
Westhelle's Vision of Hybridity and the Cultural Hybrid Practice of the Batak Church (HKBP)

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Westhelle's hybridity vision

One of Vitor Westhelle's important contributions to postcolonial studies that can be used to understand the shaping of the characteristics of Lutheran churches in the Global South, and in particular the Batak Church (Huria Kristen Batak Protestant/HKBP) in Indonesia, is his vision of hybridity. Hybridity is a term that was born and developed in post-colonial studies, a study that criticizes the unbalanced relations in the encounter between colonialists (West/Occident) and colonized (East/Orient). Unbalanced relationships have led to the practice of hegemony. The relationship between colonizers and colonized was initially analyzed by Edward Said in his book *Orientalism*. Then the idea was developed by a critic, Homi K. Bhabha, in his book *The Location of Culture*. Theologically, postcolonial ideas were developed by theologians to criticize the domination of Western Christianity in the context of colonialism and the Christian mission that was brought by the West to the South Global. For example, R.S. Sugirtharaja who criticized the domination of biblical texts in the context of religious plurality in Asia; Catherine Keller, a professor of constructive theology concerned with social justice and ecology; Vitor Westhelle, a Lutheran theologian from Latin America who developed the theological concept of hybridity; and other theologians who have paid attention to the issue.

Influenced by Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony, Edward Said examines how Western hegemony (invaders) is constructed against the East (colonized). By connecting the structures of colonialism, the production of Western knowledge and cultural representation, Said argues that colonialism is not only about political domination and territorial control. For Said, colonialism also included cultural hegemony, as with orthodoxies and canons of taste, texts, values, and colonial representations of the Others. This process begins with the efforts of the West (Occident) to define itself by reflecting on the East (Orient). The West defines themselves as a personality, image, idea, and experience that contrasts with the East.¹ This contrasting difference encourages the West to create negative stereotypes or denigrate the East, giving rise to binary oppositions in colonial and colonized relations: we/they, rational/irrational, white/black, west/east, colonial/colonized, etc. The West considered the East backward and irrational, while the

1. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 2-3.

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West considered itself to be progressive and rational. As a result of this view, the West felt that they had the authority to colonize and civilize the East because the East was considered to have no civilization. In this context, the colonial and colonized relations are much more than just a relationship of power, but domination and various complex levels of hegemony sought to instill colonial cultural values and to culturally discipline the colonized people.

However, avoiding the bias from Said's analysis which imagines the encounter of the colonizer and the colonized as seemingly stable, rigid, unchanging and always in oppositional tension, Homi Bhabha provides an alternative reading of the encounter in a more nuanced and paradoxical way. According to Bhabha, between the two categories of invaders and colonized there is a space known as the third space or the hybrid or liminal space.² Another postcolonial critic, Gayatri Spivak, called this third space "catachresis" space.³ According to Bhabha, hybridity is a metaphor to describe the joining of two different cultures to produce certain properties, as well as to eliminate certain other qualities that both

2. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 1-4.

3. Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Harvard University Press, 1994), 14.

have.⁴ This means, in a hybrid space, the colonized are trying to free themselves from binary opposition with a mimicry strategy. Influenced by the thoughts of Jacques Lacan, Bhabha argued that mimicry is like camouflage, not a harmonization of repression of difference, but a form of resemblance, that differs from or defends presence by displaying it in part, metonymically.⁵ Based on this understanding, the colonized did not oppose the colonizers head on, but rather by subtlety and deception. They took over the cultural signs of the colonizers that were given content and criticized to form a new culture or way of life.

Westhelle in his book *The Church Event* also uses the term hybrid space to describe the third space. In contrast to Bhabha who understands the formation of a hybrid space based on the encounter between the colonizer and the colonized, Westhelle, who is influenced by the thoughts of Jacques Derrida and Walter Benjamin, argues that hybrid space is formed based on negotiations between experiences of two kinds of spaces: spaces as *locales* and as *places*. Both have different characters and functions. On the one hand, as *locales*, space functions to indicate the position where we are in a path. In contrast, Westhelle describes *places* as a rest or shelter space. Functionally, *locales* space has a transit function that sends us from one place to another. Meanwhile, *places* have a catalytic function, where experiences gained while in the *locales* space are shared in the *places* space. At the same time, *locales* and *places* also have different characteristics. Based on the architecture, the *locales* space is designed to be open with irreversible decorations. Meanwhile, the decorations for the *places* space can be redesigned or completed based on the available resources.⁶ According to Westhelle, the negotiation between *locales* and *places* describes our daily lives that move between these two spatial experiences in turn. The negotiation process forms a hybrid space which has the characteristics of *both* spaces (*locales* and *places*). Even though it has the character of both, the hybrid space is not the same as both. In postcolonial studies, such situations describe those who are territorially, culturally, or politically not insiders or outsiders, but both.⁷ Therefore, Westhelle argues that hybridity is an attempt to find a concept that can simultaneously affirm union, but not forfeit difference.⁸

Within the context of ecclesiology, Westhelle builds his vision of a hybrid space. He categorizes the hybrid space with the aim of understanding the process of forming the church and the uniqueness of the space in which the church happens and is being formed. Based on this objective, the hybrid space is categorized into *thick* and *thin*. Hybrid spaces are categorized as *thick* because they leave strong memories that can change circumstances and form a more significant perception of space. The hybrid *thick* space is also a

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catalyst for the goals to be achieved. The hybrid space can also be categorized as *thin* because the space can be formed according to the purpose we want.⁹

Within the category of *thick* hybrid spaces, Westhelle also distinguishes these spaces in three forms: *monumental*, *archival*, and *epiphanic*. Monumental space is described as a space that has impressive features that are easy to remember. These features are formed as a symbolic representation of their environment. Monumental spaces also feature the telling of stories that are within that space itself and that connect us from one place to another. The archival space is interpreted as a collection of memories. If the attraction of monumental space is based on its impressive features, the attractiveness of archival space lies in the memory it evokes. Through this memory, archival space connects us to history and stories in other places. The third form of the *thick* hybrid space is called *epiphanic*. Even though it is in the *thick* hybrid space which leaves a strong impression or memory, the *epiphanic* space has special characteristics compared to the *monumental* space and the *archival* space. Some of those special characteristics are first, the *epiphanic* space has the quality of transparency that sends a view beyond that space. Second, the *epiphanic* space stores and carries a record of memories, but memories in and through which the future is revealed—a promise is also required. Their meaning as a space endowed with subjectivity is eschatological. Therefore, the memory in them is the memory of a future, which is anticipated (as *prolepsis*) in the stories of the past that are remembered. Apart from that, this space is also the place of *Parousia*, a place where divine presence is presented in worldly things as a wrapping for these gifts. Westhelle also revealed that the divine presence has three forms of manifestation, the human Jesus, the fellowship of those who follow Jesus through the preaching of the word and the sacrament, and the vague presence through all creation.¹⁰

From Westhelle's perspective, I understand that churches (denominations of churches) are formed in and through *epiphanic*

4. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 162.

5. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 128.

6. Vitor Westhelle, *The Church Event: Call and Challenge of a Church Protestant* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 141-142.

7. Westhelle, *The Church Event*, 143.

8. Vitor Westhelle, *After Heresy: Colonial Practice and Post-Colonial Theologies* (Oregon: CASCADE Books, 2010), 153.

9. Westhelle, *The Church Event*, 143-144.

10. Westhelle, *The Church Event*, 144-146.

spaces. This formation is marked by formulating teachings through the negotiation process as a real effort to create a divine presence in the midst of the existing context. This means that the church and its teachings, which are formulated, and we inherit, are formulas of negotiation in their context. When the teachings were brought and preached in a new context, they had to be renegotiated within the context of the recipient (re-contextualization). In this case, the negotiation process (re-contextualization) will show the unity of the churches which is formed with the existing teachings, but at the same time it will not eliminate the differences. That is, the church that is formed is a unity with existing theological traditions, but also has differences with those traditions. Within the Westhellean framework of thought, I have analyzed the process of the formation of the Batak Church (HKBP) with the uniqueness of the space in which the church was formed so that it has different characteristics in the midst of the Lutheran community. This uniqueness is influenced by the theological tradition of mission societies and missionaries who have undergone a negotiation process when these traditions are brought into the middle of the Batak community context, even when the Batak Church reformulated its church teachings in confession documents.

Mission society

Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, various mission societies have come to Batak Land with different theological characters, namely the Baptist Mission Society of England, Nederlandsche Zendelinggenootschap (NZG) from the Netherlands, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), and Mennonit Doopsgezinde Zendingsvereniging (DZV) supported by Mennonite churches in Ukraine (Russia). However, for different reasons, these mission societies did not succeed in evangelizing the Batak people. Some of these mission societies have not abandoned the theological traditions that we can see today. The only mission society that has successfully evangelized the Batak Land is the Rhenische Mission-Gesellschaft (RMG) which is based in Barmen, Germany. RMG missionaries started their work in Batak Land in 1861. Later that year the Batak Church (HKBP) was established. Using a variety of methods, RMG missionaries preached the gospel, establishing hospitals and schools whose teaching materials were also structured to support evangelistic goals. During its development, the RMG theological tradition also influenced the formation of the identity of the Batak Church.

As stated by James Scherer, theologically, the RMG adheres to a "consensus union" by recognizing the Lutheran confession and the Reformed confession.¹¹ This character was formulated in basic doctrine in 1847:

In our meetings, members of the two Protestant sects who are still separated from each other, are united in brotherhood. . . We are far from assuming that the confessions that gave rise to separation are not important,

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nor are we far from trying to persuade or urge people to ignore them. But we are sure that no matter what, there will be no one who might prevent us from working together and together for the glory of Christ.¹²

However, since Hugo Hahn established the status of Lutheran confession to the church he founded in South Africa, RMG changed its character to "mission union." The change gave RMG missionaries the freedom to develop Lutheran or Reformed traditions, or to negotiate both in mission fields. Although the RMG never formulated a new confession as a result of negotiations between Lutheran and Reformed confessions, these changes have provided opportunities for RMG missionaries to negotiate these two theological traditions, especially in the context of Batak society.

Institutionally, the RMG was more influenced by the Lutheran tradition, especially Pietist-Lutheran, rather than Reformed. This strand can be seen from the many teachers of Barmen Seminary, which educates prospective RMG missionaries, who are Halle alumni. When the Barmen Seminary teachers were appointed as leaders (inspectors) of the RMG, their theological traditions also influenced RMG policies. Likewise, when the teachers educated prospective RMG missionaries, their theological ideas were passed on to their students, for example I.L. Nommensen and Johannes Warneck who served in the Batak Land and introduced Lutheran traditions in the Batak Church. However, the openness of the RMG as a mission union has resulted in the birth of a church that has unique characteristics in the Batak Land. This uniqueness can be seen in two ways: Martin Luther's Small Catechism and HKBP's understanding of the church in the formulation of the HKBP confession. Despite having a unique character, the Batak Church felt closer to the Lutheran tradition so that it claimed itself to be Lutheran and became a member of the Lutheran community, LWF, in 1952.

11. James A. Scherer, *Mission and Unity in Lutheranism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 27.

12. Andar M. Lumbantobing, *Makna Wibawa Jabatan dalam Gereja Batak* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 1996), 84.

Martin Luther's Small Catechism

The entry of the Lutheran tradition in the midst of society and the Batak Church was brought by RMG missionaries who had followed the Lutheran tradition before coming to the Land of Batak. For example, in an effort to counter the influence of Roman Catholicism, which attracted Batak Church members in Balige, Johannes Warneck at the HKBP General Assembly in 1935 made a decision that the HKBP should celebrate Martin Luther's Reformation every 31 October. The first celebration of Luther's Reformation at HKBP was held on 31 October 1936.¹³ However, before Warneck, I.L Nommensen, known as the Batak Apostle, had translated Martin Luther's Small Catechism into the Batak language. The booklet was first printed in Barmen in 1874 with the title "Katekhismus Lutheri na ni hatabatakkon ni Pandita Nommensen, dohot angka donganna."¹⁴ This small catechism was the first learning material in written form. The book is used to teach the Batak people who wish to be baptized and is also used in schools founded by missionaries. Nommensen's reason for using Luther's Small Catechism was that the catechism does not use as many biblical quotations as the Heidelberg Catechism so that it is easier to teach to Batak people who do not know the alphabet. At that time, no Bible was translated into the Batak language for use

13. J. R. Hutauruk, *Johannes Warneck: Penggagas, Pengamat dan Pelaku Kemandirian Gereja Batak 1907-1944* (Medan: LAPiK, 2014), 308-309.

14. Translation: "The Lutheran Catechism, translated into Batak by Pastor Nommensen and his friends." J. R. Hutauruk, *Menghargai Dokumen Sejarah Gereja* (Medan: LAPiK, 2016), 212.

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by the Batak people.¹⁵ This meant that Luther's Small Catechism was more practical to use in the midst of the limitations of the Batak people at that time.

Although Nommensen's translation of the catechism is called Martin Luther's Small Catechism, it is slightly different from Luther's original work. We can see the difference in two things, namely the general structure of the Small Catechism and the arrangement of The Ten Commandments. The contents of Nommensen's translation of the catechism consists of only five parts: the ten commandments, the creed, the Lord's prayer, the sacra-

15. T. O. B. Simaremare, "Peranan Katekhismus Lutheri Kecil" in *Benih yang Berbuah* (Pematangsiantar: Sekolah Tinggi Theologia HKBP, 1984), 94. See Mangisi S. E. Simorangkir, *Ajaran Dua Kerajaan Luther dan Relevansinya di Indonesia* (Bandung: Penerbit Satu-satu, 2011), 277.

Commandments

	Martin Luther's Small Catechism ¹⁶	Luther's Small Catechism by Nommensen (Batak Church) ¹⁷	Heidelberg Catechism ¹⁸
I	You are to have no other gods.	I am the Lord your God! Do not have you other gods before Me.	You shall have no other gods before me.
II	You are not to misuse the name of your God.	Do not make for yourself an image that resembles anything that is in the heavens, or on earth, or in water to worship or obey.	You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.
III	You are to hallow the day of rest.	Do not use God's name in vain because God will punish those who misuse his name.	You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

16. "The Small Catechism" in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 345-375.

17. Agenda HKBP (Pematangsiantar: Percetakan HKBP, 2013), 3-4.

18. "The Heidelberg Catechism" in <http://www.heidelberg-catechism.com/pdf/lords-days/Heidelberg-Catechism.pdf> accessed January 26,

2021.

IV	You are to honor your father and your mother.	Remember and keep the Sabbath day holy: six days you will work and do your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God, so do not do any work, you or your son, or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant, or your animal, or a stranger who is in your place of residence. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and he rested on the seventh day, this is why God blessed the Sabbath day and kept it holy.	Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.
V	You are not to kill.	Honor your father and mother, so that you can live a long life on earth that God has given you.	Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.
VI	You are not to commit adultery.	Do not murder.	You shall not murder.
VII	You are not to steal.	Do not commit adultery.	You shall not commit adultery.
VIII	You are not to bear false witness against your neighbor.	Do not steal.	You shall not steal.
IX	You are not to covet your neighbor's house.	Do not speak false witnesses to your neighbors.	You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.
X	You are not to covet your neighbor's wife, male or female servant, cattle, or whatever is his.	Do not covet your neighbor's house. Do not covet his wife, or male servant, or female servant or ox or donkey, or whatever your neighbor has.	You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

ment of holy baptism, and the sacrament of the altar. This means that there are passages in Luther's Small Catechism that are not included in Nommensen's translation. In addition, Nommensen also changed the order in the section of The Ten Commandments from Luther's original version: the first and second commandments in the Luther version developed into the first to the third commandment in the Nommensen version, while the ninth and tenth commandments in the Luther version are combined into the tenth commandment in the Nommensen version. It should be noted that Nommensen's version of the ten commandments has similarities to the Heidelberg Catechism. Although there are similarities in arrangement, there are also differences: the second commandment and the explanation of the meaning of the second commandment are Nommensen's own formulations.¹⁹

According to Warneck, the reason Nommensen made several changes to Luther's Small Catechism was to fit the context of the Batak Christians who were still influenced by cultural elements and animistic religious practices.²⁰ Based on that, J.R. Hutauruk argues

that Nommensen's change of composition aims to emphasize the prohibition elements (Verbotes) that Batak Christians must pay attention to.²¹ I argue that Nommensen's version of Luther's Small Catechism is the result of negotiations carried out by Nommensen when he brought Lutheran and Reformed traditions to the context of Batak society. Nommensen's version of Luther's Small Catechism is still used in the Batak Church today. This catechism is used for confirmation classes, Sunday schools and this catechism is part of the liturgy of the Batak Church which is read every Sunday. Therefore, since childhood, the Batak people were close to Luther's Small Catechism, memorizing its text and learning and interpreting its meaning.

Church discipline

Another thing that illustrates the occurrence of the negotiation process in the theological tradition which is faced with the context of the Batak Church is church discipline. Although the RMG missionaries in Batak Land were dominated by missionaries who adhered to the Lutheran tradition, they succeeded in formulating and establishing church discipline through the RMG Missionaries

19. J. R. Hutauruk, *Menghargai Dokumen Sejarah Gereja* (Medan: LAPiK, 2016), 215.

20. See Simaremare, "Peranan Katekismus Lutheri Kecil", 93.

21. Hutauruk, *Menghargai Dokumen Sejarah Gereja*, 214.

Conference held in Siantar Narumonda, Pematangsiantar in 1897. The reason that the missionaries formulated church discipline was the animistic Batak cultural practice which was thought to hinder the loyalty of Batak Christians to the gospel. At that time (perhaps still today), the Batak Christian practiced the worshiping of ancestral spirits. In principle, church discipline aims to keep Batak Christians faithful in the Christian life, and to guide them to behave in accordance with God's Word in their daily lives.²² Based on this legalistic aspect, initially church discipline prioritized punishment, the excommunication of members of the congregation who deviated from the gospel. This legalistic aspect caused a schism in the Batak Church in 1927. At that time, members of the congregation who were subject to church discipline and excommunication rebelled by establishing a new church.

When RMG missionaries were expelled by the Dutch from Indonesia, including the Batak Lands because of the German defeat in World War II, the indigenous priests of the Batak Church included "church discipline" in the formulation of the 1951 HKBP Confession, especially in articles about the church (article VIII). This illustrates the difference between the HKBP Confession and the Augsburg Confession. This difference can be seen in three ways:²³ first, articles VII and VIII of the Augsburg Confession on the church are united in the HKBP Confession into article VIII. Second, in the HKBP Confession, one of the teachings that was rejected was the view that the church was bound to *adat* (Batak culture). Meanwhile, the Augsburg Confession condemned the Donatists. Third, departing from the rejected teachings (teachings about churches that are bound to *adat*), the Batak Church establishes the signs of a true church: the pure preaching of the Gospel, the right administration of the two sacraments, which the Lord Jesus commanded; the exercise of church discipline to combat sin. This is different from the Augsburg Confession which emphasized two aspects: the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel.

Based on this, I argue that the Batak Church confessional document was formulated through the Lutheran tradition negotiation process in the middle of the Batak Church context. Although Luther's teachings were adopted in the confession document of the Batak Church, the confession document also shows its differences with the Augsburg Confession. Besides that, the challenges faced (rejected teachings) are also different. One of the differences is the church discipline that is practiced in the life of the Batak Church. In 1952, the church discipline produced by the RMG missionaries was revised and called the *Ruhut Parmahanian dohot Paminsangan* (pastoral rules and counseling). This illustrates that the revised church discipline prioritizes pastoral aspects rather than

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punishment. The practice of church discipline is still observed in the Batak Church of today.

Conclusion

Vitor Westhelle's contribution to hybridity is helpful in seeing the formation of the identity of the Batak Church, which claims to be Lutheran. The uniqueness of the Batak Church identity formation space is *adat* (Batak culture) which often directly or indirectly leads Christian Batak people back to animist practices. The uniqueness of this space challenges the church to negotiate (re-contextualize) the traditions inherited by the church. The result of these negotiations was the birth of a unique church, inheriting Lutheran and Reformed traditions, but not completely or purely Lutheran or Reformed. The results of these negotiations also showed the unity of the Batak Church with the two theological traditions. The Batak Church is one of the voices, among other voices, that negotiate the formation of their identity in a hybrid space.

22. Darwin Lumbantobing, *Tumbuh Lokal dan Berbuah Lebat* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2018), 283.

23. See *Pengakuan Iman HKBP 1951 & 1996* (Tarutung: Kantor Pusat HKBP, 2013). "A Creed of the Younger Churches" in John H. Leith, ed., *Creeeds of the Churches*, (Virginia: John Knox Press, 1973), 561; "The Augsburg Confession" in *Book of Concord*, 42.