

Rantung, Samuel (1887–1964)

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Samuel Rantung was the first person to start the work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the eastern part of Indonesia. From Lowu, a small village in Ratahan near Manado, in 1921 the Adventist work had grown tremendously. It now has become the East Indonesia Union Conference with 977 churches and membership of nearly 126,400 in 2022.¹

Early Life, Education, and Marriage

Samuel Rantung was born on November 30, 1887, to Hendrik Haong and Katiwulan Malingkas. He was the fourth child of six siblings: Dorkas Sapela, Marsela, Adelina, Samuel, Manuel, and Agustina. He grew up in Lowu Village, Ratahan in the province of North Sulawesi, known to the native people as Minahasa. The name of the big island is Sulawesi, but it was then called Celebes. Rantung's parents were followers of Arifuru,² an animistic religion. They believed in the supernatural power of the honorable ancestors who were named as *dotu*.³

Rantung had seven years of basic education.⁴ During the Dutch occupation in the Netherlands East Indies, education was difficult for the native people to get. However, at the end of 1800, the Dutch government opened what was called as European Elementary School (Europeesche Lagere School), a seven-year basic education. Actually, the school was mainly intended for the European children; however in later developments, they allowed some native children to study. One author said, "the school, which was intended to produce European educated people, then also gave birth to a new intellectual elite called as Bumiputera [native elite], who later became the driving force for movement and press organizations."⁵ The education system seems to give impact also to the development of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Indonesia. Educated young people discovered the Three Angels Message and converted, and they became powerful instruments to reach their fellow native people.

Samuel Rantung married Marie in 1916.⁶ F. A. Detamore said about this couple, "his wife has been a Sabbath-keeper for several years; and they are quite competent in their line."⁷ Petra Tunheim testified that as a couple "Samuel and Marie Rantoeng have worked faithfully for years in the school, teaching in the Malay department."⁸ Tragically, in 1946, when they were serving in Sumatra, Mary was kidnapped by a gang, and disappeared. As of this writing, it is still not known what her situation was.⁹

On August 14, 1947, Rantung married Emma. They had three children--Johnny, Errick, and Linda.¹⁰ Johnny would later become a pastor and retired from denominational work when he was the secretary of the West Indonesia Union Mission. Errick served in the financial work of the Adventist Church, then retired while he was the treasurer of the Bandung Adventist Hospital Foundation, West Java.

Ministry

In 1910, Rantung decided to move to Java, specifically the big city of Batavia (currently named Jakarta). There he was told about a Batak man named Immanuel Siregar from Sukabumi, who taught about the Bible. Rantung decided to attend this Bible study. There he was amazed to see the pictures and the lessons from Daniel 2. After the meeting, he followed Siregar to the hotel and continued the Bible study. Then, because he was so curious, Rantung decided to go with Siregar to continue studying at Siregar's home in Sukabumi, a several-hour trip from Jakarta. Rantung left the Methodist School.¹¹

In Sukabumi, besides the Siregars family, Rantung met the R. W. Munson family. They were also very hospitable. Rantung stayed there and worked at the printing press while taking Bible studies. One year later, at the end of 1911, Rantung was baptized by Munson together with four others, including: Mrs Tan Ben Koan, her two sons Tan Tek Lim and Tan Kew Nio, and a Dutch woman whose name has been forgotten.¹² By the time he believed in Jesus, Rantung had thrown away everything that was against God, including his amulet.

Rantung started denominational work as a colporteur. During the day, he and his colporteur partner sold books and distributed tracts, but during the evenings, they went out "to the kampoengs and villages, and hold meetings."¹³ In 1913, he was registered as a Missionary Licentiate for Java Mission.¹⁴ In that year, Rantung decided to enter further study. He went to Singapore, but the school was not yet opened, so he worked in a rubber plantation in Malaysia until 1915. "When the school was opened under the leadership of Prof. K. M. Adams, instead of becoming a student, he was appointed to be a teacher."¹⁵ Rantung was in charge of the faculty for the Malay Department at Singapore Training School.¹⁶ He also helped the printing press, and he served there until 1921.¹⁷

In 1917, Rantung expressed his dream to bring the gospel to his home country. He saw that the Three Angels Message had been scattered around the world, but in his great homeland, Minahasa, "this message has not entered."¹⁸ However, the government did not allow the Adventist mission work to enter in Minahasa.¹⁹

In 1920, Rantung was given a two-month vacation to rest.²⁰ Rantung decided to visit his family in Ratahan, Minahasa. This was the beginning of the Three Angels Message entering Minahasa, and even the eastern part of Indonesia. Rantung now had the opportunity to share his faith in his home village.²¹ As someone who came from Java and even from Singapore, his family and the village people were very excited to see him. A large crowd by the hundreds would gather to listen to him.²² Rantung used the opportunity to testify about his new faith and also to give Bible studies.

He wrote, "Almost every day new friends come. The two-weeks since we first arrived, night and day, people want to meet us and hear us; and at this time, I am very tired because I am talking from morning till very late at night. I try to bring all the people to study the Bible concerning the second coming of Christ, the three angels' messages, and the commandments of God (including the command to observe the seventh day as the Sabbath, in honor of the true God); and truly many people are opening their eyes and awaking from their sleep, and beginning to examine things concerning the truth in the Book of God."²³

The impact was tremendous. Many people came to ask questions, to argue, and to make sure whether he was using the Bible like they do. Some were confused what to believe. But what made Rantung very happy was that his parents and siblings decided to accept his faith. They shunned the use of tobacco, chewing sirih (betel), and foods that defiled the body. The new set of converts started to worship on the Sabbath, then started to fully keep the Sabbath. They desired greatly to be baptized, however Rantung, although he was very excited, at that time did not have the authority to do it. He called the leaders from Singapore to come to perform the baptisms.²⁴

After his three months break, Rantung went back to Singapore. However, after a year, his health failed. The people thought that he had tuberculosis. The doctors ordered him to find a place with a better climate. He was sent to Garut, at west Java²⁵ During his sickness, there was a great concern that "his usefulness as a worker was ended. But our God whose hand is guiding this great message was working out a definite plan for the salvation of thousands of souls in the Celebes."²⁶

Meanwhile, the believers in his home village continued to ask for him to send ministers. One of the letters, signed by twenty-two people, said:

Dear Brother Rantoeng: Some of us, the undersigned, are people from Kampong, Lowu, District Pasan Ratahan, Poncakan, who confess with sincerity of heart and who are yearning for true religion. Truly we are in great need of this very thing. Now for several weeks we have gathered together and studied the true word from the Book of God. But we earnestly request the ministers of the true Word of God, if possible, to send a minister to instruct us more fully. We hope this request will be granted. "Your Obedient Servants"²⁷

Then, when regained his health, "S. Rantung and M. E. Diredja were sent to the Celebes in December of 1921. Pastor F. A. Detamore also accompanied them for he was eager to observe the reported interest."²⁸

Detamore discovered that what happened in Ratahan was very special. He described that "these are sturdy people, the most intelligent natives, as a whole, that I have met in the Indies."²⁹ Twenty-two people were baptized, and a new church was organized, the first Adventist Church in East Indonesia.³⁰

In 1922, Rantung was ordained as a minister. He also received governmental approval to freely do religious work. In 1924, Pastor L. V. Finster wrote:

I have some good news to write you this afternoon. In a communication received from Celebes, I learn that Brother Rantoeng has been granted permission to do full missionary work in all parts of Minahassa. He can baptise and celebrate marriage as far as the Government is concerned. For the past four months our church has been closed at Ratahan, and the brethren were able to meet only in their homes, but now their sadness has been turned into joy.³¹

In 1925, the work making great progress in Celebes Island (now named as Sulawesi Island), a mission field was organized, Albert Munson was the director, and Samuel Rantung as the associate.³² R. W. Munson said that "Samuel Rantung, whom I baptized in Java in 1911, is now Albert's strongest helper in the Celebes."³³ The work grew rapidly, and in a very short time, there were 500 baptized members in that field.³⁴

In 1926, Albert Munson reported that Rantung's successfully worked in Tondano, a town of 20,000 population, where the people "often run amuck and commit terrible slaughter."³⁵ Rantung faced a daunting task, but he was unfazed. Through his efforts, 30 souls accepted the truth.

In 1926, was sent to work in Ambon to support the work that had been started by the colporteurs there. Through his ministry, several revolutionists were converted. "After they were converted, all revolutionary ideas were taken out of their minds."³⁶

In Ambon Rantung reported that he worked alone while his wife was in Minahasa. For seven months, he had worked there, opening Sabbath School work in Ambon, with around 70 members, a small company outside of Ambon, and in Saparua, with 30 to 35 members.³⁷ Rantung worked in Ambon for more than a year, and God made his work prosperous there. In 1928, the membership grew to become 200 members. However, it was also challenging and dangerous. For example, one day when Rantung and three believers were on their way to conduct a preaching series in the town of Siri Soree, they walked six nights in order to avoid attacked by a group of armed men who wanted to kill him. At one time, the armed group saw an Adventist believer who was sent from the village to welcome Rantung, and they persecuted him. This man then run, and just in time saw Rantung. He waved to give to warn Rantung and the rest to hide in the tall grass by the roadside.³⁸ "Then a mob of drunken, infuriated men armed with clubs and long knives came rushing by. They ran hither and thither screaming, "Kill, kill, the Adventist teacher.' They searched and searched for the group of Rantung. "They were bent on murder, but God blinded their eyes so that they could not see what would otherwise be plainly visible."³⁹

In 1929, Rantung moved to work in South Celebes Mission. Then in 1931, he worked in the North Celebes Mission and assigned to be in charge of the Detached Station at Makasar.⁴⁰ In 1934, Rantung was elected to serve as the secretary of the Sabbath School and Personal Ministry of the North Celebes Mission.⁴¹

Later in 1935, Rantung served in the West Java Mission, then he was called to serve in Sumatra from 1939 to 1946. He was assigned to Padang, where Adventist work in Indonesia started 40 years before. World War II brought a lot of difficulties to his ministry in Padang.⁴² Rantung was severely persecuted by the Japanese

soldiers who assumed that Adventist pastors worked for their enemy, the American government. One of his feet was so badly injured that he could not walk normally again. The most tragic thing was that in 1946, his wife, Marie, was kidnapped by a gang and murdered, only her fingers were sent back to him on a piece of plate.⁴³

In 1947, Rantung was appointed to work in West Java Mission. He became as the first Indonesian native pastor at the Kramat Pulo Church, Jakarta. It was the second Adventist Church in Indonesia, now named the Petra Tunheim Memorial Church.⁴⁴

Rantung was appointed as the president of South Celebes Mission in July 1951.⁴⁵ As the president of the mission, Rantung visited and helped the pioneering work at Timor Island, Toraja and Palopo area, and also Kalimantan.⁴⁶ He served there until 1956 when he retired.⁴⁷ Samuel Rantung completed 45 years of service for the Seventh-day Adventist church serving in various capacities.

Later Life

Rantung lived in his village during his later life.⁴⁸ While supporting the mission work in his area, he and the family lived as farmers. At that time in 1957, there was a war between Indonesian troops against the locals who rebelled and wanted to set up their own government. The war was called *permesta*, “perjuangan semesta,” means “the universal people’s struggle.” Food was difficult to obtain at that time. It was said that their rice field was harvested by a family. Rantung went to the family and asked them to share half of that rice. However, the family refused to share, and on that day one of their children died without any reason. The following week, Samuel went there again to ask for a share of the rice, but they resisted, and that day, another child died. The third week, Rantung went again to ask for the rice, but they were denied again, and another child died. Then, Emma or Mrs. Rantung told her family that it is better not to ask for the rice again, otherwise another tragedy may hit the cheating family.⁴⁹

Erick Rantung testified that one day after he finished his elementary education, he was called by his parents, Samuel and Mrs. Rantung. Hesitantly, the parents told him that he could not go to school anymore, saying they had no money to pay for the tuition. Only Johnny, the oldest, would be put into school, so that at least there was one of the Rantung family may have a good education. Errick agreed to the explanation and asked for a piece of land that he can start to work on. One week later, they received a letter from Albert Munson. It was said that they should not worry about the education of the children. Munson supported their education.⁵⁰

From 1957 to 1961, the Permesta War occurred in Minahasa, and some Celebes separatists fought against the Indonesian government. One day Rantung was asked to conduct baptism at Malompar Village. The family went there, except Johnny. The Sunday after baptism, they walked home, and were caught in a crossfire. It was so intense and dangerous, and the family had to continue to walk, prayerfully. In one place, Rantung suddenly commanded the family to drop to the ground as a plane was attacking and dropping bombs. One of the bombs fell just nearby, but it did not explode. Then they continued their dangerous walk. God protected them.⁵¹

During his retirement, Samuel Rantung suffered sickness as a result of the persecutions he received during his active ministry, especially in his feet and digestive system that was badly stepped on and kicked.⁵² He went to Bandung Adventist Hospital, in Java, to undergo some operations for his digestive system. Rantung went back to Ratahan, the sickness came again when he was doing farming work. During his later years, he mostly stayed in bed due to his illness. Rantung died on October 28, 1964, at his home. He was buried in his village Lowu, Ratahan, North Sulawesi.

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