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A STUDY OF THE NIAS REVIVAL IN INDONESIA

Julia Theis Dermawan

1. Introduction

In the years between 1915 and 1940, the Niasan church in Indonesia rapidly grew. During this twenty-five year period, between the Golden Jubilee and the Diamond Jubilee, the number of baptized believers in Nias increased from about 20,000 to 135,000. The great revival movement that occurred in the island caused this phenomenal growth. Known as the *Fangesa Dodo* ("the Great Repentance"),[1] it manifested a great conviction for and confession of sin.

This paper is a historical report on the Nias revival from available sources and will show how it contributed to the overall growth of the church. This paper has also a pragmatic purpose: to remind all Asian Christians of the importance of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit for the growth of Christianity in Asia today.

2. The Location of the Revival

2.1 Geography

Nias is the largest of a chain of Indonesian islands in the Indian Ocean off the west coast of Sumatra. It has an area of 1,569 square miles (or 4,064 sq. km) and is subject to earthquakes. The chief town is Gunung Sitoli on the northeast coast.[2]

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[1] Lee Ira Bruckner, "The History and Character of the Niasan People Movement in Indonesia, 1865-1940" (D.Miss. dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1979), p. 86.

[2] "Nias," *The Encyclopedia Americana International* Edition (Danbury, Conn.: Grolier, c1997), vol. 20, p. 300.

2.2 People

Most of the 400,000 people are descendants of Proto-Malays who built megalithic tombs all over the island. Although some inhabitants are Muslim or Christian, most adhere to traditional religious systems.[3] They consider that their tribal forefathers are spirits who need to be worshipped. The social law (*adat*) is linked with animism and describes what to do from birth to death, and especially how to deal with crises.[4]

3. The History of Christianity in Nias

The history of the Christian church in Nias began through the Rhenish Missionary Society (RMS). The first missionary to enter Nias was Reverend. Denninger. He was one of the few RMS missionaries who worked among the Dayaks in Borneo, the middle part of Indonesia. In 1859, the RMS missionaries could not continue their work among the Dayaks, because the Dutch, who were colonizing Indonesia, did not permit them. Therefore, these RMS missionaries moved to Padang, West Sumatra, the western part of Indonesia. They had planned to do mission among the Bataks in north Sumatra. The Dutch also did not give permission for the missionaries to go inland among the Bataks, because they did not control that region. In 1861, while waiting in Padang for permission to go inland to work among the Bataks, Denninger started evangelistic ministry among dock-workers from Nias, on the west coast of Sumatra. Later, the Dutch permitted the missionaries to move inland to work among the Bataks. At the time, Denninger was unable to move inland with the other missionaries because of the illness of his wife.[5]

Instead, Denninger continued his ministry to the Niasan dock-workers in Padang, West Sumatra. Some of these migrants from Nias invited him to come and work on their island. He decided to move to

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[3] "Nias," p. 300.

[4] David Royal Brougham, "The Work of the Holy Spirit in Church Growth as Seen in Selected Indonesia's Case Studies" (D.Miss. dissertation, Fuller Theological seminary, 1988), p. 106.

[5] Bruckner, "The History and Character of the Niasan People Movement," pp. 4-6.

Nias, so he could minister more effectively.[6] He arrived in 1865, and settled in Gunung Sitoli. This port was the main town and the only seat of Dutch colonial authority in the island at that time.[7]

Two more missionaries of the Rhenish Mission arrived to join Denninger in the ministry. The work was not easy. The pioneers met many difficulties and discouragements at the beginning, especially due to the hostility of the daring headhunting and murderous chiefs and unhealthy conditions in the island.[8] It was not until nine years later in 1874 that the first nine converts were baptized. After twenty-five years (1865-1890), there were 906 converts in three stations.[9]

4. Some Important Factors or Events Which Caused the Nias Revival

There are several important factors or events which made the Nias revival possible.

4.1 The Establishing of Security and the Building of New Roads

Cooley offers several reasons why the early progress of the Nias church was slow. After 35 years of hard work (1865-1900), there were only 5000 converts. The geographic isolation made communication difficult. Close kinship ties made each village virtually a closed community. The lack of roads and security and the heavy weight of custom (*adat*) that was unchallenged at that time hindered church growth. After 1900, the Dutch government established security and opened roads to most parts of the island. Then, evangelism proceeded rapidly.[10]

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[6] Th. van den End and J. Weitjens, *Ragi Carita 2: Sejarah Gereja Di Indonesia 1860-an-Sekarang* [Story 2: The History of the Church in Indonesia 1860-Present] (Jakarta: PT. BPK. Gunung Mulia, 1999), p. 211.

[7] Frank L. Cooley, *Indonesia: Church and Society* (New York: Friendship Press, 1968), p. 71.

[8] A. Bettin, "The Revival in Nias," in *The Foreign Missions Convention at Washington 1925*, eds. Fennell P. Turner and Frank Knight Sanders (New York: Fleming H. Revel, 1925), p. 309.

[9] Cooley, *Indonesia*, p. 72.

[10] Cooley, *Indonesia*, p. 72.

4.2 The Bible Was Translated into Niasan

The scriptures say, "All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that all God's people may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17, TNIV). I believe that the translation of the Bible into the Niasan language also contributed to the revival there. The Christians of Nias could be strengthened and unbelievers could be awakened because of a fresh understanding of God's word.

Missionary Denninger translated the Gospel of Luke into Niasan in 1874. This was published by the British and Foreign Bible Society.[11] Later in 1815, the Bible translation was completed by Wilhelm H. Sundermann, a Rhenish Mission Society missionary to Nias.[12] However, Aberly and Latourette report that the Bible was translated into the Nias language between 1865 and 1890.[13] Actually, the translation of the Bible had been completed in 1913, before the revival in 1916.[14]

4.3 The Golden Jubilee Celebration in 1915

In 1915, the Nias church celebrated the Jubilee of the mission. A meeting was planned at which the Niasan Christians were asked to speak about what the mission work meant for their country and people during the past fifty years. They spoke first about the blessings Christianity brought to their land and then about the unfinished task.[15] The previous fifty-year period was examined and evaluated. They expected that God would do something special for them in the future.

Edward Kriele, a missions-inspector for the Rhenish Missionary Society, said, "Thus the [Golden] Jubilee did its part in encouraging us to start work in the second half-century inspired by joyful hope. Yet no one could at the time have imagined how soon the most extravagant hopes

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[11] Bruckner, "The History and Character of the Niasan People Movement," p. 9.

[12] "Sundermann," *Lutheran Cyclopedia*, eds. Erwin L. Lueker, et al. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1954), p. 742.

[13] John Aberly, *An Outline of Missions* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1945), p. 146; Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970), p. 289.

[14] Van den End & Weitjens, *Ragi Carita 2*, p. 212.

[15] Ebbie C. Smith, *God's Miracles: Indonesian Church Growth* (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1970), p. 94.

were to be more than abundantly fulfilled."[16] Therefore, the Golden Jubilee of the mission was used by the Holy Spirit as the stimulus for revival in 1916.

4.4 Bible Classes, Prayer Meetings and Discussion Meetings

As a result of the Golden Jubilee, a number of the Rhenish missionaries were burdened and challenged for further outreach and for Bible study classes, prayer meetings and discussion groups.[17] They expected that God would do something special for the Christians of Nias. A. Bettin reports, "But most of our missionaries in Nias were neither contented nor satisfied with the spiritual and moral result of their work. They longed for a baptism of the Holy Spirit for their converts and they prayed for it."[18] They prayed for a work of the Holy Spirit in their congregations. They were surprised that God answered their prayer. Eight or nine months after the Golden Jubilee, the revival began.[19] Bible study classes, prayer meetings and discussion meetings were places where the Holy Spirit moved among the congregations at that time of revival.

5. The Beginning of the Revival

After the Golden Jubilee of the mission in 1915, Rev. Rudersdorf, a pastor of the Humene Station, started Bible study classes and prayer meetings in his home there. He began these meetings with only two Niasan Christians, but the number soon started to increase.[20] He concentrated the discussions and the prayer meetings on the various defects in the lives of the believers in the light of the Bible, even if the gospel had been preached in their midst for many years. One man, an assistant teacher by the name of Filemo, was deeply moved. He confessed his sins and received forgiveness. He began to witness to

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[16] Edward Kriele, "The Nias Revival, the Story of a Spiritual Awakening," *International Review of Missions* 16 (1927), p. 93.

[17] Bruckner, "The History and Character of the Niasan People Movement," p. 90.

[18] Bettin, "The Revival in Nias," p. 309.

[19] Bruckner, "The History and Character of the Niasan People Movement," p. 90.

[20] Bettin, "The Revival in Nias," p. 310.

others about his new experience and also started a small prayer meeting.[21]

In March 1916, eight believers came to Rudersdorf's house and told him that they had the same experience with the assistant teacher. After they confessed their sins to the Lord, they also had the assurance that they had been forgiven. Later, in a Friday night meeting, a young Christian woman stood up and testified with weeping that she also had sought forgiveness and had found it. Then, three young people testified of similar experiences. After that, in the following evening meeting, the place was crowded with 300 to 350 attendants. This was the beginning of the Nias revival. It started at Whitsuntide in 1916. That was the week beginning with Whitsunday, the seventh Sunday after Easter and called Pentecost Sunday.[22]

The fear of the Lord had fallen upon the congregation at Humene. A great conviction of sin descended upon the whole body of believers. They were anxious to confess sins hidden as a secret for many years that constituted hindrances to the development of their Christian lives.[23] People began to approach Rudersdorf with tears, asking to be allowed to confess their sins. They came as individuals or in groups like families. They wept with deep contrition of heart. They were willing for open confession. Their lives were changed. A new desire for the word of God was awakened in their midst. They began to share their testimonies with relatives, neighbors and friends. The revival was spread to other villages. Not only Christians were revived, but non-Christians were also awakened.[24]

6. Several Characteristics of the Nias Revival

According to Yoon-Ho Rhee, revival can be characterized by at least seven marks. They are: extraordinary prayer, a great conviction of sin, an extraordinary power, the conversion of non-Christians, the endowment of believers with the Holy Spirit for witnessing, Bible study, wonderful

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[21] Bruckner, "The History and Character of the Niasan People Movement," p. 90; Van den End & Weitjens, *Ragi Carita 2*, p. 213.

[22] Bruckner, "The History and Character of the Niasan People Movement," pp. 91-92.

[23] Bettin, "The Revival in Nias," p. 310.

[24] Brougham, "The Work of the Holy Spirit," pp. 113-14.

outbursts of joy, and spontaneity.[25] All of these marks were characteristics of the Nias revival.

6.1 A Great Conviction of Sin

The Nias revival was marked by a great conviction of sin. Peters records an overwhelming fear of the judgment of God resulting in repentance over sin, transformed lives, radiant joy and the zealous witness of those revived.[26] Cooley seems to agree with Peters for he says that the Nias revival was "a movement of mass conversion accompanied by widespread public confession of personal sin and a sense of liberation and redemption, followed by a vigorous Christian witness."[27]

There came a deep conviction of sin by the Holy Spirit among the Niasan Christians as well as among some non-Christians. Suddenly, they cried out to God for forgiveness, and they felt this was insufficient. Then, they came to the missionaries, pastors and evangelists to confess their sins.

6.2 A Great Burden for Prayer

A great burden for prayer was another characteristic of the Nias revival. Schlipoether reported:

> In many cases, they pray for a good deal in private, asking that their sins may be disclosed to them. Sometimes they unite in such prayers with others, meeting in the church or in the teacher's house. Then, when they see their sins clearly, they come to the missionary and make a clean breast of it.[28]

In addition, Kriele recounts that prayer meetings were largely attended and family prayer was stressed for every Christian household.[29]

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[25] Yoon-Ho Rhee, "Towards a Theory of Revival: A Case Study of the Biblical and Korean Revivals" (Th.M. thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1988), pp. 26-27.

[26] George W. Peters, *Indonesia Revival: Focus on Timor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1973), p. 47.

[27] Cooley, *Indonesia*, p. 72.

[28] Paul A. Menzel, "A Pentecost in the Island of Nias," *The Missionary Review of the World*, January, 1924, p. 440.

[29] Kriele, "The Nias Revival," pp. 98-99.

6.3 Empowered for Witness

Muller-Kruger states that the most important development of the Nias revival was the willingness of Christians to witness. They began to share their testimonies with relatives, neighbors and friends. Because of this extensive witnessing on the part of the repentant-hearted Christians, large numbers of unbelievers were influenced and many of them became Christians.[30] The gospel spread from the eastern part of Nias to the west, the north and the south. Revivals of Christians had caused the awakening among the non-Christian population. Many unsaved people had come to the Lord and destroyed their idols and fetishes, ancestor images and tablets, and left behind animistic practices.[31]

6.4 A Great Demand for the Word of God

There was a great demand for the word of God in Nias. The Bible was preached and taught and Bible classes were largely attended. The Bible was freely bought and anxiously read and studied.[32] Fries, a missionary pastor, testified about what was happening during the last nine months of 1916 at the Ombalata station:

> The experiences at Ombalata are repeated at the outstations. Everywhere a hunger and thirst for the Word of God! A new and deeper understanding!… Day after day, the people have begged for books. Our stock was soon exhausted and we had to order 1,000 New Testaments from Amsterdam by wire.[33]

6.5 The Great Joy of the Revival and Transformation of Christian Living

The exchange of a deep sorrow on the part of the repentant people for joy and peace was very characteristic of the revival. After they confessed their sins and prayed for salvation, great joy filled their hearts and lives and their behavior was entirely changed. This had a great

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[30] Th. Muller-Kruger, "The Awakening of the Church of Nias," in *Sedjarah Geredja di Indonesia* [The History of the Church in Indonesia] (Jakarta: Badan Penerbit Kristen, 1966), pp. 238-39.

[31] Brougham, "The Work of the Holy Spirit," p. 126.

[32] Bettin, "The Revival in Nias," p. 310.

[33] Menzel, "A Pentecost in the Island of Nias," pp. 441-42.

impact upon their individual lives, their homes and the entire society of the island of Nias. This revival movement was called *fangesa dodo*, which meant "the great repentance" or "the heart repentance," and really expressed what had happened in their individual lives.[34] In addition, A. Bettin says, "Justification by faith was not only a doctrine but a real personal experience to them."[35]

6.6 Spontaneous Work of God

According to Pratney one of the features of revival is its spontaneity. He says, "Revival is the result of divine, not human impulse. It cannot be worked up.… Fulfilled conditions do not provide the motive force of revival. Revival, like salvation and healing, is an act of divine mercy."[36]

The Nias revival was the spontaneous working of the Spirit of God. Muller-Kruger reports that the missionaries, having prayed for a work of the Spirit in the congregations, were surprised at God's tremendous answer to their petitions.[37] In addition, the spread of the Nias revival was under divine control and direction. Menzel reports that in one case the missionaries had sent workers into an adjacent area "in the expectation that the [revival] fire would quickly kindle there." But to their great surprise "no response came and the lesson was quickly learned: 'the wind bloweth where it listeth,' there was nothing man-made in the movement."[38]

6.7 The Manifestation of Pentecostal Experience

During the revival (1916-1940), manifestations of the Holy Spirit were reported. For instance, Menzel quotes a report from one of the newer stations in the southern part of the island which he does not name but where a Pentecostal manifestation was experienced.

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[34] Muller-Kruger, "The Awakening of the Church of Nias," p. 238.

[35] Bettin, "The Revival in Nias," p. 310.

[36] Winkie Pratney, *Revival: Principles to Change the World* (Springdale, PA: Whitaker, 1984), p. 298.

[37] Theodor Muller-Kruger, *Die Grosse Reue auf Nias*: *Geschichte und Gestalt einer Erweckung auf dem Missionfield* (Gutersloh: Bertelsmann, 1931), pp. 36-37.

[38] Menzel, "A Pentecost in the Island of Nias," p. 440.

> We are in the presence of a veritable divine miracle. Hardened heathen, who heretofore never came to our meetings—sorcerers, rich people, poor people, all alike—were suddenly seized by the terror of their guilt. They came to the station with the one question: "How can we get rid of our sins?" Old headhunters and notorious murderers are confessing their misdeeds. Thieves return what they have stolen. Many profess to have had visions and dreams wherein the forgiveness of their sins was vouchsafed them, and they believe firmly and unmovedly in the truth of the experience.[39]

Dreams and visions constituted an important part in the testimonies of new Christians. Other Pentecostal phenomena also manifested during the Nias revival in 1916 and thereafter. Peters, (summarized from the German sources) viewed the following as negative factors of the revival.

> (1) An undue search for the spectacular; for signs and wonders; for voices, visions and dreams. They claimed to hear Christ speak to them in an audible voice, "thy sins are forgiven," and many other words and messages. They would see Christ in the sky in glory; they would see Him suffering on the cross, etc.
> (2) Prayer with ecstasy, rapturous experiences with coma, at times for hours at a stretch. Such experiences were often accompanied by visions and messages.
> (3) Prophets and prophetesses appeared, and workers of miracles.[40]

In addition, Peters also recounts Pentecostal manifestations of the Holy Spirit in a new wave of the Nias revival in 1940 saying:

> Signs and wonders of all kinds were reported. People spoke in tongues and fell into trances and comas for hours at a time. Visions, dreams and ecstasy gained prominence. There were stories of healings and resuscitations of people who supposed to have died. People supposedly walked on water.[41]

Interestingly, some missionaries of the Rhenish Mission, who were working with the people, considered Pentecostal-type experiences among the Nias people as negative. Accounting for these reactions, Muller-Kruger offers a convincing explanation related to the backgrounds of the missionaries. Those who had experienced movements of the Holy Spirit

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[39] Menzel, "A Pentecost in the Island of Nias," pp. 443-44.

[40] Peters, *Indonesia Revival*, p. 48.

[41] Peters, *Indonesia Revival*, p. 48.

in their home country, according to Muller-Kruger, were more sympathetic than those who had not.[42]

These experiences caused a schism in the Nias church. Cooley reports, "There were other waves of this same phenomenon, the most pronounced coming just after World War II, but they brought no positive fruits to the life of the church. In fact, in some cases they led to schism, which is frequently an accompaniment of such Pentecostal phenomena."[43] I will discuss the schism in the Nias church in the end of the revival.

7. The End of the Revival

The Nias revival began to diminish after enjoying glowing success for several years. Kriele writes that after the nine year period of intense revival, it concluded in 1925. Concerning the declining character of the Nias revival, he says:

> It is true that the movement has become calmer; it has lost the tempestuous character which is so apt to attach itself to the beginning of a mental and spiritual awakening. The rushing, mighty wind has become a still, small voice. That is no loss and implies no permanent injury. The fire, though its first blaze may have died down, burns on quietly and from time to time, in one village or another, minor local revivals take place.[44]

There are several different arguments as to the exact end of the Nias revival. Peters gives the dates of the Nias revival as 1916-1922. Additionally, he reports that there was a new wave of revival that came over a number of Nias churches in 1940.[45] On the other hand, Freytag notes that the Nias revival movement flooded the area in two waves: one in 1916-1917 and the other in 1922-1923. According to him, the revival continued to impact the area until 1930.[46] However, Muller-Kruger says that the Nias revival continued on up to 1940 and through World War

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[42] Muller-Kruger, *Die Grosse Reue auf Nias*, pp. 79-80.

[43] Cooley, *Indonesia*, p. 72.

[44] Kriele, "The Nias Revival," p. 101.

[45] Peters, *Indonesia Revival*, pp. 46-48.

[46] Walter Freytag, *Spiritual Revolution in the East*, trans. L. M. Stalker (London: Lutterworth, 1940), p. 91.

II.[47] Nevertheless, the increase in the number of Christians between 1916-1940 indicates that the Nias revival movement continued through the end of this period in 1940.[48]

Brougham provides more detailed information in his dissertation about the last period of the Nias revival. According to him, one of the remarkable features that developed since the first revival movement in 1916 was the gathering of believers on their own initiative in small groups. These groups grew into a fellowship movement that consisted of Christians who had experienced renewal. They did not originate in the church or with the missionaries, but were a sign of the believers' indigenousness. Sadly, some of the missionaries opposed these fellowship groups, declaring their own meetings (under the Nias Protestant Church or *Banua Niha Keriso Protestan*) as the only legitimate gatherings.[49]

Since 1930 there have been various schisms in the Nias church. The large break-offs are the *Orahua Niha Keriso Protestan* (Nias Christian Protestant Assembly), which developed out of a revival movement in the west of Nias, and the *Agama Masehi Idanoi Niha* (Nias Indonesian Christian Association), which grew out of a fellowship movement in Humene, east of Nias.[50]

These churches are not Pentecostal, although they still manifest some Pentecostal phenomena such as prophecy and healings. In fact, they are not included in the Indonesian Pentecostal denominations.[51] Brougham describes the churches that developed out of revival movements:

> They have often retained some of the characteristics of the revival movements, but lack mostly the biblical emphasis on repentance and renewal which had been so prominent. They are led by self-elected prophets who often minister as healers, but lack the clear preaching of

[47] Muller-Kruger, "The Awakening of the Church of Nias," p. 238.

[48] Bruckner, "The History and Character of the Niasan People Movement," p. 132.

[49] Brougham, "The Work of the Holy Spirit," pp. 121-22, 136.

[50] Brougham, "The Work of the Holy Spirit," p. 136.

[51] H. L. Senduk, *Sejarah GBI: Suatu Gereja Nasional Yang Termuda* [The History of GBI: The Younggest National Church] (Jakarta: Yayasan Bethel, n.d.), pp. 14-18.

> the gospel. The church of Nias has distanced herself from these movements, but there is competition for members."[52]

It seems that the schism among the Nias Christians caused the revival to diminish. Bruckner agrees with Brougham. He says that the decreasing growth of the Nias church, indicated by the lessening of the Nias revival, was caused by many problems related to nationalism, independence, individualism, separatism and the competition between the nativistic-messianic movements, fellowship groups and the Nias church.[53]

8. The Effects of the Revival

There were several effects of the Nias revival on Christian lives, the church, and society.

8.1 Impact on Christian Lives

The Holy Spirit brought a new dimension into the lives of the Christians in Nias through this revival. There was a great desire for prayer, singing and personal witness. Family worship was common. People prayed before starting their work in the fields. During the flu epidemic in 1918, they developed a deep trust in the Lord. The believers understood and loved God's word more. These new Christians showed high consideration for their Christian community. They loved the services, the prayer meetings and especially the special evangelistic gatherings and religious celebrations.[54]

On the other hand, the transformation of Christian life in Nias did not continue long after the end of the revival. Brougham says, "Only after the revival had waned, did baptism become more traditional and then was often not followed by a changed life style."[55] It seems that the missionaries placed more emphasis on baptism as an indication of the

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[52] Brougham, "The Work of the Holy Spirit," p. 136.

[53] Bruckner, "The History and Character of the Niasan People Movement," p. 133.

[54] Brougham, "The Work of the Holy Spirit," p. 123; Van den End & Weitjens, pp. 213-14.

[55] Brougham, "The Work of the Holy Spirit," p. 123.

maturity of new believers rather than as the work of the Holy Spirit who brings lives into maturity.

8.2 Training of Workers

The number of Christians increased during the Nias revival. Thereby creating a great need and demand for new workers. The mission was forced to begin a program of training for lay pastors. Many young men, who had felt the call of God during the Nias Revival, became involved in this training program. Consequently, there was an increase of lay pastors from only 6 in 1916 to 383 in 1925. Bettin reports, "Before this revival there was always a shortage of native preachers willing to go as evangelists to other counties, but since this spiritual rising they are glad to go where they are needed."[56]

8.3 Remarkable Church Growth

The Nias revival really contributed to the growth of the church quantitatively. The following shows the growth of the church in Nias:

1865: Rev. Denninger started work at Gunung Sitoli.
1874: First baptisms of 9 believers,
1890: 3 congregations with 906 Christians,
1900: 11 congregations with 5,000 Christians,
1915: 14 congregations with 20,000 Christians, after 50 years,
1921: 62,000 Christians,
1940: 135,000 Christians, after 75 years,
1965: 205,000 Christians, after 100 years[57]
1985: 300,000 Christians.[58]

In the years between 1915 and 1940, the Nias church rapidly grew. During the twenty-five years between the Golden Jubilee and the Diamond Jubilee, the number of Christians on Nias increased from about 20,000 to 135,000, that is, an increase of 115,000. The Nias revival produced remarkable church growth.

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[56] Bettin, "The Revival in Nias," p. 311; Smith, *God's Miracles*, p. 96.

[57] Cooley, *Indonesia*, p. 72.

[58] Dorothea Richter, A letter to Brougham (Gunung Sitoli, Nias, 1985) quoted in Brougham, "The Work of the Holy Spirit," p. 132.

8.4 Impact on Society

The revival affected the Christians and the society. Some significant changes that were noted: 1) a great increase in truthfulness, 2) a spirit of neighborly love, 3) trustworthiness, 4) a readiness to exercise self-sacrifice to those in need, and 5) a great improvement in clean speech.[59] In fact, the Chinese businessmen in Nias particularly attested to this. Stolen goods were returned to them, and many confessed telling lies without the threat of punishment being imposed. They were convinced of the reality of the living God. As a result, a congregation was established for Chinese Christians in Nias.[60]

9. Summary, Lessons and Challenge

9.1 Summary

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Nias brought a great conviction of sin, the dramatic experience of forgiveness, joy and peace, changed lives and the willingness to witness. The revival among Niasan Christians influenced an awakening of the unbelieving community that contributed to a remarkable growth of the church qualitatively and quantitatively.

God worked in Pentecostal ways to revive the Niasan Christians and to awaken the non-Christians to come to God. In fact, Pentecostal experiences such as speaking in tongues, prayer with ecstasy, falling into a trance, casting out demons, revelation through visions and dreams, healing miracles, as well as the restoration of the offices of prophet/prophetesses were reported during the revival. Many unsaved people came to the Lord because of signs and wonders.

In contrast, the work of the Holy Spirit seemed to diminish after the revival ended. People became Christians because of tradition, not because they repented of their sins. They were Christians without changed lives. The manifestation of Pentecostal experiences was misused. In fact, the fellowship movements, where manifestations of the prophetic and healings occurred, emphasized *manifestation* rather than *repentance*. Sadly, the work of the Holy Spirit, which brought remarkable growth to the Nias church qualitatively and quantitatively,

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[59] Kriele, "The Nias Revival," p. 98.

[60] Bettin, "The Revival in Nias," p. 311.

finally settled down because the missionaries and church leaders lacked proper knowledge of the power of the Holy Spirit.

9.2 Lessons

There are three lessons that I gleaned from the history of the Nias revival. First, it provides proof of the significance of revival on the accelerated growth of the church. Before revival, the growth of the Nias church was slow, but afterwards, beginning in 1916, the church rapidly grew. In fact, after thirty-five years of ministry between 1865 and 1900, there were only 5,000 Christians. However, the number of Christians increased drastically during the Nias rival. Between 1915 and 1940 (25 years) membership grew from 20,000 to 135,000, an increase of 115,000. This fact affirms Yoon-Ho Rhee's theory of revival: "All revival movements have two dimensions: the work of the Holy Spirit for the people of God and the work of the Holy Spirit for the unregenerate masses."[61] Thus, the correlation between a revival and church growth was affirmed.

The second lesson is that the Nias revival also proves that Pentecostalism is a powerful contextualizing tool for the growth of Christianity in Asia. Brougham says, "The non-western worldview demands validation through concrete religious experiences, while people in the west stand on written evidence."[62] The Niasan people needed signs and wonders to convict their faith to God. With their animistic background they believed in the supernatural dimension of religious existence and that the spirits can communicate with them through dreams, visions, and exorcism. The spirits have power to help and heal them. Therefore, Pentecostalism is relevant to the need of Asian people because it takes seriously the supernatural dimension of human existence. It is relevant to Asian worldviews. Thus, churches that have taken the supernatural seriously are in the forefront of the growth of Christianity in Asia.[63]

Third, the Nias revival proves that "no revival in itself guarantees permanent and continuing growth unless it is followed up with high quality shepherding and nurturing with an emphasis on the dynamics of

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[61] Rhee, "Towards a Theory of Revival," p. 53.

[62] Brougham, "The Work of the Holy Spirit," p. 139.

[63] Hwa Yung, "Pentecostalism and the Asian Church" (Unpublished paper, Trinity Theological College, Singapore, n.d.), p. 12.

the Holy Spirit."[64] In fact, after the end of the revival, the Nias churches slowed in numerical and spiritual growth. The missionaries and church leaders emphasized Christian tradition more than the dynamics of the Holy Spirit to transform lives and to empower for witness.

9.3 Challenge

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit is needed for the growth of Christianity in Asia today. We are challenged to pray that God will again pour out his Spirit to revive the Niasan Christians and all his church in Indonesia and worldwide. We are also challenged to exercise a ministry of signs and wonders among Asian people. On the other hand, we must remember that the experience of the power of the Holy Spirit cannot displace the experience of salvation. Both of these experiences are important to be a Christian.

[64] Brougham, "The Work of the Holy Spirit," p. 126.