

IN MEMORIAM: T. B. SIMATUPANG, 1920–1990

Frank L. Cooley

In writing this memorial to my longtime colleague and friend, “Pak Sim” (as he was addressed by those close to him). I have found it difficult to do justice to the rich, many-sidedness of Pak Sim’s person and work.

Dr. T. B. Simatupang (Lieutenant General Retired) died in Jakarta on January 1, 1990. He was buried, with full military honors, in the Kalibata Heroes’ Cemetery the following day, less than a month from his 70th birthday. On January 28, he was to have been presented with a “Birthday Book”¹ containing essays requested by his friends and associates in September 1989, only days before his illness (cancer of the liver) was discovered.

Tahi Bonar Simatupang was born on January 28, 1920, in Tapanuli, North Sumatra, to the devout and active second generation Protestant Christian family of Simon Simatupang, the postmaster in Sidikalang. Pak Sim’s father was active in the Christian church and schools, founded an organization that was a precursor of the Christian Political Party, and wrote newspaper articles in the Batak, Indonesian, and Dutch languages.

After completing Dutch-language elementary school in Pematang Siantar, T.B. entered lower middle school in Tarutung. Since there was no higher secondary education in Sumatra when he graduated (1937), he had to go to Java to continue his education. Entering the Christian higher middle school in Jakarta, he lived with students from the regions in a student hostel. That, like his high school, was located near the Higher Theological School (HTS). Many HTS students who were his close friends later became leaders in their denominations and in the ecumenical movement in Indonesia. Simatupang also became very active in the Kernolong Batak Church and its youth group. During this period he came to know young men who, after Independence, became top leaders in the Christian, the Socialist, and Communist political parties.

¹The book was presented to the family as planned. *Saya Adalah Orang Yang Berhutang* [I am One Under Obligation] (Jakarta: Pustaka Sinar Harapan, 1990). Writing this essay was greatly assisted by the rich material in that book, plus the pieces that appeared in the *Suara Pembaruan*, and *Kompas* daily papers, and in *Tempo* in early January 1990. Especially helpful was Sim’s 8,000-word autobiographical sketch entitled, *Postscriptum* “*Saya Adalah Orang Yang Berhutang*,” that appeared in *Suara Pembaruan* on January 2 and 3, 1990.

In 1940, at 20 years of age, Sim (so addressed by his fellow cadets) entered the Royal Dutch Military Academy in Bandung in order, he said, to disprove the opinion widely held among the Dutch at that time, that the Indonesian people would never be able to become independent nor build modern armed forces. Sim's strong nationalist feelings and pride had developed early! Among the cadets in the two classes entering before the Japanese defeated the Dutch on Java, were about fifteen Indonesians, most of whom had been influenced by the nationalist movement. His special motivation and superior intellectual ability combined to make Sim the "Crown Cadet" (valedictorian) of the Academy.

During the years of the Japanese occupation, while holding a formal position in the customs service, Simatupang joined nationalist groups, especially those around Sutan Sjahrir. In that period he read much of Carl von Clausewitz and Karl Marx on war and revolution. Out of this period there came new and exciting visions and thinking about the future of Indonesia. Yet no theological works were then available that could help place his vision of the future in the perspective of Christian faith. So the church seemed to fade in significance for him.

After the Independence Proclamation, Simatupang went to Yogyakarta to join the fledgling Indonesian armed forces first under General Urip Sumoharjo and then under General Sudirman, after his appointment as Commander in Chief. Sim soon became the military theoretician at military headquarters concerned primarily with matters of organization, strategy, education, policy, and diplomacy related to building the armed forces, and the strategy of facing the better equipped, supplied, and trained Dutch forces that had been returned to the archipelago by the Allies.

An account of his activities and experiences in the anti-Dutch struggle can be found in his book *Laporan dari Banaran*, first published in 1960.² During this period not only had the attempted return to power by the Dutch to be defeated, but also a Communist rebellion in Madiun in 1948 had to be put down, as did the Darul Islam guerrilla rebellion in West Java beginning in 1948. At the Round Table Conference negotiations in The Hague in late 1949, Colonel T. B. Simatupang served as vice chairman and military advisor of the Indonesian delegation, having earlier served in the Linggardjati and Renville attempts to reconcile the conflict.

From 1950–1953 Colonel, soon Major General, Simatupang played a key part in determining the role of the Indonesian armed forces in the new Republic, first as acting or deputy Chief of Staff of the armed forces, prior to the death of General Sudirman, and then as Chief of Staff from 1950. In that position he chaired the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Army, Navy, and Air Force. A number of major challenges confronted these officers, of which the most fundamental and difficult was that of placing the armed forces, that had grown so large during the People's War, within the developments taking place in the state and society. For there were signs of growing political challenges to the basis of the state, mounted both by the Communists, and by Darul Islam and similar groups who were striving for a religious state. In an effort to address this situation, the leadership of the Indonesian National Army (TNI) instituted the Seven Pledges (*Sapta Marga*) and Soldiers' Vow (*Sumpah Prajurit*), pledging absolute loyalty to the Five Principles

²An English translation was prepared and published by the Cornell University Modern Indonesia Project in 1972 (T. B. Simatupang, *Report from Banaran: Experiences during the People's War*, trans. Benedict Anderson and Elizabeth Graves [Ithaca: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1972]), and a Dutch translation in 1985.

(*Pancasila*), to guarantee the unity of the armed forces and therefore the unity of the nation.

This was the heart of the matter that led up to the "October 17," 1952 Affair, during which there was a sharp break between President Sukarno and the leadership of the armed forces, particularly Simatupang and Army Chief of Staff, Colonel A. H. Nasution. The final result (the complex details of which cannot be set forth here) was the removal in 1953 of Nasution, and the abolishing of the position, held by Simatupang, of Chief of Staff of the armed forces. Upon declining to become an ambassador, Major General Simatupang, the highest-ranking officer in the Indonesian armed forces, was appointed military advisor (whose advice was never sought), thus making it clear to him that he would have to terminate his service as an active officer.

From then until 1959 when he was formally retired (at age 39), Simatupang sought to contribute to the Indonesian army in the two fields remaining open to him, those of doctrine and cadre training. He taught at the Army's Staff and Command School and at the Military Law Academy.

Once again, as between 1942 and 1945, in an unwelcome way he was given leisure and the circumstances in which to study more deeply about war and revolution. But this time, facing a personal crisis and the challenge of a different future, there was a new aspect to his study. Now theology helped him see the problems of freedom, justice, and humanity, that had for years motivated him to study war and revolution, in the light of the Christian faith. He noted in his memoir, "What gave me much new passion was that in the perspective of Christian faith the problems of freedom, justice and humanity suddenly came to be seen through more realistic glasses although with a vision that was more hopeful."

This vision led him into a new career. General Simatupang became a lay theologian, wrestling now with the whole range of problems concerning the role of religion (and the church) for society, problems being encountered by developing societies like Indonesia, that fall within the concept of "development."

This new career spanned thirty years, more than twice the length of his military career. As the armed forces and military science were at the center of his first career, so the ecumenical movement and the theology and social ethics of the Christian community provided the channel and focus of his second career. As the unity and health of the armed forces and the problems and challenges they encountered occupied his mind and energies during the first period, so did the unity and health of the churches and their responsible service to God and to the Indonesian community occupy his mind and energies from 1959 to the day of his death. This is not to suggest that he turned his back on the armed forces, the state, and the nation he had served earlier. He continued actively but quietly offering his thoughts and advice to both the armed services (including giving lectures in their academies) and the government, through his writings, particularly in the press, his private memoranda to government figures, and his membership in the Supreme Advisory Council in the 1970s. Pak Sim's loyalty and love for his country and its armed forces continued till the end. After 1959, however, he expressed it mainly through his second career.

His study of theology and Christian social ethics, particularly of Reinhold Niebuhr's writings, during his "unemployed" years (1955-1959), sharpened and added to his already impressive tools of analysis as he moved into the Church and Society Commission of the Council of Churches in Indonesia founded in the closing years of Sukarno's

presidency. This commission had the task of stimulating and developing the thinking of the Protestant community concerning the social, political, economic, and cultural conditions and issues facing the nation. It provided a channel for Pak Sim's contribution to the Protestant churches, to the ecumenical movement, to the Protestant Christian Political Party (Parkindo), the Indonesian Student Christian Movement (GMKI), to Christian Youth Organizations, and to the nation through his articles in *Sinar Harapan*, the Protestant Christian national daily paper.

By the end of Sukarno's rule the influence of Pak Sim's thinking was already widely felt, known, and welcomed in, but not limited to, the churches, the institutions, and organizations related to the Indonesia Council of Churches (Dewan Gereja Indonesia, DGI), especially through the 1962 and succeeding National Conferences on Church and Society.

As a member of the Executive Body of the DGI, Pak Sim attended the annual meetings of its Central Committee as well as the quadrennial Assemblies of the Council from the IVth through the Xth, held in 1984 in Ambon. Those meetings processed the thinking that determined policy for the Council (which in 1984 became the Communion of Churches in Indonesia). These were the settings in which Pak Sim and others, presented and debated their thinking about issues of Church and Society, and from where these ideas were widely disseminated within the Christian community, and beyond it.

Mention must be made especially of Pak Sim's contribution, and that of the Rev. W. J. Rumambi (both of whom had wide experience and contacts with government) in the tragic yet decisive events of October 1965 through March 1966, i.e. the transition from Sukarno's Old Order to the New Order presided over by Army General Suharto. The DGI addressed forthrightly, through public statements and its programs, the issues of justice and judicial treatment under the rule of law for those accused of involvement in the coup, that of human rights for all, including political prisoners, humanitarian treatment of their families, and reconciling efforts in the midst of severe ethnic, political, economic, and inter-religious tensions.

Later, as the New Order government began setting policy goals and guidelines for the nation and people, contributions were sought from various circles in society, including the religious and political groupings. Thus Pak Sim's thinking was fed, through the DGI, to the government, the Parliament, and the People's Consultative Council.

On two issues or national problems, T.B. Simatupang emerged as a pre-eminent thinker and spokesperson for the Christian community.

The first concerned the relations between the religious communities. These had become quite tense in the 1967-1969 period, largely as an outcome of the government's position, following the coup, that all Indonesians must have a manifest religious affiliation that expressed belief in the Unitary Deity in keeping with the first principle of the *Pancasila*. Those who did not, risked being considered atheists (read Communist), following the government's declaration that the Indonesian Communist Party was illegal and therefore outlawed. As a result, those, particularly on Java, who felt affected by this policy scrambled hastily to "enter" one of the religions recognized by the government. With official encouragement, the various religious communities engaged in propagation and educational efforts for those seeking to join them. At times and in certain places these efforts appeared overtly and intentionally competitive.

In 1966–1967, reports began to appear in international media and religious publications about the “huge numbers of Muslims converting to Christianity in Indonesia.” Often spectacular and unbalanced, these reports failed to note that Indonesians affiliating with Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism were as numerous, if not more so, than those entering Christianity. In any case, they aroused intense interest and understandably negative feelings in some quarters, especially in various parts of the Muslim world. Thus tensions escalated in Indonesia between the Muslim and Christian communities. Overtly hostile incidents, threats, and statements aroused volatile, defensive feelings in both communities.

This situation occasioned efforts by the religious communities, mainly the Christians and Muslims, and by the government to seek mutual understanding and agreement that would insure peaceful co-existence and harmony among their adherents. Changing one’s religious allegiance, particularly objectionable for Muslims, was the main issue, though the banning or control of overseas material support for religious purposes was also raised. In the government-sponsored consultation held in Jakarta in late 1967 the authorities made a proposal, supported by some at least of the Muslim participants, that religious propagation be limited to those without an accepted religious affiliation. At a crucial point in the heated exchange, Simatupang pointed out that both Christians and Muslims were mandated by their God-given Scriptures to invite all to accept their faith; consequently, such a limitation was unacceptable to both. While this intervention did not do much to solve the immediate tensions, it did initiate a continuing series of inter-religious dialogues, both official and non-official, to explore ways of achieving better mutual understanding and tolerance among the religious communities. Pak Sim played a significant, positive role in this issue for the remainder of his life.

The second focus of Simatupang’s efforts in the late 1960s was in developing ideas and programs, also through the DGI, concerning development. Beginning with the first Five-Year National Development Plan in 1969, development became the major concern of the nation. In his *Postscriptum* Pak Sim noted that during the late 1950s he had taken part in groups that were engaged in thinking about the main problems to be addressed in the post-Sukarno period. Also during the first years of the New Order he had presented his thinking in lectures and writings that were later published in a book entitled, *From Revolution to Development*. Throughout most of the 1970s, Dr. Simatupang was Chairman of the Board of the DGI’s “Development Center,” which initiated development programs and training of development motivators in many of the regions of Indonesia, including Irian Jaya, a program that was carried out in cooperation with a consortium of voluntary aid agencies in the West through the World Council of Churches.

During the late 1960s, Dr. Simatupang also became deeply involved in two wider networks of the ecumenical movement. The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) was born in Indonesia, at Prapat, on the shore of North Sumatra’s Lake Toba in 1956. By the late 1960s, when Dr. Simatupang served a term as one of its presidents, it gathered member churches from Pakistan to Japan and from Korea to New Zealand. Pak Sim’s purpose in giving his time and energies to the CCA was, on the one hand, to contribute Indonesia’s experience in revolution and development as a *Pancasila* state and society to other Asian countries and churches, while at the same time helping the Indonesian churches to come to know and to gain from the experience of other Asian churches.

The same purposes motivated Pak Sim’s involvement in the World Council of Churches (WCC). This began with his attending the Third Assembly of the WCC in New

Delhi, as delegate of the Indonesian Christian Church. He was soon tapped to serve on the Planning Committee for the first WCC sponsored World Conference on Church and Society. General Simatupang chaired the Political Section of that conference which included eighty delegates from churches in all parts of the world. In 1968 he was elected a member of the Central Committee of the WCC (along with Dr. Richard von Weizsaecker, the current president of West Germany). From 1975–1983 Pak Sim served as one of the six presidents of the WCC, representing Asia.

The University of Tulsa (Oklahoma) in 1970 honored Simatupang with the degree Doctor *honoris causa*. For years, beginning in the 1970s, he served as chairman of the board of the Indonesian Christian University in Jakarta (where this writer first taught in 1956–1960). He guided its development, working to enhance its academic standing. By any measure, Pak Sim truly deserved to be addressed as Dr. T. B. Simatupang.

Also he served as chairperson of the Foundation for Management Nurture and Education (Yayasan Pembinaan dan Pendidikan Manajemen), in association with prominent figures from the Catholic, Islamic, Hindu, and Buddhist communities. This Foundation, and the Institute it developed (sometimes referred to as the Harvard Business School of Indonesia), is an example of Simatupang's commitment to inter-religious cooperation in meeting the concrete needs of Indonesian society, one of the first such ventures in that country.

Another "educational" enterprise Simatupang helped develop was the influential *Sinar Harapan* (*Ray of Hope*) daily Jakarta newspaper. Besides being one of the founders, he served on the editorial board and frequently contributed to its editorial page on important national developments. That participation continued with *Suara Pembaruan* (*Voice of Renewal*), *SH's* successor.

In the late 1970s he served as a member of the Supreme Advisory Council, one of the "senior statesmen" appointed by the President to "offer advice requested and not requested, welcomed and not-welcomed" by government bodies relative to national policies, programs, and problems.

During the period of his second career, Pak Sim's activities broadened and deepened both within Indonesia and internationally, primarily in ecumenical circles. The main concerns of his thinking, teaching, and writing were: 1) development as the stage beyond revolution; 2) the *Pancasila* rather than religion as the proper foundation for developing the Indonesian state and society; 3) the urgent need for the West to understand and accept the reality and role of the "third world" in forging the future; and 4) preparing the next generation of leaders for their role in a modern, advanced *Pancasila* Indonesia by honing their ability to think "positively, creatively, critically and realistically in the modernization process of the 'long march' of the Indonesian people." None of these themes was new to this period. Rather they were further developed ideas integrating his earlier thinking and writing.

In 1980 Pak Sim underwent successful heart surgery in Holland. Perhaps, looking back, that incident signalled a milestone in his life journey. During his final years he continued accepting invitations to lecture and teach, write books, articles, and editorials, and to consult with and advise religious, government, political, social, and cultural bodies, especially intellectual, scholarly, student, and youth organizations.

With the completion of his terms as a president of both the World Council of Churches and the Communion of Churches in Indonesia, Dr. Simatupang's heavy

responsibilities in those two ecumenical networks were lightened considerably. He was, however, elected chair of the Communion of Churches' (Persekutuan Gereja-gereja di Indonesia) Advisory Council for 1984–1989, in which capacity he served actively, being re-elected to that office at the XIth Assembly in October 1989 shortly before his death.

Pak Sim was a democrat, a “democratic military fighter” one colleague noted, one who could discuss, indeed debate vigorously, even heatedly, ideas, concepts, policy alternatives, but without pressuring others to accept what he judged to be right. He was always open to dialogue, to other religious, or differing political points of view, “a Christian realist” as one colleague viewed him. He manifested dedication and devotion to both the armed forces and the church, and above all to his country and the *Pancasila* foundation on which Indonesia is built and is building.

Because of his openness, his unswerving commitment to the *Pancasila*, and his respected position and reputation in Indonesia and in the world-wide Christian community, he was able to make a significant contribution to the understanding and improvement of relations between the religious communities in Indonesia during the tensions that heightened sharply following the events of 1966, particularly between Muslims and Christians.

For the last thirty years of his life, T. B. Simatupang was the most widely heard and read Indonesian exponent of the Christian faith as it relates to the wide range of church and society questions. This was the case not simply because of the outstanding military reputation he brought to his second career but also because both the content and the language of his thinking were attractive and easily understood by educated, thoughtful Indonesians from all backgrounds and walks of life. He was more of a clergyman and theologian than most professional clergy and theology teachers. Also he brought to his speaking and writing a wider and deeper knowledge and experience of the life of the “secular” world than most Christian ministers and teachers.

Thus Simatupang was a *guru*, a challenger, a stimulator of thoughts and thinking both within the Christian community and beyond it. He continually urged his hearers and readers to draw on the sources of their faith in order to wrestle with the problems confronting them with realism, a critical mind, creativity, and a positive, hopeful attitude.

He was undoubtedly the foremost proponent of the *Pancasila* in the Christian community, another of the legacies to the churches from his military career. From the beginning Christians had gladly received and supported the *Pancasila*, but Pak Sim challenged them to deepen their understanding and sharpen their application of it in the church's thinking about and service to society, particularly with regard to development. This concern was the reason Dr. Simatupang kept hammering away at—until it was written into the Guidelines of State Policy—“national development as the application/implementation of the *Pancasila*.” This too, I believe, is why he eventually came to support “the *Pancasila* as the sole basis of Indonesian life in societal, national and state matters.” And he was able, I sense, to convince the government that the “sole basis” did not include the religious, spiritual life of the faith communities and their adherents.

Simatupang was an interpreter of the Asian and world churches' experience and thinking to the Indonesian churches, thus greatly broadening and enriching their perspective. And for me and for the churches in the West, especially North America, Pak Sim helped interpret clearly the experience of the churches and societies in Asia so as to help the West understand what the experience of Western colonialism and imperialism

had done to them, what it had created, and the challenges that experience, as a consequence, presents to the West today.

Perhaps that challenge can be stated most tersely in a question Dr. Simatupang voiced quietly in an ecumenical mission conference in Bangkok in the 1970s: "Can the West be converted, renewed?" And that is no small contribution!