

NOMMENSEN'S DIALOGICAL APPROACH: THE APPROPRIATION OF THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF "LOVE YOUR GOD AND LOVE YOUR NEIGHBORS" IN BATAK TOBA COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT: Nommensen's missionary work is an outstanding act of intercultural and dialogical evangelism. His eagerness to learn Batak Toba people's culture and language shaped his cultural sensitivity in evangelism and made his missionary work successful. The biblical concept of "love your God and love your neighbor" in Nommensen will be examined and compared with Batak Toba people's understanding in four dimensions of belief, sense of belonging, behavior, and experience. Afterwards, how Nommensen's dialogical approach appropriates this concept in Batak Toba communities who constantly live at war will be examined.

KEYWORDS: dialogical; appropriation; love; evangelization; culture.

ABSTRAK: Pelayanan misi Nommensen merupakan suatu kegiatan luar biasa akan penginjilan dialogis dan lintas budaya. Keinginannya mempelajari budaya orang-orang Batak Toba dan bahasa Batak telah menajamkan kepekaannya akan budaya di dalam penginjilan yang membuat pelayanan misinya berhasil. Dalam artikel ini, konsep Alkitabiah akan "mengasihi Tuhan dan mengasihi sesama" dalam pemikiran Nommensen akan diteliti dan dibandingkan dengan pengertian orang-orang Batak Toba dalam empat dimensi dari kepercayaan, kepemilikan, kebiasaan, dan pengalaman. Selanjutnya, bagaimana pendekatan dialogis Nommensen dapat menyampaikan

konsep ini dengan baik di dalam komunitas Batak Toba yang selalu hidup di dalam peperangan akan dibahas.

KATA KUNCI: dialogis; apropriasi; kasih; penginjilan; budaya.

Introduction

Around two hundred years ago, several missionaries had tried to evangelize Batak Toba people in Silindung, which was known as the bulwark of paganism at that time.¹ However, all of them had failed except a young German missionary from *Rheinischen Missionsgesellschaft* (RMG), Ludwig Ingwer Nommensen. He became a missionary in North Sumatra for 56 years, from 1862 to his death in 1918 and was known as “the apostle to the Batak people.”

It was Nommensen cultural sensitivity which was based on his understanding of Batak culture and language that could led his missionary work to success. He used a dialogical approach to deliver and appropriate the biblical messages, which mean that he would introduce a certain biblical message by posing questions.² This approach would allow him to understand the four dimensions of Batak Toba’s ways of belief, sense of belonging, behavior, and experience. Therefore, in his early encounter with Batak Toba people, he tried to appropriate the biblical concept of “love your God and love your neighbor” in order to bring the concept of forgiveness, peace, and happiness in Batak Toba societies which constantly live at war.³ Strikingly, the appropriation of this concept demands an actual example from Nommensen himself to open their hearts for biblical messages.

In this article, I will examine how Nommensen appropriates the biblical concept of “love your God and love your neighbor” in his

¹ Timothy L. Nommensen, *Ludwig Ingwer Nommensen and The Batak Church in Sumatra*, trans. William Nommensen (Academic Paper, Wisconsin, May 12th, 1987), 4,7. <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/3492/NommensenLINommensenBatakSumatra.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> (accessed: September, 30th, 2018)

² Lothar Schreiner, *The Legacy of Ingwer Ludwig Nommensen* (International Bulletin of Missionary Research: April 2000), 81.

³ Nommensen, *Nommensen and Batak Church*, 13.

missionary work, especially through his dialogical approach to Batak Toba people in Silindung, North Sumatra. Thus, I will first provide brief information about Nommensen. Second, I will discuss Silindung's political, historical, and cultural context at that time. Third, I will examine and compare the concept of "love your God and love your neighbor" between the biblical concept with the Batak Toba people's concept in four dimensions of belief, sense of belonging, behavior, and experience. Fourth, I will discuss Nommensen's cultural sensitivity and his dialogical approach to deliver the biblical messages. Finally, I will give brief conclusions and highlight several principles in Nommensen missionary works that are still relevant in our contemporary context to deliver the biblical messages interculturally in the way that Nommensen did.

Nommensen's Biography

Nommensen was born on 6th of February 1843. He had a severe accident when he was twelve years old. The accident that crushed his legs led him to become a missionary. Because he vowed to God that if his legs were healed, he would go to the heathen. God answered his prayers through the doctor who found a new remedy.⁴ Furthermore, according to Schreiner, Nommensen owed his outlook and convictions not only to his seminary training but also to the Lutheran revival movement in Schleswig-Holstein. He had learned from F.A.G. Tholuck (1799–1872) and A. Neander (1789–1850) and interpreted Christianity as "New Life." Tholuck and Neander's theological and philosophical positions pervaded the teaching that Nommensen received during his seminary years.⁵ Moreover, in 1857, Nommensen was admitted to the mission house, and after completing his studies, the church at Barmen under RMG ordained him as a missionary to the Batak people in October 1861.⁶

⁴ Ibid., 2-3.

⁵ Schreiner, *Legacy of Nommensen*, 81.

⁶ Nommensen, *Nommensen and Batak Church*, 3.

Contemporary Contexts

In order to have a better understanding of Nommensen's missionary works, it is necessary to have a brief discussion about the political, historical, and cultural context at that time. All those contexts not only explained several challenges that Nommensen had faced but also prepared and shaped Nommensen's missionary work in Silindung.

Political and Historical Contexts

In 1818–1824, Stanford Raffles had his direct encounter with Batak people during his office as Lieutenant-Governor of Bencoolen (now Bengkulu). Raffles political views preferred the Malay inhabitants adhere to paganism as opposed to Islam. However, his conscience told him to bring them from darkness to light, from ignorance to enlightenment, and from barbarous circumstances to civilization and he was convinced that education and Christianity with an active government and zealous missionary works might do wonders among the inhabitants.⁷

Furthermore, Raffles' awareness led to the missionary works in North Sumatra. In 1820, Pastor Richard Burton and Nathan Ward were sent out to Sumatra from England. After receiving Raffles' advice, they went to North Sumatera, where the Batak people lived. In 1824, they went deeper to Silindung where the Batak Toba tribe lived. Unfortunately, in their first approach, the emphasis was on the necessity to become "little children," if they wanted to be a member of the kingdom of God. Nommensen said, "Batak Toba people found this message unacceptable, because they were very ambitious, and dreamed of leadership to become a great people." Thus, as a result, they were driven out from the borders of the Batak land.⁸ Soon after this incident, there were a group of Arab marauders who invaded the valley where the Batak lived, pillaging and

⁷ Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied, *Shades of Alterity: A study of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles' discourse on religions amongst the Malays* (Master Thesis in University of Singapore, 2004), 70–72. <http://scholarbank.nus.sg/handle/10635/13867> (accessed: January, 24th, 2017)

⁸ Nommensen, *Nommensen and Batak Church*, 1.

killing. The Batak people associated this invasion with their treatment to those two missionaries and started to have a perception against white men and missionaries.⁹

In 1824, Sumatra was ceded by the British to the Netherlands under Anglo-Dutch Treaty. Consequently, all missionary works in North Sumatra were under the Netherlands. In 1834, two missionaries, Henry Lyman and Samuel Munson were sent from America to reach Batak people in Sumatra.¹⁰ Being zealous to bring the Gospel to the bulwark of paganism, they hastened from the coast to Silindung without permission or protection by the Dutch government. Unfortunately, convinced that they were enemies, Raja Panggalamei together with his people attacked them with spears and knives and ate them in a cannibal feast.¹¹

Moreover, Franz Wilhelm Junghuhn published his book about Batak people based on his journey in 1840. In his book, Junghuhn suggested that the Dutch government should open Christian missionary work to stem the influence of Islam in the northern part of Sumatra. It was because North Sumatra lay between Islam areas, namely, Aceh and Minangkabau.¹² This book influenced *Nederlandsche Bijbelgenootschap* to send Van der Tuuk to analyze Batak language to translate the Bible.¹³ After several years, Van der Tuuk publishes “a grammar of Batak Toba” and suggested to send Christian missionaries to Tapanuli. Thus, in 1857, G. Van Asselt came to evangelize Batak people in Tapanuli and resulted in the first two Batak people who became Christian, namely, Jakobus Tampubolon and Simon Siregar.¹⁴ Furthermore, on 7th of October 1861 four pastors held a meeting to hand over the missionary works in North Sumatra to RMG. Interestingly, Nommensen was ordained as missionary to the Batak people in the following days and then went to Holland for

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Van den end & Weitjens, SJ. *Ragi Cerita 2* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2008), 182.

¹¹ Nommensen, *Nommensen and Batak Church*, 1.

¹² Sarah L. Maltey, *The Missionary Herald* (Boston, Crocker and Brewster, 1835), 101.

¹³ B. Napitupulu, *Almanak HKBP* (Pematang Siantar: Unit Usaha Percetakan HKBP, 2008), 442.

¹⁴ Ibid.

the first two months to learn the fundamentals of the Batak language directly from the linguist, Dr. van der Tuuk and also learned Batak culture from Junghuhn's book.¹⁵

Cultural Context

According to Raffles, Batak people possesses a language and a written character peculiar to themselves even though the influences of Hinduism may be traced in their religion. They also have a regular government with deliberative assemblies, and in all their dealings, they are fair and honorable with a few numbers of crime.¹⁶ Furthermore, Lehmann explains their great cultural achievements in weaponry, tools, architecture, literature and discusses how Batak people are intelligent and eloquent in their speech, which shows a special predilection for subtle arguments and acute judgments.¹⁷

However, Raffles mentions that Batak people were warlike and exhibited some of the worst characteristics of barbarism. They were cannibals, and the laws of their country obliged them to devour the flesh of the criminals or prisoners.¹⁸ The savage practice was prevalent at that times, and it was also said that the Batak people preferred human flesh to any other, so the lives of nearly all the old people were terminated in this manner.¹⁹ In 1820, Raffles estimated that the number of persons annually eaten was around sixty to one hundred in a time of peace.²⁰ Nommensen also confirmed the cruelties and cannibalism ritual in the lives of Batak Toba. He said the tribes were constantly at war, and the captives and enemies would be tortured, killed and eaten in their cannibal feast. He witnessed how the local people, on the one hand, could show their

¹⁵ Nommensen, *Nommensen and Batak Church*, 3-4.

¹⁶ Maltey, *The Missionary Herald*, 101.

¹⁷ Martin E. Lehmann, *Studies in the History of Missions*, vol. 13, *A Biographical Study of Ingwer Ludwig Nommensen, 1834-1918: Pioneer Missionary to the Bataks of Sumatra* (Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 1996), 61.

¹⁸ Maltey, *The Missionary Herald*, 101.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

intelligent, friendly, good-natured conversation but on the other hand could become a leader of a cannibal feast, without feeling that he had committed an atrocity.²¹ Thus, Nommensen said Batak Toba people who were led by their kings did not know the meaning of right and justice.²² He also added that he needed to deal with Batak people's stubbornness, with their sinful behavior such as thievery, impudence, cursing, deceiving, and lying.²³

The Concept of "Love Your God and Love Your Neighbor"

Nommensen wants to proclaim the Gospel of peace since his first encounter with Batak people because he thinks it will make them happy and wise.²⁴ Consequently, there are several approaches and messages delivered by Nommensen, but one of the important biblical messages that made Nicodemus convert to Christianity is the concept of "love your God and love your neighbor."²⁵ However, it is necessary to compare the Biblical message about "love your God and love your neighbor" with Batak Toba people who constantly live at war because of their understanding of four dimensions of belief, sense of belonging, behavior, and experience.

Biblical Understanding About the Concept "Love Your God and Love Your Neighbor"

Belief

The Bible teaches that human being was created according to the image of God (Genesis 1:26-28) and according to Berkhof, when Adam fell into temptation, the natural image of God which consisted of man's spiritual, rational, moral, and immortal was obscured but not lost by sin, whereas

²¹ Nommensen, *Nommensen and Batak Church*, 13-14.

²² *Ibid.*, 13.

²³ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 7, 11.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

the moral image of God which consisted in true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness was lost by sin.²⁶ Thus, human enter into a broken relationship with God and falls into damnation because of sin. However, Christ as the second person of Trinity, incarnates into a human being and brings the salvation to His people. This action shows the fulfillment of God's ultimate love for man as what had been mentioned in Ephesians 1:4, that God the Father chose His people in Christ before the foundation of the world to make His people holy and blameless before Him. In this way, His people could exercise the biblical concept of "love your God and love your neighbor." The apostle John mentions that His people could do it because God had first loved His people (1 John 4:19). Moreover, Christ's sacrificial love has become an actual example or model for His people to exercise the same act. John said, "by this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers" (1 John 3:16).

Sense of belonging

Christ's sacrificial love had united all believers of all ages. Thus, He becomes the head, and the believers become one as the body of Christ which consists of many parts who has their own function for the benefit of the whole body and the glory of Christ (Ephesians 2:13-16; 1 Corinthians 12:20). Therefore, the body of Christ becomes the community of love where other people will recognize them as the disciples of Christ (John 13:34-35). In this sense, there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female because all are one in Christ (Galatians 3:28).

Behavior

The Bible records several examples where the concept of "love your God and love your neighbor" had been exercised in early Christian

²⁶ Louis Berkhof, *Summary of Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1938), 68.

communities. Luke mentioned that the believers were selling their lands and houses and belongings and brought the proceeds at the apostles' feet and distributed to each as any had need (Act 2:45; 4:34-35). Another example was mentioned by Paul when he witnessed what the churches of Macedonia did to Corinthians congregations. He explained that even though the Macedonian churches had faced a severe test of affliction and extreme poverty, they begged Paul to have the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints and gave more than Paul expected. This action showed their love to God and neighbor un-separable because as what Paul said that they gave themselves first to the Lord and also by the will of God to Paul and his team. (2 Cor.8:1-5). In another case, John also reminded his congregations to express their love toward God by loving their brothers (1 John 4:20-21).

Experience

As explained above, the churches of Macedonia had expressed and proven the abundance of their joy and generosity in the midst of severe affliction and poverty by taking part in the relief of the saints. Joy in suffering was not possible without love, especially in their condition. Moreover, Paul said,

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

Batak Toba Understanding about the Concept “Love Your God and Love Your Neighbor”

Before discussing the concept of “love your God and love your neighbor” in four dimensions, it is necessary to understand the development of the ancient Batak religion. Raffles explained, this religion had a lasting influence on Islam and Hindu-Buddhists during his time, even in Batak

Mandailing people who were already converted to Islam.²⁷ Sisingamangaraja XII as the King of Batak Toba people in Silindung believed and practiced this religion, but on its further development together with Guru Somalaing Pardede and Raja Mulia Naipospos, they formed a kind of new religion called Parmalim.²⁸ The influence of Parmalim and Sisingamangaraja XII was at first limited in Silindung, but then expanded progressively and even reached the other region of Batak tribes in Dairi, Simalungun, and Karo.²⁹ It happened because he used Parmalim as a propaganda against the influence of the Dutch colonialism and Christianity.³⁰ However, the development of Parmalim that could not be separated from the cultural encounter and this had made Parmalim a kind of syncretistic religion,³¹ mixing the teaching of Judaism, Christian/ Catholic, Islam with local believes.³² According to Hasselgren, Parmalim leaders often had messianic ideas and delivered a millenarian message. At that time, they expected the return of Sisingamangaraja XII to deliver them from the Dutch rule and kept organized small-scale, military resistance.³³ Today, Parmalim religion still exists with around 10,000 members and is acknowledged by the Indonesian government as one of the cult religions.³⁴ Interestingly, when Parmalim religion was institutionalized, any form of cannibalism had ceased and transformed into a kind of peaceful religion.

²⁷ Aljunied, *Shades of Alterity*, 64, 70.

²⁸ Corry Purba, *Gerakan Politik dan Spiritual Parmalim Dalam Rangka Mempertahankan Eksistensi Agama Suku di Tanah Batak*, 5-6. http://www.usi.ac.id/dosen_004/ (accessed: January, 24th, 2017).

²⁹ Uli Kozok, *Surat Batak Sejarah Perkembangan Tulisan Batak* (Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, 2009), 164.

³⁰ Purba, *Gerakan Politik dan Spiritual Parmalim*, 5-6.

³¹ Irwansyah Harahap, *Rasionalisasi Religius dalam Diskursus Keagamaan di Indonesia: Kasus Parmalim Batak Toba* (*Antropologi Indonesia* 61, 2000), 31.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Johan Hasselgren, *Rural Batak, Kings in Medan: The Development of Toba Batak Ethno-religious identity in Medan, Indonesia, 1912-1965* (Stockholm: Elanders Gotab, 2000), 79

³⁴ Oase, *Ugamo Malim*. <https://budaya-indonesia.org/Ugamo-Malim> (accessed: October 1st, 2018).

Belief

First of all, Batak people acknowledge the existence of One Great God, the creator of the heaven and the earth, known as *Debata Mula Jadi Nabolon*.³⁵ Lehmann explains that the power of *Debata* is experienced through the various powers within the cosmos inherent in human beings, living creatures, and nature as a whole.³⁶ Moreover, *Debata* has three manifestations called *Debata Natolu* that reflect three functions, namely: *Batara Guru* representing the underworld; *Sari Pada* representing the middle world; and *Manggala Bulan* representing the upper world.³⁷ Therefore, the embodiment of love and glorification of *Debata* can be seen through all kinds of appreciation to these manifestations in the universe.³⁸

Second, Batak people believe that all the world is populated with nature-spirits and the spirits of the deceased. Those spirits are divided into two categories, *begu* and *somboan*. *Begu* represents the spirits that are less important when the person is still alive, and *Somboan* represents the higher nature-spirits and the spirits of the dead who have a commanding position and beneficial influence in life.³⁹ Batak people believe that innumerable *begu* fill the earth and air. Therefore, they are constantly threatening the living and are responsible for all human misery, misfortune, disease, bad weather, drought, earthquake, crop failures and epidemics among humans and beasts.⁴⁰

Third, according to Batak animistic belief, every living thing including people, animals, and plants possess *tondi* or souls. Lehmann explains that *tondi* is a power that pervades every particle of a person's bodily existence, and both body and *tondi* originates from and eventually will return to *Debata* who is "all-*tondi* and all-space" as the essential

³⁵ Purba, *Gerakan Politik dan Spiritual Parmalim*, 6.

³⁶ Lehmann, *Biographical Study of Nommensen*, 63.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ M. Sorimangaraja Sitanggang, *Kitab Debata Sori Sohaliapan*, 13.

<http://www.rajabatak.org/#5> (accessed: October, 1st, 2018)

³⁹ Lehmann., *Biographical Study of Nommensen*, 63.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

oneness of cosmic totality and order. Accordingly, their chief concern is to preserve their soul and to enrich it by appropriating the souls of other people and other living beings in the immediate environment. For those reasons, a certain sacrifice is given to one's soul to receive certain gifts to enrich their soul.⁴¹ Goldman said, "the action of cannibalism is usually associated with the ideologies about the recycling and regeneration of life-force substance," and becomes a means for processing life-generating substance.⁴² In these ways, the cannibal will receive a certain characteristic of the people whom they eat and also will receive a certain power that will enrich their soul. Thus, these understanding will give a certain balance toward the type of cannibalism that is mentioned by Raffles. Cannibalism is not merely about eating for survival or preference, but it can also be triggered by their ideology about the way to appropriate the soul.

Moreover, Lehmann said, "this self-centered concern for one's soul explains the widespread practice of cannibalism among the Bataks." They eat the flesh and drink the flowing blood of the warriors or criminals in the belief that they are appropriating a part of that person's soul to receive a certain power for themselves.⁴³ However, they believe that one can extract a certain magic substance from persons by killing them in the most gruesome manner and then it can be used to bring death and destruction upon their enemies.⁴⁴

Thus, all kinds of prayers and sacrifices of both animals and human beings to *Debata* and other spirits are not only meant to show their act of love and gratitude but also to reflect their act of self-loving in order to drive away the evil spirits and to gain favor of the ancestral spirits of the departed that could enrich their soul.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Lehmann, *Biographical Study of Nommensen*, 65.

⁴² Laurence Goldman, ed., *The Anthropology of Cannibalism* (Westport: Bergin & Garvey, 1999), 14,16.

⁴³ Lehmann, *Biographical Study of Nommensen*, 65.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 63–64.

Fourth, Lehmann explains that Batak people's beliefs that before birth their soul dwells with God in heaven, and a soul will descend into the world and enter a human body. Accordingly, the fate of that person is once and for all determined by becoming an unalterable destiny that a person cannot escape.⁴⁶ Thus, all struggles and labors cannot alter the final outcome of a person's life. Moreover, this point of view shapes their ethical conduct and belief that one is not responsible nor accountable for every "sinful action" committed, such as theft, plundering, and murder.⁴⁷ Lehmann said that the spirit of self-righteousness characterizes the life and conduct of Batak people and their natural egocentricity, reinforced by the views of soul produced all kinds of misdeeds and crimes. Thus, cannibalism, murder, and a veritable catalog of cruelties belong to the order of the day in their conduct.⁴⁸

Sense of Belonging

Lehmann explains that kings in the tribes possess stately herds of cattle and ample stores rice, whereas the common people are indigent and victims of oppression and extortion by their selfish rulers. The Kings would be willing to provide the poor in case of misfortune with rice that has to be repaid with the double amount of what is borrowed within six months, and if the borrower is unable to repay the loan, he and his family will become slaves until the debt is paid.⁴⁹ Moreover, the relation in one tribe is very close because they are family or relatives. They have the customs in showing respect to the wife's family (*Somba Marhulahula*), showing kindness to all women (*Elek Marboru*), and being careful in living with close relatives (*Manat Mardongan Tubu*) and being obedient toward Kings (*Hormat Marharajaon*).⁵⁰ However, the relations between tribes are constantly at war, and only when they are faced with a

⁴⁶ Ibid., 66.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 67.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Lehmann, *Biographical Study of Nommensen*, 63.

⁵⁰ Sitanggang, *Kitab Debata Sori Sohaliapan*, 28.

common enemy would they fight unitedly for their independence.⁵¹

Behavior

The ritual *Pamaleaon Huta Bolon Sipaha Lima* had been performed annually by Batak people by offering sacrificial buffalo in a *Bius* ceremony.⁵² Nommensen who had seen this ritual on September 25th, 1864, mentioned that after the animal for the sacrifice had been slaughtered, the spirit of the ancestor, as was customary at such celebrations, expressed himself by the mouth of one and told the multitude that he would not accept their sacrifice if his descendants would not observe the custom of the festival, namely if they would not kill a man, who would bring the sacrifice to him in the underworld.⁵³ Moreover, the act of *exocannibalism* in the case of Lyman and Munson where the sacrifice was killed and eaten by the whole tribe of Raja Panggalamei reflected their view on the appropriation of the soul. In fact, in the cannibal feast, they were sharing a certain enrichment to their soul by eating both missionaries together. Accordingly, the act of *endocannibalism* such as to eat the old people could reflect their views on the regeneration of life-force substance. Mele Pesti said that the ritual of cannibalism did not have to be violent because some communities divided the bodies of the deceased among themselves so that the souls of the departed could go on living and for them, it was brutal to let the body of your loved one rot in the ground.⁵⁴

Experience

According to Nommensen, Batak Toba people were living in fear because they were living in a constant war situation. The battle itself was quite

⁵¹ Lehmann, *Biographical Study of Nommensen*, 67.

⁵² Oase, *Ugamo Malim*. <https://budaya-indonesia.org/Ugamo-Malim> (accessed: October 1st, 2018).

⁵³ Nommensen, *Nommensen and Batak Church*, 15–16.

⁵⁴ Mele Pesti, *Cannibalism as an act of Love*. <https://www.tlu.ee/en/news/mele-pesti-cannibalism-act-love> (accessed: October 1st, 2018)

harmless because everyone seemed afraid of being wounded but each party would hunt down the opponents stealthily including women, children and then murder them or drive them away as captives.⁵⁵ However, they do not have any guilty feeling because of their self-righteousness based on their understanding of fate and destiny.

Nommensen's Dialogical Approach

There are several important aspects to discuss Nommensen's dialogical approach. First Nommensen's success in a certain manner could be explained through Hiebert's analysis about contextualization. In his article, Hiebert mentioned there was an era of non-contextualization where every aspect of the traditional non-Christian culture had to be destroyed before Christianity could be build up.⁵⁶ This description would explain a certain reason why several missionaries before Nommensen had failed. Without proper understanding about Batak culture and language, they tried to evangelize the bulwark of paganism in Silindung, and as a result, they had been expelled and even killed by Batak Toba people in Silindung.⁵⁷ Unlike other missionaries, Nommensen was aware of the importance of culture. Thus he had been learning Batak Toba language and culture; even he spent one year in Angkola to have a certain adaptation before approaching Batak Toba people in Silindung.⁵⁸ Schreiner mentioned that Nommensen emphasized to his fellow missionaries that one must master the Batak language and study their way of thinking in order to live and demonstrate one's life to the heathen.⁵⁹ Nommensen was fully aware of the danger living among the natives, as he said, "Of course I did not want only to expose myself to the danger, especially when I have not yet fully

⁵⁵ Nommensen, *Nommensen and Batak Church*, 13.

⁵⁶ Paul G. Hiebert. *Critical Contextualization* (International Bulletin of Missionary Research: July 1987), 104.

⁵⁷ Nommensen, *Nommensen and Batak Church*, 1.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 3–4.

⁵⁹ Schreiner, *Legacy of Nommensen*, 81.

mastered the language. Be very careful, and go out only with such people who are well known there."⁶⁰ In these ways, Nommensen had shown a certain level of cultural exegesis, which was one of the important aspects of Hiebert theory of critical contextualization.⁶¹

Second, Nommensen who had been influenced by Lutheran revival movement in Schleswig-Holstein tried to explicate Christianity as "New Life" in every aspect of indigenous experience and also committed himself to see that New Life penetrated Batak life and culture.⁶² Schreiner said, "the anthropocentric orientation of his theology led him to evangelize dialogically."⁶³ From the first encounter with Batak Toba people in Silindung, he already used this method to have conversations with them. Interestingly, the biblical messages about "love your God and love your neighbor" directly appropriate through his attitude and manner when he approached them. Under the threat of being killed and eaten, Nommensen was interrogated by the local people who wanted to know the reason of his coming. Nommensen explained that he intended to live among them and instructed all who wished to become wise and happy, but they did not welcome him and threatened him even more. Strikingly, Nommensen smiled and said, "my God told me to stay here," and then he took his violin and played until his arm ached, showed them his watch, and told several stories to them about Europe until they forgot their displeasure and left him.⁶⁴ Days after days, the same conversations and threats were repeated, and indeed it was a hard trial of patience until he persuaded the doubtful chief, and they let him live among them.⁶⁵

However, he also received rejection when he asked for a building place, but because of his cultural sensitivity, he opened his book and told them that he would write the names of those who would not tolerate him

⁶⁰ Ibid., 5.

⁶¹ Hiebert., *Critical Contextualization*, 109–10.

⁶² Schreiner, *Legacy of Nommensen*, 81.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Nommensen, *Nommensen and Batak Church*, 11.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

to remain with them, but because of superstitious fear no one dared to oppose him anymore.⁶⁶ In the sacrificial ritual that required a man to be killed, Nommensen bravely said,

“the spirit who demanded the murder could not be their grandfather, for a grandfather does not desire the death of his grandchild. The sacrifice rather is a plot of the devil who delights in having men tear each other to pieces. But God loves them and would have them all delivered from their misery.”⁶⁷

After hearing Nommensen logical argumentation, they were impressed, and the ceremony ended on that day without a riot. Nommensen added to his argument the biblical messages about God’s love, and this action showed not only his cultural sensitivity but also his dialogical approach to appropriate the Biblical messages. Furthermore, when some rulers wanted to test Nommensen patience by asking him to entertain them and waste his time by staying overnight in his house, Nommensen served them, and with his love, he gave them his blanket, and when they woke up in the early morning, they felt so shameful and left quietly. This incident made such an impression on them, and they told this story to Nommensen in his old age.⁶⁸

Furthermore, many times some of them wanted to kill Nommensen secretly. One of his enemies cut through the ropes by which his house was held together, in the expectation that the wind would crush down his house and kill him, but at the right time, God sent the earthquake so Nommensen could rush out of the house before it crumbled.⁶⁹ Twice during the first six months, the deadliest poison was administered to him, and the person who gave it to him saw Nommensen ate his porridge and also gave some of it to his dog. The dog died at once, but nothing happened to Nommensen.⁷⁰ Wonderfully, Nicodemus, the

⁶⁶ Ibid., 12.

⁶⁷ Ibid.,16.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 14.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

one who tried to kill Nommensen heard his message and finally sought his forgiveness. After receiving Nommensen forgiveness, he changed his mind, began to learn and later on was baptized as the first believers in Silindung.⁷¹ The other enemies, later on, followed Nicodemus' path and became the believers.

Through his act, Nommensen delivered the biblical message about "love your God and love your neighbor." Instead of sacrificing an animal or human being for God or for their own benefit, as what Batak Toba people observed, Nommensen chose to sacrifice himself as a response of loving God and his neighbor. At the same time, his patience and willingness to endure all kinds of difficulties in missionary works showed the quality of love that he had for Batak Toba people. Instead of being afraid, he chose to serve those who tested him; he forgave those who wanted to kill him, and showed them the way of living as a member of God's kingdom. It is amazing to see how Nommensen overcame his struggle and difficulties in the missionary works to appropriate the biblical message that resulted in thousands of believers, but it is more amazing to see God's work through history in preparing the Gospel to enter North Sumatra.

Conclusion

From Nommensen dialogical approach to appropriate the biblical concept of "love your God and love your neighbor," it is obvious that this approach requires Nommensen dedication and sacrificial love to stay in North Sumatra for the rest of his life. He said he gave up his European taste; he ate in order to live, wore cloth as a necessity of demand, lived as a pilgrim because he realized his call was out of love to Jesus and His kingdom.⁷² In these ways, Nommensen could understand Batak people worldview, culture, language, and custom of living more precise than anybody from day to day. Interestingly, his missionary works in a certain

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., 6-7

manner, proved that the theory of cross-cultural apologetic persuasion which gave an emphasis on the dialogical approach was possible. Toren realizes, there are several barriers which relate to the tradition or culture, sinful nature of man, and worldview but he believes that the work of the Holy Spirit in the apologetic dialogue could make all of these possible.⁷³

⁷³ Benno van den Toren, *Challenges and Possibilities of inter-religious and cross-cultural apologetic persuasion* (Evangelical Quarterly 82.1, January 2010), 45.