

ALLIANCE MISSION OBJECTIVES



## *The Indigenous Church*

# The Indigenous Church

A quiet stream meanders slowly through a tropical forest. Mangrove swamps line the banks. Among the trees monkeys are swinging. An occasional iguana darts through the foliage. In the water a lazy crocodile lies motionless. In the air black crows hurry along, and white herons wing their deliberate way.

But nature's peace is rudely shattered by a marine motor's strident exhaust as a small launch comes into view. Two of its passengers are white men, missionaries travelling to a camp meeting in the jungle. Yet it is not a mission conference to which they go. These two will be the only missionaries present. Indeed, this district has had no resident white missionary since World War II.

## *Seed Sowing*

Long years ago a missionary couple came to this primeval forest and labored faithfully through several terms among these pagan people. Gradually they won favor, respect, and love. Converts were made, churches were established, and native workers were trained. Then came the war. The little brown invaders threatened this region, and our now aging couple fled into the hills.

Through those slow, tragic years of conflict, their native friends hid and sustained them. At last peace brought them rescue and a well-earned rest back in America, while native helpers carried on the work. Now, at the Lapuyan chapel of that Margosatubig District on Mindanao Island in our Philippine Field, after four years of rehabilitation and advance, this conference is being held.

## *Harvest*

Three weeks are given to daily Bible classes and nightly

revival meetings. The audiences range from 400 to 700, mostly Christians but also some pagans. They have gathered from 58 outstations, manned by eight graduates of Ebenezer Bible Institute and about twenty lay workers. This camp meeting is conducted by the District Superintendent, the Field Evangelist, the local workers and two neighboring pastors—all of them natives of the island, and some of them Subanun tribesmen of the district. This is the indigenous church in action.

### *Mission Responsibility*

Every foreign mission should have as its primary objective the salvation of individuals. But its ultimate objective should be the establishment of the indigenous church. *Moulding the converted individuals into the church body, then guiding that church body's development* — these *both* are the responsibility of the mission. To his converts the missionary is a father. But to the church *he should soon become an elder brother, a wise counsellor, an "elder statesman."*

The indigenous church, self-supporting, self-administering, self-propagating — this is the goal of every Alliance mission. Suitable officers and committees on each level — local, provincial and national — are chosen from among the native membership. On these committees the missionary serves in an advisory capacity, and only when requested. This goal has already been reached in many lands, sometimes quite slowly on the older fields, frequently much faster in the younger work.

### *Church Development*

Different countries, with their different racial, historic and economic backgrounds, have produced different types of church development. Congo, our oldest field, has our largest church membership abroad, 22,015 out of the total of 83,511 for all our foreign fields. Our Congo church organization is complete but simple, in

keeping with the simplicity of the people and their manner of life. India, on the other hand, almost as old as Congo, has a church development which is more complex, with synods, councils and committees, quite in keeping with the Oriental fondness for organized detail.

The development of the indigenous church may be adequate and gratifying, and still be unequal to the task of evangelizing the area in which the church is located and for which the mission has assumed responsibility. In that case, the growth of the church in one portion of that area, should release the mission's forces and funds to press the evangelization of the remaining portions. *This is exactly what has happened recently in our India work.* But when the entire area assigned to the mission has been covered by the indigenous church, our foreign forces and funds should be transferred to needier lands.

### *Past Experience*

On younger fields, church development has profited by the experience of the older missions. For instance, in French Indo-China, guarding against those trends which our early work in India and China had found harmful, the mission leaders developed an indigenous church which has been justly called "The Amazing Annamese Alliance." Several years before the war with Japan, seventy churches in Tonkin, Annam and Cochin China, were united into one national Alliance Church, which has functioned efficiently ever since.

On some older fields it has been found necessary to expedite the church development. For example, in China, floods, famines, revolutions, and civil wars seriously retarded church maturity. So, after the first Communist uprising of 1927, foreseeing the probability that, sooner or later, the foreigners would need to withdraw from China, the missions doubled their efforts to develop Chinese church leaders. Recent events have justi-

fied that policy, and these leaders have taken up many of the burdens which missionaries had to lay down.

### *The Road Ahead*

What has happened to China now threatens other Oriental lands as well. Countries known to us as our largest and most successful pioneer fields, are now being noted by the whole world as the next in line of the Communist advance. In those lands our workers are straining every effort to take the gospel faster to the unevangelized millions. But, with equal fervor, they are pressing the training of national workers and the development of the indigenous church.

What the indigenous church can become, by the grace of God, and what it can accomplish for itself and for its heathen neighbors, is seen in our Philippine camp meeting story. But Margosatubig is only one district in one field out of our twenty Alliance foreign fields. Its camp meeting is an encouragement to our faith, because similar meetings are being held on our other fields as well. And it is a challenge to our prayers and gifts, that, in the short time yet remaining, similar harvests may be reaped everywhere on all our fields.



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