

my AFRICAN experience

by Glenn Schwartz

In the Sept-Oct. 2007 issue of *Mission Frontiers* I wrote about meeting two kinds of people on a recent visit to Africa. By the responses I received, it became clear that my credentials have not been made known to some of the current readers of *Mission Frontiers*. One e-mail I received said something like the following: “You visited nine cities in three weeks and spoke to only two African church leaders. I doubt if you have ever seen people in rural parts of Africa.”

If that is the perception of some of my involvement in Africa, I felt I should let the readers know something of my African experience over the past forty-six years. I am not doing this in a defensive manner, but to show the basis from which I write about sustainability in the Christian movement.

I first went to Africa in 1961 in some ways at the height of the colonial period. Many African countries had not yet achieved independence. In those days many missionaries were perceived by African people to be in collusion with leaders in the white minority governments. This was further complicated because white missionaries used “white only” facilities such as restaurants and hotels and traveled first and second-class on the trains. In those days in some countries African people were limited to riding third and fourth class on the trains.

As a young missionary, I took a personal stand to show that I did not approve of that link between the missionary movement and colonial governments. I personally challenged the mission system of which I was a part—something that did not always make life easy for me. However, what I did was



Glenn Schwartz is Executive Director of World Mission Associates, based in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The author welcomes interaction by e-mail at glennschwartz@msn.com.

recognized by my African brothers and sisters who themselves suffered indignities as a result of the colonial mentality.

After spending most of the 1960s in Africa I enrolled in missionary training at the Fuller Theological Seminary School of World Mission (as it was then called) in Pasadena, California. Following the two-year masters program I served as an administrator in the School of World Mission for six years. It was during this time that my understanding of missiology grew significantly. It was my privilege to learn firsthand from the original SWM faculty which included Donald McGavran, Alan Tippett, Ralph Winter, J. Edwin Orr, Peter Wagner, Charles Kraft, R. Pierce Beaver and Dean Arthur Glasser, for whom I served as administrative assistant.

I did not realize it at the time that I was in a period of preparation for future ministry back in Africa. And so in 1983 I began an itinerant ministry which led me back to Africa as many as four times a year for up to two or three months each year. During the following twenty-four years I conducted seminars or consultations in many countries including Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Botswana, South Africa, Mozambique, Lesotho and Swaziland. Everywhere I went during the past several decades, I listened as one African church leader after another told me about their encounter with Christianity. To say that this was an enlightening experience would be an understatement.

As a result of this travel, research and listening I collected the information which makes up the content of the seminars I have been conducting. In 1996 Dr. Ralph Winter encouraged me to put my teaching onto video. I produced the eight-hour series on dependency and then in 2007 converted it all to a four-hundred page book. The book is called *When Charity Destroys Dignity: Overcoming Unhealthy Dependency in the Christian Movement*.

It is forty-six years since I first went to Africa, and my life has been greatly enriched as a result. I gained a unique understanding of the way Christianity is being lived out in both rural and urban Africa. As you can see my three-week trip to Africa earlier this year was not my first visit there. 🌐

I welcome interaction from those who wish to exchange ideas. My e-mail address is glennschwartz@msn.com.