntak, *Pemikiran tentang Batak* (Medan: Universitas H.K.B.P. Nommensen, 1986), p. 113.



and the liturgy since the early 1980s. Members of the Catholic Church have even started composing new *gondang* pieces for use in worship.<sup>94</sup>

The present *Order of Discipline* of the HKBP was written in 1982 and that of the GKPI in 1987; each maintains the previous rules but makes some additional points. For example, the HKBP prohibits the performance of any kind of music or dance other than Christian hymns during the process of burying or reburying corpses, or of unearthing and removing the bones of a deceased person. Nevertheless, the Church allows the *gondang sabangunan* and *tortor* to be performed during *adat* feasts, provided that it is under the supervision of a minister and that the feast concludes with Christian hymns and prayers. This is recorded in the current *Order of Discipline* as follows:

Temptations, such as spirit possession, may result from performing the *gondang* and, if that happens, it demonstrates the weakness of the performers' faith. Church ministers must advise any one who wishes to host a *gondang-tortor* performance with regard to this. Every *gondang-tortor* performance must be concluded in [Christian] prayer.<sup>95</sup>

The GKPI similarly requires that those who intend to perform *adat* feasts associated with traditional practices must request the Church's approval; every *adat* feast must begin and end with Christian practices. Its current *Order of Discipline* reads as follows:

Church ministers must always investigate/supervise any performance of a ritual ceremony. Church ministers must discourage members of the congregation from performing any practice that is associated with paganism . . . Those who wish to perform *adat* feasts that are associated with local traditions must first obtain approval from Church ministers. Church ministers must open and end an *adat* feast with a short Christian service.<sup>96</sup>

The HKBP and the GKPI insist that those who disregard the regulations may be penalised, by the suspension of their Church membership, for example. To be reaccepted as a member, any transgressor must tender an apology in front of the ministers and congregation. The Synods of both Churches insist that punishments will only be carried out if the transgressors, after having been admonished by the ministers, do not intend to change their attitudes.

In an interview published in 1987, Dr Nababan (the former leader of the HKBP) openly voiced his opposition to religious practices of *adat* and *gondang* performance associated with spirit calling. He asserted that:

*Adat* practices which are associated with animism must be adjusted to the message of the Gospel; the *gondang* must be used only to accompany people when dancing the *tortor* for entertainment, otherwise the Church disallows the *gondang* to be played in church functions. We [the ministers of HKBP] will accept *adat* only if its contents have been fully Christianised.<sup>97</sup>

94 Okazaki, 'Music, identity', pp. 189–90. Okazaki, who attended a Catholic music liturgy seminar held in Medan, informed me (personal communication, September 1996) that the seminar has encouraged talented musicians to compose new *gondang* pieces for use in worship.

95 *Ruhut parmahanon dohot paminsangon di Huria Kristen Batak Protestan* (Tarutung: Kantor Pusat H.K.B.P., 1987), p. 27.

96 *Hukum siasat Gereja G.K.P.I.* (Pematang Siantar: Kantor Pusat G.K.P.I., 1982), pp. 20–1.

97 'Mengkristenkan yang sudah Kristen', *Tempo*, 17, 36 (1987): 79.

As the leader of a huge Protestant congregation, Nababan's statement represents the attitude of the HKBP as an institution as well as the entire congregation. Yet, in practice his statement does not prevent Protestants from practising *adat* in a non-religious setting or performing *gondang sabangunan* and *tortor* in order to worship the spirits of the ancestors, as is evidenced in the case of contemporary *adat* feasts which are taken seriously by some contemporary Protestant Toba Batak. However, it also demonstrates the fact that even after more than a century of dialogue, each performance of *gondang sabangunan* and *tortor* today takes place within a dialectical framework created out of the participants' interpretation of the opposing norms of *adat* and Christianity.

### Conclusion: Into the modern era

The Protestant Church has struggled with its relationship to *adat* (including *gondang* and *tortor* as its musical symbol) over one-and-a-half centuries of debate and negotiation, moving from a position of conflict and prohibition to a point of reconciliation that recognises that congregants have and will always practice aspects of *adat* and therefore accommodates some *adat* practices. To this day the two largest Protestant Batak Churches – the HKBP and GKPI – remain uncertain about their attitude to the *gondang-tortor* tradition. The current *Order of Discipline* expressly forbids the traditional mode of *gondang sabangunan* performance. However, the Protestant Church now allows its congregations to use *gondang sabangunan* in *adat* ceremonies, subject to certain constraints and rules.

Unlike the Catholic Church, Protestants have not re-contextualised the *gondang-tortor* tradition by including it in the Sunday service liturgy, maintaining instead the policy of privileging European forms of liturgical and religious musical expression.<sup>98</sup> Through the *Order of Discipline*, however, the Church is endeavouring to shift the function of the *gondang-tortor* tradition from one which is animist-religious to one which is non-religious and socially and culturally oriented, by allowing its use in church feasts while simultaneously encouraging the people to adapt it in *adat* ceremonies to accord with Christian teaching.

Since the essence of the Toba Batak culture was originally found to be antithetical to Christianity, contact with the latter interfered with *adat*. In order to proselytise among the local people, missionaries felt they needed to replace *adat* with Christian beliefs and practices as well as Western cultural forms. After only a few decades, German missionaries collaborated with the Dutch colonial government in an effort to eliminate the practices of *adat*. So, for example, the various *Orders of Discipline* instituted in the period between 1866 and the 1940s banned congregations from employing the *gondang-tortor* tradition at *adat* feasts. Contrary to expectations, the ban did not serve to destroy *adat*; it only created chaos within Protestant communities and generated resistance among those who adhered to their ancestral beliefs. The situation became even more complex for Christians as the missionaries held that *adat* practices could be divided into three categories: anti-Christian, pro-Christian and neutral. Although intended to assist the process of the Christianisation of *adat*, this threefold division confused the converts' understanding of its meaning and role and they were therefore divided in their acceptance of various

98 One should not exaggerate the degree of inculturation that has taken place; see Purba, 'Gondang sabangunan', p. 11.

concepts about its nature. The results of this confusion and divided understanding of *adat* remain to this day; the missionary legacy of the three categories is clearly distinguishable in the 1952, 1968 and 1987 *Orders of Discipline*, even as prepared by Toba ministers.

The conflicts and contradictions between belief systems are not hidden or ignored; indeed *konflik* (conflict) is recognised as an aspect of social intercourse in Toba society and is usually faced openly.<sup>99</sup> So, for example, when a conflict occurred between the Protestant Church (HKBP) and its members in the early 1960s that led to a prospective contradiction between Church and government policy with regard to *adat* practices, it was addressed at *adat* seminars. The 1968 seminar succeeded in issuing some instructions and regulations regarding *adat* for Protestants, but it failed to reach a unified view.

Although the Church does not want its members to practice *hasipelebeguan*, it has come to recognise the pre-Christian social traditions through which the people strengthen relationships. Likewise, when Toba Batak ministers took over governance of the Church from missionaries, they found it necessary to practice *adat* despite their ecclesiastical responsibility, otherwise they would have been excluded from these social relationships, and this necessity began to influence Church policy from the time they assumed leadership. When ministers hosted an *adat* feast, they therefore sometimes presented a *gondang-tortor* performance. When they attended *adat* feasts to the accompaniment of the *gondang*, they also participated in dancing the *tortor*. Frequently, when they visited a particular congregation during church functions, they were honoured with a performance of *gondang* music. Being so honoured, they had to respect it, and dance the *tortor* together with members of the congregation, some of whom were their relatives. Ministers who understood the use of the *gondang* and *tortor* from their own experiences, thus persuaded the Protestant Church to tolerate the use of the *gondang-tortor* tradition in order not to lose its members.

It is apparent that the Church disagrees with the idea of using local culture as a tool to communicate the Gospel; participants in the 1977 seminar that attempted to indigenize Church liturgy failed to achieve a unanimous decision. However, by allowing the *gondang-tortor* tradition a place in church feasts, Protestant ministers have assigned it a new role alongside the music of electric organs, brass bands and hymn singing belonging to the Church liturgy. This is constantly confirmed in the speeches delivered by pastors at these feasts. When *gondang* and *tortor* are performed at non-liturgical Protestant functions, rules of performance and other *adat* rules become subservient to Church law.

Outside the Church, however, the tension between *adat* and Christian teachings remains (for Christians). Possibly it will always remain, for it exists at a very profound level. Because of the moral responsibility to follow the Church's *Order of Discipline*, few Protestant-run *gondang-tortor* performances at either *adat* or non-*adat* feasts now include spirit possession rituals. Exceptions do occur, however. In the pre-funeral ceremony and exhumation of bones ceremony with *gondang* and *tortor* that I witnessed in Medan and Sipaholon in 1994, the worship of ancestral spirits openly occurred, leading some to ask whether the Church allows Protestants to choose between obeying

99 H. Basyral Harahap, *Orientasi nilai-nilai budaya Batak: Suatu pendekatan terhadap perilaku Batak Toba dan Angkola-Mandailing* (Jakarta: Sanggar Willem Iskandar, 1987), pp. 172–8.

the *Order of Discipline* as members of Christian parishes and observing their *adat* obligations as members of clans. The answer to this question is still unknown, but the fact that the Church did not discipline those who performed the worship of ancestral spirits openly implies that a high level of pragmatism now prevails.

*Adat* and Church culture have distinctly different principles and objectives and yet for many Toba Batak *adat* and Christianity are each constituents of their identity and influence their social and religious lives in equal measure. It is unlikely that the Church will ever fully control *adat*, or vice versa. *Adat* and Church teachings will therefore continually have to find a creative compromise to resolve the tension between them. Accordingly we can expect that the two conflicting sets of social and religious conduct represented by *adat* and the *Order of Discipline* will continue to influence the future of the *gondang-tortor* tradition.