



# RAISING LOCAL RESOURCES

## The Tragedy in Japan – A Personal Statement

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I was young and single when I went to Africa for the first time as a missionary volunteer. After spending two years there (1961-63), one thing became clear to me: I did not want to return to Africa as a missionary. Instead, I asked our mission to be assigned to Japan. However, my request was not accepted; so in 1966 I ended up returning to Africa and have been serving there off and on for the past 50 years.

What was behind my desire to be assigned to Japan as a missionary? In short, my desire was to be a church-planting missionary, introducing people to Christ. During my two years in Africa I saw that project after project kept missionaries and church leaders preoccupied. Many of those projects were only marginally related to building the church and could be sustained only by outside funding and outside people.

The recent earthquake in Japan reminded me of my earlier desire to serve Christ there. As I watched television reports of the devastation following the recent earthquake and tsunami, photos would sometimes show a Japanese person looking out over a devastated city where all the houses had been reduced to piles of broken sticks as far as the eye could see. Sometimes the reporter would ask a man or woman what they were doing, and with tears in their eyes they would reply that they were searching for a lost member of their family.

These scenes brought tears to my eyes as I realized that many others, like that man who had lost so much, do not have a relationship with our Lord to help see them through such a crisis. I tried to think how I would feel if I were in his place and had no knowledge of God's love to sustain me when my world fell apart in such a devastating way.

So, how do I justify my returning to Africa so many times over the past 50 years? After all, I have been working in places where people have heard the Christian gospel over and over again, yet some of them are still unable to sustain themselves and their churches without outside assistance. In reality, I do not regret my decision to spend my life on behalf of the African church, because I am convinced it is a sleeping giant that must be awakened for God's service. But, for the past 50 years, I have been working largely among the "reached," knowing that they have received a disproportionate amount of the world's missionary resources while millions in Japan and elsewhere are still waiting to hear the gospel in their own language for the very first time. What comes to mind are the words of the Apostle Paul, who said that his desire was to preach the gospel where it had not been preached (Romans 15:20).

That image of a Japanese person looking for a lost relative breaks my heart. How Christ's heart must ache as He looks at so many in this world who have not yet made a commitment to Him! This tragedy reminds me that many Japanese have either not heard—or have resisted—the Good News that they could find the Rock of Salvation—Jesus—in times like these.

As long as I have health and strength, I will continue to go back to Africa since that is my calling. But I will deliver the message God has given me with increasing determination, reminding my African brothers and sisters that they can mobilize their own resources—both people and funds—so the gospel can be preached where it has not yet been preached. Africans are welcome in Asia. But, just like the rest of us, they need to

be awakened, trained and mobilized to participate in the harvest.

I have a further word for those who are church and mission leaders or those who serve on church mission committees. The tragedy in Japan should be a reminder to all who have missionary resources - anywhere in the world - to take a serious look at how those resources are being used. Are those resources being used to perpetuate unhealthy dependency in places where the gospel has already been preached? If that is the case, are they willing to redirect those resources to places where so many have yet to hear the invitation to become part of God's family through faith in Christ? Remember, the justification to go where the gospel has already been preached is for the purpose of mobilizing the Church for God's kingdom.

I do not regret going back to Africa to fulfill the ministry of mobilization that God has given me. He knows my heart, and He knows that I do not pine for what might have been. But Japan's current heartbreak is a reminder that many in our world still need the Savior and that without Him they are deprived of the eternity which is so much a part of the hope that lies within us as believers (1 Peter 3:15).<sup>f</sup>

Glenn Schwartz is author of *When Charity Destroys Dignity: Overcoming Unhealthy Dependency in the Christian Movement*. This book along with other materials can be ordered on the World Mission Associates' website at [www.wmausa.org](http://www.wmausa.org). He can be reached by e-mail at [glennschwartz@wmausa.org](mailto:glennschwartz@wmausa.org).