

Missions Giving in Southern African Black Churches: Present and Future Challenges

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1. Introduction

Knowing that the obvious authorities on this subject are my black colleagues in ministry, whom I respect deeply for their sacrificial service in much harsher environments than most of the rest of us have ever experienced, I approach the topic of stewardship in the Black Church with trepidation, and hopefully a measure of humility. However, after almost 20 years of cross-cultural ministry, I have observed much of what we struggle with in this delicate area of church and mission life. The sight of collection plates containing only coppers, silver coins and a few notes on a good day, is all too familiar in black churches. This is especially true of churches which fall under the broad category of mainline churches. While we rejoice with those churches, and there are many, where the pastor is adequately provided for, we lament the fact that on the whole this is where stewardship ends. There is very little financial involvement of black churches outside the church structures, for instance in supporting a cross-cultural missionary, or even a local volunteer in a specialized field of service like school ministry. While we remember the commendation of Jesus of the widow who gave all she had, we attribute the problem to poverty much too readily. It is far more complex than that. There are numerous factors which have contributed to this state of affairs, which we will try to deal with in a cursory way. We are particularly interested in highlighting the problem of stewardship as it relates to the historical relationship between mission-sending churches in the West as well as locally in South Africa, and the younger churches in Africa, and how this impacts negatively on healthy stewardship principles and practices. Thereafter we would like to look briefly into principles which could help in the changes which may need to be made to address the lack of giving to missions in the black church.

2. Socio-Political Factors

2.1 Paternalism.

A major factor in the relationship between older and younger churches has been the control, which donor churches may exercise because of 'the inescapable influence of the "almighty dollar"' (Bush 1990:29). As the well-known adage goes; 'He who pays the piper calls the tune.' Much control has been exerted over people, churches and countries by means of money. On the other hand, when the donor church seeks to hold the recipient accountable for the use of the funds to prevent problems of misuse, the donor may be accused of reverting to old paternalistic practices (McQuilkin 1999:45).

Paternalism has been addressed by African mission statesmen like Panya Baba of Nigeria, as well as the late Byang Kato. However, few have expressed the frustration regarding paternalism as poignantly as Dominic Mwasaru, already in 1975:

Africanization!

Paternalism is a very bad disease.

It turns adults into children.

Thus, the people suffering from paternalism need special care.

You cannot appeal to their common sense.

One has to force the medicine down their throats.

This is the time to refuse people blankets.

When a man comes to beg for a fish, do not give him a fish;

For tomorrow he will come for another.

No. Give him a fishing-rod.

Show him how to use it on his own.

Next time you meet both of you are human beings...

Does this amount to a total rejection of all foreign aid?

It definitely means the refusal of all paternalistic aid.

Such aid does not build – it destroys.

Like ants, it eats up the very foundation of a man's dignity.

It reduces a man to a state of perpetual dependence.

It afflicts a man with inferiority complex and helplessness...

Africanization!

It is an appeal to rid ourselves of paternalism.

It is an appeal to found a self-reliant African Church.

It is an effort to give the Church in Africa genuine structures (Mwasaru 1975:122-128).

2.2 The Position of Power Held by Western Churches

When Westerners come from the vantage point of affluence it creates real problems for teaching stewardship principles in the African Church. It also creates problems regarding the indigenous support of missionaries. This is mainly the case where there is a lack of identification, and where a foreign economic standard is imposed on the cultural group that is predominantly poorer than that of the Westerner.

2.3 The Dependency Syndrome.

Based on the logic that about 50 nationals can be supported at the cost of sending one American missionary family overseas (over \$50 000 per year), there are more than 140 mission organizations which are built on the premise of gathering and sending money, not people (McQuilkin 1999:57). This practice, though appealing for several reasons, has some real hazards. Because local (i.e. national) believers have no need to give sacrificially of their own resources, however meagre that may be, they never gain a sense of ownership, and do not learn to depend on God or on themselves. Church and mission leaders become preoccupied with raising North American dollars, get involved in legal wranglings over properties bought with those dollars, and become jealous, demanding and ungrateful (McQuilkin 1999:57-58). In these instances the very act of giving becomes *taking*. 'Unfortunately, many mission-established churches and other institutions are economically paralyzed and feel they have little or nothing to contribute toward the remaining task.' (Schwartz

1998:22). In this sense their dignity and potential are being denied them because of dependency arising from paternalistic giving.

Indeed it is extremely important that local resources be given high priority. 'The availability of outside resources often convinces people that what they have is insignificant and of so little value that it isn't worth giving back to God. That is how the dependency syndrome is created and perpetuated.' (Schwartz 1998:22).

3. Historical-Structural Factors::

3.1 Western structures imposed on African Churches.

The African Church has experienced the proverbial David in Saul's armour for a long time. These human, imported structures, often very needed and effective during the pioneer phase of missions, can even be termed 'heretical structures', as they do not constitute a biblical standard of worship applicable for all time and everywhere, yet were imposed on the young churches in Africa. They include the traditional missionary compound, or 'mission station', where schools, hospitals, workshops, trading stores and of course church buildings were established. Teacher-evangelists, from among the first converts, were trained at these mission stations, and used in full-time, paid employment to plant and lead young churches. "...this approach was *expensive* and ... 'mission churches' had almost no alternative but to continue the same (expensive) model of ministry and buildings" (Kritzinger 2001:47, emphasis and parenthesis in original).

The complex, foreign structures of the Christian movement introduced into extensive parts of Africa, built over many years with millions of dollars, pounds, and deutsche-marks, have not been reproducible to say the least. 'If the expatriate personnel during the colonial period ran the programme largely with a foreign subsidy, how could they expect local believers to do it without the subsidy?' (Schwartz 1993:128). Instead of gladly spreading the Good News of the Gospel, many African Church leaders are weighed down by elaborate structures inherited from the past. They are preoccupied with maintenance, indeed survival, rather than dynamic missionary outreach, and in the end made to look like poor managers, rather than the community leaders which they are. Indeed, the lack of indigenization, ownership and the imposition of foreign structures and funding is what has caused the church in Africa to be *neutered* in the sense that the 'Three Selves Formula', so ardently propagated by Venn and Anderson, viz. for younger churches to be self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating, has not been realized to a large extent in Africa.

3.2 Historical Legacy Of Colonialism and Racism in Church Structures.

The sacrificial service of the early missionaries and church leaders in South Africa like Van Lier, Moffat, Van der Kemp, Casalis, Gutsche, Philip, Gray, Shaw, and many others, was marred by colonial and political influences that eventually caused the well-known structural divisions in most, if not all the major denominations in Southern Africa. These divisions, primarily along racial lines, have hindered the free-

flow of ideas, resources, and personnel. Had this not been the case, we may have seen an entirely different picture regarding stewardship and mission in the African Church.

4. Economic Factors:

4.1 Superiority/Inferiority Attitudes Regarding Money

'The strategies and the outcomes of the Western Christian missionary endeavours for the past two hundred years are impossible to understand apart from the massive economic and material superiority enjoyed by missionaries, vis-à-vis the majority of the people inhabiting those countries popularly designated "mission fields."...Economic power is still the most crucial factor in the Western missionary movement.' (Bonk 1991:4). Considering the fact that already in 1984 the Gross National Product per capita of the USA was \$US 15 490, while in Zaire it was \$US 140 and in Kenya it was \$US 300, (Bonk 1991:6,7) we can better understand this superiority-inferiority dynamic, which has certainly negatively affected stewardship practices and giving-patterns in the young churches.

Bavinck once observed, 'The danger is always imminent that one church feels superior to the other, because of her economic power, her splendid buildings, her intellectual superiority. Especially when it concerns churches of different races, the chance is not unthinkable that this feeling of superiority assumes an extremely questionable character' (in Verstraelen-Gilhuis 1982:288).

4.2 Pervasive Poverty in Africa:

This is definitely one of the main problems of the African Church, paralyzing its efforts to be a mission force, instead of a mission field. In the Tswana communities among whom we work, as many as 12 people are dependent on one pensioner's monthly grant. A Tswana pastor recently told me that only about 10% of his congregation earn some form of income. If we add to this the related issues of unemployment, crime, and the land issue in Southern Africa, we indeed cannot escape serious reflection on the bearing these problems have on stewardship in the African Church.

5. Missiological Factors

5.1 The African Church as Traditional Mission Field.

In 1900 African Christians amounted to 8 million (2,5 mil. Protestant), which was 10% of the total population. By 1990 this had risen to 275 million (57%), with an estimated 396 million (61%) by 2000! (Johnstone 1993:37). Coupled to this, the emergence of the Third World mission force has been astounding to most. Scott already observed in 1980 that there were 3 400 missionaries from 46 developing countries, with Nigeria being the largest sending country of these (1980:38). However, the question has to be asked, how many of these missionaries are serving in cross-cultural situations, and furthermore, how many are in countries other than their own. Of the 1 253 Asian missionaries in the above figure, 51% were engaged in 'home missions', and of the 49% in foreign missions, almost 75% were 'diaspora' missionaries, i.e. working among their own people in a foreign country (Scott 1980:38). Thus the issue is not so much whether the African Church is involved in

mission, but the problem lies in the narrow *scope*, the agenda, of missionary activity in Africa. Panya Baba does not know of any organization in Africa which has sent 'many missionaries and supported them fully in Western countries...The churches in Africa could be mobilized to send missionaries to do evangelism and church planting in Europe or Western countries.' (1990:133). It is not difficult to see why many African churches have hitherto been unmotivated to even consider becoming part of the mission force on a global scale, because for so long they have been considered the mission field.

Unfortunately Western missionaries have given the impression that one needs a massive support base, with expensive equipment, to go into the world as a missionary. Fr. Afagbegee, a Ghanaian missionary to Botswana, says: 'The Church in Africa is part and parcel of the universal or world-wide Church, and so it must share in the missionary dimension of the Church, both in receiving and in sending out missionaries....And just as the poor can, and should give and share with others, even the little that they have, especially with those in greater need than themselves, so also can African countries send out some missionaries to each other and beyond, despite their own shortage of priests and religious (workers).' (1988:318-319, parenthesis mine). I am sure most African clergymen will agree with this, yet so little is done practically, that one is still inclined to ask who is "putting their money where their mouth is"?

5.2 Lack of Impartation of Stewardship Principles.

Vedhanayagam Azariah, one of the 18 delegates from the younger churches at the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910, cites two of the reasons for inadequate giving in young churches; the neglect of teaching on the privilege of Christian stewardship to young converts, and enforcing the duty of giving by wrong methods, such as a compulsory church levy (in Bush 1990:17). Repeatedly missionaries and community development workers in Africa hear the cry: 'If only somebody had taught us to use money responsibly!'

6. Cultural Factors::

6.1 Family Demands

Ancestral veneration, even among many of the 'churched', causes a fear of contravening the traditions of the fore-fathers. Other conventions, such as the responsibility of the eldest single son to care for his aged parents and other dependents, have been the cause of many African Christian workers and missionaries withdrawing from the field, or never reaching a foreign field in the first place.

6.2 Concept of Time

The unique concept of time in Africa tends to cause the indigenous, traditional African to be caught up in the past, rather than planning for the future, which has financial implications. The Western concept of time proceeding in a linear manner into the future is strange in Africa, as is openness to the future and resultant historic character of faith. According to Mbiti the traditional African concept of time is that it

is a two-dimensional phenomenon, with a long past, a present, and virtually no future; people set their minds chiefly on what has taken place, and not on what is to come, thus time moves 'backward', rather than 'forward' (in Ross 1995:74). The implication of this for stewardship in the African Church is that budgeting for the future becomes irrelevant to a large extent, especially in the sense of anticipating expenses and saving that which is not immediately needed. Planning of projects and recruitment of personnel ahead of time may also be minimized.

6.3 Dealing with Dishonesty

Mysterious disappearance of church funds is often not dealt with decisively when discovered. The African culture seems to dictate that shame should be *covered*, as opposed to the Western principle that *justice* should be served on the guilty party. The former culture is *shame-based*, whereas the latter is *guilt-based*. The imposition of a uniform Christian Ethic in this situation is clearly problematic.

6.4 Possible Influences of African Traditional Religion;

Möller is of the opinion that the focus of African Traditional Religion is self-interest; self-interest of the group, but chiefly of the individual. When rituals demand any kind of sacrifice on the part of the individual, it is in a time of crisis when things go wrong, or prescriptions to ensure success, and not as a matter of course. The practice of traditional religion is therefore often based on selfish motives. (1972:265). When this is the background from which African Christians are converted, we may have to ask whether there may sometimes be a residue of this selfish motive in their practice of Christianity, which also impacts negatively on stewardship practices. Furthermore, ATR and some traditional cultural beliefs dictate that on the whole there may not be big discrepancies between the material or financial status of individuals within a particular community. If an individual becomes rich, he or she has done so *at the expense of the rest of the community*. There are notable exceptions, however, as in the case of the king, chief, and spiritual leader. These icons of the community are regarded as rich *on behalf of the rest of the community*, and have not therefore taken from them, in spite of their incredible wealth in some cases. Nürnberger (1994:13) believes that the African collective consciousness is a cause for the traditionalist culture to be less productive than the modern scientific-technological civilization, and is also unable to defend itself against the competitive advantage of the latter. 'Traditionalism is marked by a dependency syndrome which stifles initiative... horizons are confined by the boundaries of clan, tribe and ethnic group, while in modernity horizons are confined by individual, short term and material interests' (1994:13).

6.5 Western Cultural Imperialism;

Cultural imperialism of Western missionaries has been just as damaging to stewardship principles and practices in the young churches. Hence we have 'the spectacle of Indian believers worshipping Christ in Gothic cathedrals in tropical climates, and Nigerian disciples abandoning drums in favour of organs and singing hymns to tunes originating in German beer halls' (Scott 1980:32,33). The imposition

of Western architecture, vestments, and the like, has been a major hindrance to workable, indigenous stewardship practices within the African Church.

7. Seeking a Biblical Basis for Church and Mission Funding

According to the example of the Macedonian churches which Paul referred to in 2 Corinthians 8:3-5, who gave liberally in spite of their trials and extreme poverty. Christian giving and true generosity is not only the prerogative of those who have much to give, but is the privilege of all believers who have God as their Source. Rhyne (1987:410) believes that Christology should dominate any discussion on Christian financial stewardship, as the latter is based on the grace of God according to 2 Corinthians 8:1-15, and this grace is demonstrated supremely in the incarnation of Christ; 'For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich' (2 Cor 8:9). It is important to understand here why 'Material and spiritual are unapologetically lumped together' (Rhyne 1987:409). Paul introduces the incarnation of Christ in order to affirm that the Corinthian Christians have been enriched by his grace, by justification, reconciliation, adoption, regeneration, etc, and they can *therefore* freely respond in love to the needs of others. If grace is real in our lives, we too can respond joyfully to the real needs of others. This sharing is *mutual*, and is not minimized or maximized by the size of the gift, or the currency in which it is given. Indeed, the Macedonians did not restrict their giving to financial aid. On the contrary, 'in keeping with God's will' (2 Cor 8:5), they dedicated themselves first and foremost (*proton*) to Christ, but also made *themselves* available for any service in connection with the collection. Peterlin (1995:164) asks the question; 'How was Paul's mission financed?' He then relates what the New Testament seems to convey. Firstly he worked with his hands to raise his own support (tent-making). In other cases he received and accepted money from churches he had planted. Then his acceptance of hospitality on the field may also qualify as receiving support. Finally, there is a theory that he partly financed his endeavours himself from 'reasonable funds at his disposal' (Peterlin 1995:164). From passages like 1 Thessalonians 2:9 it seems that Paul talked to people while he was working 'night and day', and that there were also times when he laid aside his tools and taught the gospel.

8. Some Important Principles Regarding Mission Funding

8.1 The Principle of Grace

This principle, which we find in 2 Corinthians 8:1-9 as well as 1 John 3:14-18, implies that to whom much is given, much will be required. Lack of stewardship of money is equivalent to unfaithfulness to grace, as we introduce grace by giving and receiving. Paul urged the Corinthians to excel in the 'grace of giving' (2 Cor 8:7), referring to grace as a virtuous act of sharing or as gracious help. The word *charis* is found ten times in 2 Corinthians 8-9, and can be rendered as divine generosity lavishly displayed, or divine enablement (to participate worthily in the collection - 2 Cor 8:1, 9:8,14).

8.2 The Principle of Interdependence

Here Ephesians 2:11-15 is foundational. The redeemed community in Christ is set free from the walls of nationalism, cultural, racial, and religious conceit and individualism. Gary Parker (1998:36) stresses the principle of interdependency as a third way between dependency (which is ardently denigrated by missiologists like Glenn Schwartz), and independence (which he believes is equal to self-supporting churches).

8.3 The Principle of Ownership

Aryeetey (1997:35) laments the fact that past experience in Africa has convinced those on the receiving end of outside funding, that he who pays the piper, calls the tune. 'The African church must be prepared to shoulder the bulk of the resource needs if indeed this African initiative is to be truly indigenous. If we have come of age as we say we have, then we must own every aspect of the vision. We must see it primarily as our responsibility. If the West wants to come alongside and help us in partnership, that is acceptable. However, we must be prepared to take charge properly by our willingness to pay the bills ourselves.'

8.4 The Principle of Family

As in the case of the Church in Jerusalem after Pentecost (Ac 2:44, 4:4, 34), who shared everything they had to the extent that there were no needy persons among them, so the family of God throughout the world should be able to share resources, by surrendering legitimate rights for the sake of others (1 Cor 9:4,6,12) (Bush 1990:20).

8.5 The Principle of the Divine Mandate

Mission giving and going should be dependent on the 'Great Commission' which applies to the whole of the Christian Church. Panya Baba agrees that the Great Commission was given to all. 'The Lord of the harvest has already begun sending out African missionaries to Europe and other Western countries. It isn't because there are no churches in those countries, but because the Lord of the harvest can use African missionaries in Western countries in one way, while he can still use Western missionaries in African countries' (1990:133).

8.6 The Principle of the Local Church

The local church should be the primary agent from which the work of missions is funded, and not mission agencies, national associations and societies, important as they may be to do specialized work as an arm of the church. Where there is foreign funding involved, two distinct and unrelated organisations are called for. The one would be the funding agency, and the other the agent for consultancy, while the local church retains control of their work, and thus of their dignity (Batchelor 1993:130). 'The local churches will be in a position, more and more to impose on us missionaries their own priorities, their scale of values, and their pace and modalities in implementing apostolic programmes. We missionaries may find ourselves forced to appeal less and less to our own traditional priorities and beaten tracks...'

(Kalilombe 1989:189). Watakama (1990:129) criticizes some Western missionaries whose authority comes from the home board and field headquarters, with no reference to the local church, nor are they even members of the African church. Panya Baba agrees that the missionary should work under the leadership of the local church, but believes that a constructive, side-by-side existence of mission agency and local church should continue (Baba 1990:133).

8.7 The Principle of Mutual Accountability

'Accountability should not be a tool for control, but a protection against evil; it should be established through agreement of the key parties involved' (Bush 1990:29). Bush is referring here to accountability between the donors and recipients of mission funds, especially accountability regarding the way these funds are used.

8.8 The Principle of Tithing

Most pastors would agree that the key to funding in any church is tithing, and that it is also the scriptural way of getting money. Schwartz (1994:41) believes that the emphasis should be shifted from the 'law of tithing' to the 'joy of giving'. He cites the example of the building of the tabernacle in the time of Moses (Ex 35-36), when the people willingly and joyfully gave until they had to be stopped. With the building of the temple in David's time it was the same (1 Chr 29), as well as the rebuilding of the walls around Jerusalem in Nehemiah's time (Neh 3). People gave in response to what God had given them, (the principle of grace).

8.9 The Principle of Partnering

The most healthy form of this principle in action seems to be the interdependent partnerships, as practised inter alia by CNEC Partners International, who see partnership as 'a complimentary relationship of two independent ministries in which each serves to complement and fill out the other' (in Bush 1990:24). Here the focus should not just be money, but the sharing of resources in a spirit of true fellowship that can enhance the work of missions in general. Kritzinger (1997:99) believes that the traditional African concept of *ubuntu* ("I am a person through other people") is very applicable to the principle of partnering in mission. If it is taken seriously, Western individualism would have to be repented of, and African Christians could lead the way in forging partnerships. Examples of working principles for partnership could be cited from the policies held by *Partners International*: agree on doctrine and ethical behaviour; share a common goal; develop an attitude of equality; avoid dominance of one over the other; open communication; accountability; mutual prayer, etc. (in Kritzinger 1997:100).

9. Conclusion

We propose that role players within the Baptist Union of Southern Africa seriously consider how many of the above (negative) aspects of our church-in-mission legacy we are perpetuating, and which of the above principles, among others, we need to incorporate in an on-going discussion regarding stewardship within the context of missions giving. We then need to look at practical ways of addressing the paradigm shift that is needed for our predominately black churches

to become missions-minded, and to experience that indeed 'it is more blessed to give than receive.' Furthermore, models for stewardship-in-mission need to be explored, especially church support and personal support-raising for black missionaries, tent-making models, and possible agricultural and industrial co-operatives which can become support-bases for mission in and from Southern Africa.

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