

## **My Personal Journey**

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As I recount my pilgrimage as a missionary, I'll attempt to share something of my vision for a world unreached as well as my personal philosophy of missions.

### **THE EARLY YEARS**

I was born into a nominal Lutheran family in York County, Pennsylvania, just prior to World War II. As a small child I remember the blackouts, rationing and other things that were part of the times. When I was three years old I remember being asked to perform on the piano, "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition," which I then attempted to imitate.

Our family attended Sunday School but hardly ever a worship service. Later on we were taken to church by concerned neighbors, first to an EUB (Evangelical United Brethren) church and later to the Brethren in Christ. The neighbor who persisted most was conservative both in appearance and philosophy. It is to him I owe the greatest debt because through his persistence I eventually made a commitment to the Lord. I am reminded of the expression that "some come into the kingdom backwards, kicking and screaming." The Spirit of the Lord kept prodding and leading until I believed.

The Brethren in Christ congregation I joined at that time was a "plain" church with a conservative cultural outlook. I only realized later the significant dissimilarity between my nominal Lutheran background and the background of those in this ethnic church. This would create a tension with which I would always wrestle - at least to a degree for the rest of my life. But through this gate I passed, and the Lord provided it for me to enter His Kingdom. I praise the Lord for those who opened the door and encouraged me to enter.

My decision to become a follower of the Christian way came when I was a lad just thirteen years old. Somehow I had a feeling that full-time Christian service lay ahead.

When I was in my late teens I read a story in the Reader's Digest that had a profound impact on my life. It was a Sunday afternoon. I sat on my bed with my back against the headboard and with my legs stretched before me. I read the story of five missionaries martyred on a sandy beach in Ecuador. When I finished reading the story, I put the book down on my lap and the Lord spoke to me. The voice was as clear and audible as if someone were standing in the room. The words were simply these, "There is a time and a place for you in Christian service somewhere."

It was no more or less dramatic than that. What did result from it was that I began to take one step after another in obedience, not knowing where the path would lead.

The path led to Messiah College where I struggled with a deep inner wrestling that left me in some spiritual turmoil. On one occasion of deep searching I was confronted with three unrelated elements in my life with which the Lord was obviously displeased. In obedience, I determined to make all things right. When I did, I was granted a new inner freedom from the Lord. For me it was the third major spiritual experience of my life: conversion, the call to service and then this experience of spiritual preparation. At this time it was becoming apparent that I would follow no ordinary path.

It was at this time that I learned that guidance from the Lord would be given to me one step at a time. I would not see the entire picture for long spans into the future. God, in his wisdom, chose that for me.

### **THE FIRST AFRICA EXPERIENCE**

I entered Messiah College in 1958 but did not do well academically during those first two years. I majored on extra-curricular activities, such as Gospel Team and drama. A break from college was clearly a good option.

I listened to the call for volunteers who would serve in Africa and Navajo land. I nearly went to work among Native Americans, but the way that opened was to Central Africa.

In January 1961, I left for Africa by ocean-going freighter, sailing from New York City to Capetown. The journey lasted eighteen long days, and I was not a good sailor. I was uncomfortable and somewhat bored on the long journey. (I was one of the last sent out by ship and shed no tear at the passing of sea travel to the mission field.) One struggle I remember was the battle to spend time with the Lord even amidst a schedule that only included three meals a day and checkers with the Captain.

The sight of Capetown with its Table Bay and Table Mountain was most welcome, but my most exhilarating moment after arriving in Africa came three days later as we drove across South Africa to what was then Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). I well remember the excitement as the first Zulu villages with round houses and pointed grass roofs appeared on the horizon. I then knew that I was in Africa. Homes like those would have increasing meaning for me as the years unfolded.

My two years as a volunteer in Southern and Northern Rhodesia were in some respects not very eventful. The spiritual battle with quiet times continued, but on the positive side I found great reward in learning to speak the language of the people. I bought primary school textbooks with pictures and simple words. At the end of the day I sat down with an African friend and he helped me to unravel the mysteries of this fascinating language, complete with the clicks unique to several Bantu languages.

I was never very good at Sindebele but my determination to try was noticed by many African friends. My success drew a few snide remarks from older missionaries who had many rationalizations for not acquiring the language. By the time I left Central Africa at the end of two years, I could pray publicly and give a simple sermon in Sindebele when asked.

## **RE-ENTRY TO THE USA**

I saw sin in a new way during this short period in Africa. I encountered alcoholism, witchcraft, adultery and a host of other things almost daily. Among them was political violence about which I knew nothing where I had grown up. In the early 1960s, frustrated people in Southern Rhodesia were derailing trains and burning the thatched roofs off school buildings in rural villages. At one point the police phoned our mission station every fifteen minutes to see if we were safe. That says something of the times in which we lived. Having witnessed all that, I returned to Pennsylvania in January 1963 and to the ethnic church in which I grew up.

This was my first real encounter with culture shock. Upon my return I attended an evangelistic service at my home congregation where the evangelist was preaching against the sin of wearing a necktie. I sat somewhat in disbelief as I reflected on what I had seen in Central Africa. My first response was (and is today), "This man doesn't know what sin is." The cultural dissimilarity of which I spoke earlier stood out in bold relief.

I have come to believe since then that the theology of such preaching is a serious confusion of Christianity and culture, the result of a woefully inadequate Biblical hermeneutic.

I pause here for a moment to reflect. What happened to me at this point was only a partial awakening to the tension between Christianity and culture. Later I would come to understand even more of this conflict.

What happened to me at that evangelistic meeting is worth some reflection. When I joined the Brethren in Christ Church, I was converted culturally as well as spiritually. In other words, there was a fair amount of social dislocation involved. Though I never wore plain clothes, I did stop wearing a necktie and wore only conservative colored clothing. I then joined the brotherhood (including today, Bishops) in making the transition to wearing first a black necktie and eventually those of many colors.

As I reflect on what I encountered, it strikes me that there were few in my generation who accepted such radical social dislocation in order to enter the Kingdom. How many, I wonder, might have responded if they had not been asked to make a cultural as well as spiritual transition. We have no way of knowing.

## **THE RETURN TO COLLEGE**

After returning to the USA, I needed money for college and returned to the weaving mill for some months, working long hours, determined to finish my undergraduate education. It was in the fall of 1963 that I returned to Messiah College. This time I meant business academically. I refused all invitations to engage in campus extra-curricular activities. I even declined serving as chairman of the campus missionary committee. A good friend with whom I shared the Africa experience led the committee in my place.

Studies were not easy but I persevered. I determined that every course I took should be applicable to preparing for further missionary service. I would avoid, if at all possible, courses designed just to fill a requirement. But there was no mission major in the college and only one or two courses on principles and methods in missions. To this day, I feel terribly cheated because I had nothing in missionary anthropology and related subjects to help prepare me to go back to Africa. Somehow I was not discerning enough to insist on it.

It was during these final two years of college that I allowed one significant extra-curricular activity. I met Verna Oberholtzer (secretary to the campus missionary committee on which I declined to serve). She was much better academically than I and proved a good inspiration for me to improve my academic work. She had a clear calling to missionary service and a year later we were married. God in his providence had provided for me a competent, dedicated, spiritual person who would be an excellent mother to our two children both born later in Africa. In addition to all she came to mean to our family, she was to become a constant, loyal and wise companion. This would be proven as the storm clouds gathered in the years that followed. In a short essay like this, it is impossible to express the value that she became to an increasingly frustrated missionary.

## **PREPARING FOR THE RETURN TO AFRICA**

The year 1965 was decision time again. College graduation was behind us and the future lay before us. We were approached about going out to Africa because teachers were much needed. I resisted because I felt there was a clear preoccupation in African missionary work with programs that made me quite uncomfortable. There were large mission-run farms ranging from 3,000 to 7,000 acres each. There were hundreds of schools, several large hospitals and various other activities that I considered marginal to missionary evangelism. I felt, too, that many of these programs were really large-scale businesses run by missionaries while the adult population was largely unevangelized.

When approached by the mission board to return to Africa, I expressed my reservations and asked not to be sent there. I requested that we be sent to Japan where I learned that house churches and evangelism were the highest priority of the missionaries. My request was declined. "The situation in Japan is not as rosy as it appears," was the reply, "and furthermore, teachers are needed in Africa." I came to learn later that the large institutions of Africa were like organisms with a huge appetite. To keep them alive required large sums of money, many "foreign" missionaries, and time, time, time. Even so, Verna and I accepted the call of the church to fill teaching posts, first in a secondary school and later at a teacher training college both in Zambia.

## **BEGINNING MISSIONARY SERVICE AS A (MARRIED) TEAM**

I was not only ill-prepared for missionary work in general, but I felt particularly unsuited for the classroom. My heart was not in teaching English language, social studies or a course in commerce. On the other hand, I had a strong desire to learn their language and the way things were done in their social setting, the African village.

When we accepted the call we were assigned to Zambia, not Southern Rhodesia or Rhodesia where I had been before. This meant learning a new language, Tonga, instead of Sindebele. I poured my heart into Tonga and passed the second year examination after only about four months of study. Having learned Sindebele previously gave me a running start.

Mercifully, I was soon moved out of the classroom that I loathed. But it was as superintendent of a mission station that I got caught in another real dilemma of cross-cultural missions. I was assigned to a task bigger than I was ever prepared to undertake. I was assigned to be a large-scale rural farmer, business person, manager of boarding schools, and pastor of a church with 700 in attendance each Sunday that schools were in session. (Fewer than fifty came when school was not in session.)

More than that, at the young age of 26, I had more responsibility and influence in that rural district of Zambia than most African village headmen and perhaps, in some ways, more than the chief himself. As I look back now, it is most embarrassing. But it reflects something of missions in colonial Central Africa. To question the situation often elicited the response, "This is the way all missions are in Central Africa." Unfortunately, almost without exception, that was true.

I carried an enormous load of activities for a year or more seeking to solve problems that were far above my ability or competence. For example, managing the budget of the mission was clearly beyond my ability. Among other things, the only homes that had electricity on the mission were within "the mission fence", missionary homes in particular. When I began electrifying homes of African staff who lived outside the fence, the costs were high. As a result, the mission ran a deficit but at least the disparity between those who had electricity and those who didn't was corrected. This was only symptomatic of the difficulties I had.

Three missionary executives - two from North America and one from our mission in Zambia - encouraged me to move out into village evangelism. "Just find one day per week," they would say, "in which to go to the villages." I rationalized, saying that administration on the mission was too heavy for me to do that.

## **TAKING HOLD OF MY SCHEDULE**

Then one day it struck me: I must delegate this work to others. And so, I gave most of what I was doing to capable assistants - unfortunately, much went to missionary volunteers from North America - but I did take control of my schedule. Each Monday I pursued serious language study. I was soon giving all my sermons in the Tonga language. Wednesday afternoon was given to a Bible study with local pastors and evangelists. Friday was reserved for village evangelism. I began to lead daily devotional times in the Tonga language with all mission workers and with a team of African men who were making bricks nearby. Simultaneously, Verna had a growing ministry among village women. It appeared that we had turned the corner. We felt tremendously rewarded as our effectiveness became evident. That year the mission budget regained half its previous deficit and it looked as if we were being rewarded for getting our priorities right. But we

still had a long way to go.

Into that rewarding ministry of personal evangelism, however, came a change as radical as a meteor from outer space. The ruling field committee - made up mostly of missionaries - decided that a position needed to be filled in a nearby teacher training college. Once again I was to become a school teacher. I begged to remain where I was. Leaving ministry in the local language to teach English was somehow repulsive; I knew I was unsuited for it.

None of my attempts to persuade differently worked, so I had to leave the rural ministry I had come to love. My new assignment included weekend pastoral duties in a local congregation. But it was during this time that I experienced my most severe disillusionment with the mission establishment.

I learned for example, that 84% of those being taken into church membership each year were leaving by attrition through a well-greased back door. In other words, our mission and church baptized about 5,000 people between 1959 and 1969 and the membership increased only between four and five hundred. In addition, I became aware that decision-making was being done primarily by missionaries from North America. Largely because the money came from North America, it was obvious that the church in Central Africa was being kept dependent. The constitution and bylaws for the church had been hammered out by a group of 50-60 North Americans with only a small handful of Africans present. I clearly remember listening as the legal terminology was debated - in English, of course.

I was also impressed with how little our missionary message had to say about demon possession, witchcraft, polygamy and other issues of cultural importance. In addition, most of my missionary colleagues could not preach a sermon in the local language. Some who could do so often used the language in a denigrating manner. In the words of one African brother, "Some missionaries speak our language well, but they use it to despise our people."

Needless to say, my growing restlessness left me quite disillusioned. The more I learned, the more dissatisfied I became. The more vocal I became, the more alienated I became from the missionary administration.

Unfortunately, through the years an adversary relationship had developed between the missionary establishment and some members of the African church, many of whom were leaders. There were several evidences of this. One was a remark an older missionary had made to me only a few days after I arrived in Africa years before. She said, "Glenn, one thing that will strike you is the harsh manner in which missionaries speak to local people." That word was prophetic.

Another evidence of this adversary relationship was seen in remarks such as the following made by more than one African colleague through the years: "A missionary is either well-liked by us Africans or he is well-liked by the mission administration. The ones we appreciate the most have a lot of problems with the mission administration."

Something else was happening that I did not fully perceive. Because of the stand I took, I found myself crossing over into the frame of reference of African brothers and sisters who were watching my demise with the mission establishment with great interest. To them it became increasingly clear that when the chips were down, they could count on me; I would stand with them. Space does not permit examples of how things like this occurred.

Needless to say, when my missionary term of five and a half years ended in 1971, it was decided by the missionary administration that unless I changed there was no possibility of my returning to that mission field.

### **THE SEARCH FOR HELP**

As my disillusionment grew, so did my search for answers. I learned about the emerging Church Growth school of thought. As I read one thing after another, I was convinced that I was not alone. It was refreshing to find that someone was verbalizing what I was feeling. During this time I engaged in deep inner searching to see what made me react so strongly to the way I and many African colleagues were being treated. I actually began to wonder if I were off base spiritually or maybe even mentally. That was a scary thought. But then I learned that there were others - from the outside - who saw things from the same perspective. For me that was like being declared sane. What a tremendous relief!

One missionary from another society in a different country visited me and gave a few reassuring words: "Glenn, when you leave here and go to California to study, you will find that you are not radical at all. You will only be middle of the road. They will confirm many of your suspicions." That word of encouragement, too, proved to be prophetic.

### **THE RETURN TO THE USA**

In 1971 Verna and I, along with Diana and Steven, left Zambia. I had been greatly enriched, yet quite disillusioned concerning the nature of missionary work in general and Central Africa in particular.

I recall one incident vividly. We boarded the airplane in Livingstone to begin the long journey home. As the plane raced down the runway the door to the cabin was left open for some reason. As I watched, the pilot pushed forward the levers on the powerful jet engines, and to my surprise, the co-pilot gently laid his hand behind the hand of the pilot. He held it there as we lifted into the sky. I hadn't known about that practice in which the co-pilot shows support for the pilot during take-off.

As I watched I cried. My thoughts turned to my experience of the past few years. I realized that I could not put my hand behind the hands of those in charge. There was too much with which I disagreed. My sense of justice told me that something was very wrong indeed.

### **MISSIONARY TRAINING FOR THE FIRST TIME**

I felt compelled to follow God's leading to study, and I enrolled in the School of World

Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary. Prior to that, however, I worked for six months (May to December of 1971) building the covered bridge that now stands on the campus of Messiah College.

When some of my colleagues from Africa heard that I was building a bridge they chided me. I had spoken so much about the brick and mortar approach to mission work in Central Africa that they wondered how I could ever become involved in building a bridge. They taunted me by saying that it must be one of Dr. McGavran's Bridges of God - the title of his book that launched the Church Growth Movement.

The bridge was completed in December 1971, and in January 1972 our family moved to California where we lived at the Christian and Missionary Alliance complex in Glendale while I studied at the seminary in Pasadena.

What I learned in this program was not only reassuring but somewhat more radicalizing. I was carried further down the road I had begun in Zambia. I became more and more convinced that there was something wrong with the colonial approach that the missionary enterprise followed in Central Africa. As I mentioned earlier, it characterized not only my own mission society, but many others in Central Africa as well.

I received a great deal of affirmation from what I was learning, but there was another major benefit from enrolling in this program. I met and learned to know scores (later hundreds) of other missionaries and national church leaders from many parts of the world. One thing struck me: while colonialism exists in many places, I met missionaries who knew nothing of the kind that I had encountered. Of course there were some who had experiences similar to mine. Some of these became close friends with whom I could work through the implications of what I had experienced.

As I progressed through the graduate level program in missiology, I began to analyze the church and mission in Zambia. For my masters thesis I wrote *The Brethren in Christ in Zambia*. I first entitled it "Crucial Issues of The Brethren in Christ in Zambia". One administrator from our mission looked at the title and laughed, as if to indicate that it was a bit presumptuous to indicate that our church in Zambia faced any "crucial issues". I later dropped the words from the title, though the word 'crucial' was hardly strong enough.

By the time I finished the two-year course at Fuller, it became increasingly clear that I could not return to Zambia. The missionary administration that declared me unfit to serve was still in place. The better part of judgment indicated that I should seek another ministry.

I should add that as decision time drew near (1973), I was approached by the mission and asked to return to Zambia. I was told, however, that I would have to accept what was being done by the mission. I declined the offer and responded to another invitation to stay in California to work.

## **SERVICE AT FULLER SEMINARY**

I was given an invitation to work in the School of World Mission of Fuller Theological Seminary as Administrative Assistant to Dean Arthur F. Glasser, who himself had been a missionary in China and, for many years, North American Director of the Overseas Missionary Fellowship.

I served from 1973-1979 as Assistant to Dean Glasser, Faculty Secretary and International Student Advisor. The experience was unparalleled in its scope of activity and reward. I was daily a servant of professors like Donald A. McGavran, Alan R. Tippett, Ralph D. Winter and others. In addition, I learned to know hundreds of missionaries and national church leaders from all over the world.

## **THE AFRICAN EXPERIENCE CATCHES UP TO ME**

During this time I began to feel the full impact of my previous experience. While in Africa I had vocalized my feelings. This vocalizing upset others, but it kept me from getting an ulcer.

In California, however, I was not speaking out as before, and the resentment resulting from my earlier experience was now being internalized. As a result, I became ill with stomach and chest pains. On several occasions I was taken to the hospital in the middle of the night thinking that I was having a heart attack. I had all the symptoms, including pain or numbness in the arms. Such experiences were disquieting.

Over a period of about a year and a half, I had one medical examination after another with hundreds of dollars of expense. No one could find a physical problem, yet I was often in great distress. On two different occasions medical doctors said to me, each using exactly the same words, "There are five things that cause your kind of problem: fear, resentment, bitterness, anxiety and unmet goals." One said, "Before you get well you may have to face up to what happened to you in the past." Those were more prophetic words!

At that time the Lord brought into my path a colleague by the name of Joe Arthur who had been a C&MA missionary in the Philippines. Joe was one of the scores of mid-career missionaries that I learned to know at the School of World Mission. He sensed my struggle and one day said to me, "Glenn, if you want help, I'll try to help you." He proved to be a genuine provision from the Lord. I accepted his offer, and for twenty-two days we met in his home for one hour each afternoon getting to the bottom of my problem. He made me say nothing, but rather he spoke in great detail of the effects of unresolved inner conflicts. I listened and took notes copiously.

At the end of those twenty-two sessions with Joe - a true peer-therapist - I was convinced of one thing: I had inner, unresolved conflicts; and if I were to get well physically, these conflicts would have to be resolved. A heavy personal assignment lay ahead of me. With Verna's patient and concerned help, I wrote letters to all those with whom I felt my past relationship was either strained or broken. Some were African church leaders, others were missionaries, and one or two were mission executives.

I wrote sixteen letters in which I assumed full responsibility for what happened. I blamed no one. The responses I got back were varied. Some wrote to say that they too were sorry that the relationship was broken and they were glad to have it repaired. A few came to see me personally. One missionary wrote to say, "That's the way you are. I tried to tell you differently but you wouldn't listen. Furthermore", he said, "when one is five years old his attitudes are set for life, so for you there is no possibility of change." But I was free because I had done all I knew to do.

One Zambian brother had an interesting response. He was about fifty years of age at the time. When he received my letter he took it to a missionary near where he lived and asked, "What's the meaning of this?" The missionary responded by saying, "Glenn has written you a letter of apology." He replied, "But what am I to do with it?" "Forgive him," the missionary answered, "that's all he is asking for." This African church leader who had worked with missionaries for decades said, "No missionary has ever apologized to me for anything." This remark was symptomatic of the relationship that existed between the mission administration and many of our African brothers and sisters. I am happy to report that this Zambian brother subsequently sent me a wonderful letter which I treasure highly to this day.

Once I wrote those letters, the burden was lifted and gradually the stomach and chest pains left. There were no more visits to the hospital in the middle of the night. I praise the Lord for the insight and intuition of my missionary brother, Joe Arthur.

## **ANOTHER CALL TO RETURN TO AFRICA**

When it became clear that my time at Fuller Seminary was coming to a close in the late 1970s, I was faced with another period of decision-making. Thoughts turned again toward Africa and the mission. The mission society approached the African church about their need for missionary assistance.

By now there was a major change in the church and mission administration in Zambia where I had served. The missionary administration had been replaced in the mid-1970s with an African Bishop and assistant. In addition, the ruling field committee to which I referred earlier, was by now mostly made up of Africans - many of whom knew me well.

Another significant change had taken place. The overseas secretary from North America was replaced. On a survey trip to Zambia, he asked the ruling field committee the following question: "Who served with you before as a missionary that you would be willing to have come back?" The committee, now mostly Zambians, suggested my name as their first choice. The invitation I was given by the church was to serve as principal of the Sikalongo Bible Institute. When the request was relayed to me, I declined on the basis that, after more than 70 years of mission activity in Zambia, obviously there was a qualified Zambian to fill that post. I agreed that I might teach there, but I could not lead the program.

When my sentiments were sent back to the Zambian Church, they received my suggestion and appointed a senior African church leader to be the principal. Had I taken the position, I would have kept yet another African church leader out of leadership. Upon

investigation one would learn that to this day (1987), the church has produced members who serve in Zambia's Parliament, the President's Cabinet and other high places throughout the land. One church member served as secretary to the National Christian Council. Another as regional education secretary for the government. Yet the finances of the church are still managed by a "foreign" missionary from North America. That, too, is characteristic of missions in Central Africa.

## **REFLECTIONS ON SPIRITUALITY**

I mentioned several times my struggle with quiet times. This is a struggle with which many in active Christian service constantly live. As time went by, I observed that some of my colleagues appeared to be quite "spiritual". I envied them somewhat because they seemed to live above the human struggle that was evident in my life.

But in retrospect, I view the situation somewhat differently. Some of those who appeared to be the most "spiritual" I found were the most impatient with our African brothers and sisters. They were the quickest to condemn acts they thought to be "sin". They may have been "spiritually" sensitive but they were obviously "culturally" insensitive.

As I look back I realize that what one learns in his devotional times must be demonstrated in the public encounters. Keeping a good balance between our humanity and our spirituality makes a big difference in how we are perceived by others. That has important missionary implications which deserve a great deal of reflection.

## **A NEW MINISTRY**

In the early 1980's, our Lord, through the sovereign leadership of the Holy Spirit, opened the way for me to have a new ministry. In 1983 I responded to the encouragement of a few missionary colleagues to launch a ministry in which I could use my gifts for the wider body of Christ. Consequently, World Mission Associates was begun in June 1983 as a catalytic service organization on the missionary scene.

Today my ministry leads me to Europe and Israel, as well as East, Central and Southern Africa. My colleagues and I serve as consultants to missionaries, mission executives and national church leaders. I teach seminars on cross-cultural ministry. What I experienced as a missionary has been preparation that now benefits hundreds of others. Some who benefit the most are national church leaders who are struggling to serve our Lord in the midst of substantial cultural overhang from the missionary past.

My current ministry is rewarding. It is far beyond anything I anticipated when I received the call sitting on my bed some thirty years before. And I am still following one step at a time.

**Glenn J. Schwartz May 1987**