

WORDS AND BLESSINGS
BATAR CATHOLIC DISCOURSES IN NORTH SUMATERA

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The Catholic Church in Bataklands, North Sumatera, Indonesia, has attracted hundreds of thousands of the indigenous people through its blessings, works, charities, and educational system. However, the Church's authorized interpretation of the Biblical God's Words has been perceived as being at odds with the Catholic Bataks' traditional notion of discourse. The conflict arises because of the different notions of language used by the Catholic Church as well as by Batak adat to interpret the present day Christian Batak societies with regard to their past.

Based on sixteen months (1986-1987) of field research in Toba Batakland, this study reveals the strategies of the Catholic Church (1934-1987) in dealing with the boundaries of Toba Batak adat ("traditional") words and blessings. The strategies were aimed at dealing with the historical events that occurred in North Sumatera before, during and after Indonesian independence in 1945.

The conclusion discusses the Catholic Bataks' interpretation of the conflict. For the Catholic Church as well as for Batak adat, words convey images which yield meaningful interpretations. The practice of dedicating

ancestral monuments (tugu) has shown an idiosyncratic solution to the unresolved conflict of interpretation among the Christian Bataks. Despite this conflict, hundreds of Batak men and women have dedicated themselves to actualizing the Biblical Word by joining a religious order as priests, brothers and nuns. This study shows that the Batak religious people have been living symbols of the Batak Catholic discourse, an unresolved conflict of interpretations.