

THE EMERGENCE OF NATIONAL LEADERSHIP FOR THE INDIA MENNONITE BRETHERN CHURCH

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One of the identifying characteristics of a living church is its ability to produce able leaders, both on the level of the church and on the level of the conference. Admittedly, in some areas, the M. B. Church of India has its weaknesses, but if we use the emergence of national leadership as a criteria to measure church growth, I believe we have good reason to be optimistic.

From the outset, the mission and the Indian church showed deep concern for the training of village pastors and evangelists. Out of the Bible training programs, which took many forms, arose village leaders who have borne the tedious and often thankless task of founding churches in the villages. One can but thank God for these men, too numerous to list, who, despite their limitations gave birth to the M. B. Church of India.

The second test in the development of leadership comes now when the Indian churches have gained their autonomy and assume their rightful place as brother churches as equals with other M. B. churches around the world. This transition demands national leaders who can guide the growth of an independent Indian church without subordination yet with all brotherhood, can work with international church agencies in their own areas. It is precisely in this test that the Indian church has shown its vitality.

Since the second World War, there has grown an awareness in India of the need for leaders with advanced training. This awareness has snowballed in the last half dozen years. An advanced junior college Bible course was started in the M. B. Bible Institute at Shamshabad. Scholarships were made available for seminary training at the Union Biblical Seminary, Yeotmal, with which the church and mission are affiliated.

More important than this is the fact that God is leading out capable men for the greater tasks of the church. From the Bible college course is coming a group of men and women who are taking the initiative in Bible teaching programs in our schools and hospitals. From the seminary are coming excellent conference leaders, men with as much Bible and secular training as those of us on the mission staff, men with as much dedication and sacrifice as our leaders anywhere. R. R. K. Murthy heads up the radio and literature programs. D. J. Arthur and J. Paranjyothi have completed their B. D. degrees and are serving in conference-wide programs. Others like Brother Ruffus, have completed the equivalent of a Bible B. A. and are assuming greater responsibilities in the church. These are joining the older national leaders who have carried the responsibilities of the Indian conference for many years.