

# African Adventists and Self-Reliance

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By Pardon Mwansa

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This article is written because I share the concern that many have about Africa. Many are concerned that Africa continues to be a suffering continent that has failed to attain financial self-reliance both in political circles and in the Seventh-day Adventist Church itself.

It is impossible for any one paper to deal with the issues of this continent and be fair to all regions of Africa. Africa, being the second-largest and second-most-populous continent (after Asia), cannot be dealt with as if it is one country with one culture. Because of this limitation, I have focused on broad principles rath-

er than on details of any country or region. I believe that principles transcend national borders.

This article attempts to do the following: first, to present facts that show that there is a problem in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Africa when it comes to self-reliance. Hopefully these facts will motivate us to do something about the situation. Second, to define the state of self-reliance. Third, to identify causes and factors that have contributed to a spirit of dependency in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Africa. Fourth, to present a biblical overview of self-reliance and how it is attained. Fifth, to present reasons why the church should expand its stewardship program or promotion beyond that of appealing to members to be faithful. Sixth, to review literature on the impact of aid to Africa and what that has done to Africa. Seventh, to present seven practical suggestions to consider for implementation as a means to start changing the picture of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Africa from a dependent church to a fully self-reliant church.



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## Problems

The first step in solving a problem is to acknowledge that there is a problem. Therefore, I acknowledge that there is a problem with the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Africa in being self-reliant and in caring and providing for quality services for the membership. The following evidences have led me to conclude that there is a problem:

1. The number of pastors employed on the continent to care for the large numbers of believers and large territories is inadequate and results in poor care to church members. In 1950 the ratio of pastors to membership was 1:300 (337:93,527) and by 2005 the ratio had become 1:1,444 (2,793:4,888,138). The work load of the pastor in 2005 was four times what it was in 1950. The worsening trend continues.

2. While the Adventist Church has been in many African countries for over 100 years, it is still operating most of its work under *mission* status instead of *conference* status. One of the characteristics of a conference is that it does not receive operating appropriations from outside of its territory. Out of 24 unions operating in Africa, only 4 operate under conference status while the other 20 are operating under mission status. Out of 121 organized church entities operating in Africa, 42 are operating under conference status, while 79 operate either as missions, fields, or associations. That means that

out of the 121 entities, 79 are still receiving some operating appropriations and are not yet self-reliant in some sense of the word.

3. In spite of growing from 689 churches in 1950 with a membership of 93,527 to 25,689 churches in 2005 with a membership of 4,888,138, Africa is not able to build houses of worship in most places without asking for foreign aid. Take for example Mozambique. This Union has over 220,000 members with a total of 974 organized churches, but has only 13 church buildings. In 2007, Maranatha International Volunteers, a foreign organization, kindly decided to build 1,001 churches for that Union.

4. Over 90 percent of the pastors in Africa do not have a reliable form of transportation with which to perform their demanding duties for their churches and members.

5. The major capital projects such as a university campus or publishing house development still depend on most of the money coming from outside of Africa.

6. From 1981 to 2005 (about 25 years), out of almost one billion dollars spent in the development and operations of the Adventist Church in Africa, about 50 percent came in the form of appropriations from outside of Africa.

7. The brain drain from the continent among both church employees and non-employees is symptomatic of something gone wrong. Whether this is true or not, or even right or wrong, one

of the factors causing the brain drain is a lack of good working conditions and care for worker's needs.

The list could go on, but the above should be enough to prove the point that there are problems in Africa when it comes to self-reliance.

### **A Working Definition of Self-Reliance**

What do we regard as self-reliance? How are we going to tell when Africa has become self-reliant? The following will help in serving as a definition and at the same time as performance indicators of self-reliance. Self-

ties as conferences rather than missions; and (5) contribute its due share to the world budget to enable the world church to evangelize the un-entered territories of the world.

### **Factors Contributing to African Dependence**

Below are listed several factors that have contributed to make Seventh-day Adventists in Africa so dependent on foreign aid.

1. The missionaries brought both the gospel and the gold, thereby creating a spirit of dependence among the local people. When the missionaries who

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reliance in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Africa will be attained when it is able to raise sufficient financial resources to carry out a viable ministry that includes: (1) sufficient operating income for all its entities, excluding donations and appropriations, to cover its operating expenses; (2) provide church buildings for the ever growing church congregations using locally generated income; (3) care for its employees by providing a livable wage and other needs for their performance of ministry such as transportation, etc.; (4) operate all or most of its enti-

came to Africa brought the message they also brought with them financial aid to help establish institutions and run ministries in Africa. While this was good, it communicated to the local people that the same people who brought the message were responsible for its funding. There was no systematic plan to move from this *feeding* mentality to a *take over* mind set.

2. Stewardship teachings have focused on helping people to be faithful without helping them know how to make wealth. Most of our methods in stewardship have continued to focus on

teaching people to be faithful in returning tithe and offerings, the assumption being that people have money.

3. Principles of good internal control are not implemented in the church treasury system in Africa. In the treasury seminars that I have attended, I have heard it repeatedly said: "The Church in Africa would double its income if it implemented basic internal control measures in its financial management system."

4. Wealthy people in Africa who are faithful to God have not been taught to make wills that benefit the church upon their demise. When a rich person dies in Africa, his support to the church has ended. If the wealthy people in Africa were taught to name the church in their wills they would continue supporting the church even after their death.

5. Not enough education has been done in telling Africa that the Bible teaches people to work hard and take care of their own needs so as not to be a burden on others. Many people in Africa would qualify as *beggars*. A begging mentality is destructive to self-reliance. Unless a person changes his mind to that of a hard worker, one who does not beg, one cannot grow out of a begging mentality. The Adventist Church has not strongly promoted, taught, and upheld the biblical views on hard work, independence in providing for one's needs, and for caring for the material and spiritual well being of one's family.

6. The newly converted people coming into the church in recent years, especially those brought in through large campaigns, have not been adequately taught proper stewardship. Many people have been baptized who have not heard of or even demonstrated true discipleship through practices such as faithfulness in the returning of tithe.

7. The brain drain—the migration of Africans out of Africa in search of a better life—has emerged in recent years as one of the biggest factors contributing to Africa failing to attain self-reliance.

Some analysts say that as many as 50,000 Ph.D.s, or 30% of Africa's University-trained professionals, currently live and work outside the continent—in Britain, Europe and the USA. Others put the number higher: 70,000 skilled graduates are leaving each year. (*Sawubona Magazine*, 112)

The impact on the Seventh-day Adventist Church caused by this loss is that the church is losing and continues to lose some of its best people who could help solve the problem of inadequate self-reliance.

### **Biblical Principles**

The Bible presents important principles that apply to the African situation.

#### *Self-Reliance*

Paul gave this counsel to Timothy as sound teachings on self-reliance:

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat. And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right. If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother. (2 Thess 3:6-15)

This profound passage has several key points that I would like to outline to ensure they are clearly understood:

1. Paul teaches that being self-reliant should be a *model* lifestyle, one that all believers should aim for (3:9).

2. In order to be self-reliant, people have to believe in working hard and working hard sometimes may call one to work nights and days (3:8).

3. If people are not willing to work hard so that they can sup-

ply their own needs, they should not then enjoy a life they have not worked for. If they are not willing to work, they should not eat (3:10).

4. Believers should not be a burden to others. Being a burden to others happens when people look to others or expect others to supply their needs. Paul is not saying we should not receive help from others because he himself gave examples of how he took gifts from one church to the church in Jerusalem, but rather he is saying we should not live in a manner that makes others responsible to supply our needs (3:7).

To Paul, these teachings are not a minor subject. This subject was so important that he personally practiced it. He refused to receive support from church members so that he would not be a burden. "Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you" (1 Thess 2:9). So strong were his convictions on this that he wrote to the Corinthians,

And when I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed. I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so. (2 Cor 11:9)

There is one point I need to stress. For Paul, self-reliance was not merely a personal life-

style preference but part of being a Christian. He writes,

I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:33-35)

Paul's teachings are consistent with the rest of the Bible. When sin first entered, God reminded Adam and Eve that because the ground was cursed, they were going to have to work

hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty" (Prov 14:23). He repeated the same counsel in other passages using different examples. "A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest—and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man" (Prov 6:10, 11; 24:33, 34). Solomon taught that "the lazy man does not roast his game, but the diligent man prizes his possessions" (Prov 12:27).

Getting things free was not encouraged in the Bible. Even when a young man wanted to marry, he was required to prove that he was hard working and

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and sweat through painful toil to live. "By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return" (Gen 3:17-19). Before eating, before enjoying any lifestyle, before enjoying comfort, before enjoying anything there is hard work!

#### *Hard Work*

Hard work as a concept and lifestyle is strongly promoted by Scripture. Solomon, the wise servant of God, wrote and said, "All

could keep his wife and the family. When Jacob negotiated marriage with Laban he said, "I'll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter Rachel" (Gen 29:18). Embedded in the fourth commandment was the concept of working. "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work" (Exod 20:8-9).

#### **Biblical Examples**

Since the Fall, God's people have followed God's advice to



work hard with the soil, to work hard to earn a living, and God has blessed the work of their hands. The Bible records that God placed Adam and his family in the garden to work. “Now Abel kept the flocks and Cain worked the soil” (Gen 4:2). Noah, “A man of the soil” started a garden as soon as he came out of the ark (Gen 9:20). God’s people in the Old Testament based their economy on animal raising or tilling the soil. It is said of Isaac and the use of the soil, that “Isaac planted crops in that land and the same year reaped a hundred-fold, because the Lord blessed

The examples given above are not intended to make either agriculture or animal husbandry the only occupations that God’s people are to have, but they serve as examples of how God’s people made use of the natural gifts of God, the soil and nature, to establish a livelihood. These people worked and God blessed their labor and they did not depend on someone to provide for their needs. Others had other trades, but all the same, those trades provided their means of living. Paul was a tent maker (Acts 18:3) and Lydia was a dealer in purple cloth (Acts 16:14). The disciples

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him” (Gen 26:12). And it is said of Uzziah that “he had people working his fields and vineyards in the hills and in the fertile lands, for he loved the soil” (2 Chr 26:10). The keeping and raising of animals was so important in the Hebrew economy that when the family of Jacob went into Egypt they asked for fertile land. When Pharaoh asked the sons of Jacob about their occupation, they answered, “Your servants have tended livestock from our boyhood on, just as our fathers did” (Gen 46:34). Even women were shepherdesses (Gen 29:9).

were fishermen (Mark 1:6). The point really is not the specific occupation but that they had an occupation or trade by which they earned their living, thereby avoiding being a burden to others.

### **God’s Promises**

A careful study of the promises of God reveals that God puts a blessing on his peoples’ labor and not on their idleness. While the nature of blessings is different in different areas of life, here is how God promised he would bless his children if they had a relationship of loyalty with him.

If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God: You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country. The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock—the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. Your basket and your kneading trough will be blessed. You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out. The Lord will open the heavens, the storehouse of his bounty, to send rain on your land in season and to bless all the work of your hands. You will lend to many nations but will borrow from none. The Lord will make you the head, not the tail. If you pay attention to the commands of the Lord your God that I give you this day and carefully follow them, you will always be at the top, never at the bottom. (Deut 28:1-6, 12, 13)

Before I conclude this section, I do not want to leave the impression that I am saying that Africans are not hard workers. Many of them are. What I am saying is that all people should approach life with this attitude. By working hard, sometimes very hard, sometimes day and night, one is to provide the needs of life. This attitude will lead people not to look to other people to meet their needs, but rather to look to self as the supplier of one's needs. Africans and all of God's people need to adopt and internalize this attitude. Begging is not of God's order for his children.

### **Reasons to Enhance Stewardship Education**

The current emphasis in stewardship education that only appeals to members to be faithful in returning tithe and offerings is not adequate in dealing with the subject of self-reliance in Africa. For people to give or support God's work materially they must have wealth or something to give. The Church, either through the Department of Stewardship or some other entity, should therefore expand their teachings to include empowering believers with knowledge and means to work hard and make money.

When I once shared the points above, a person asked me, "Well what do those people eat if they claim they do not have money?" The answer is that they eat food and mainly it is the kind of food that is not transferable to cash. Take for an example a person who grows some vegetables and cassava for consumption. Subsistence farmers often do not produce enough to sell. They are living from hand to mouth. I have never forgotten what my mother told me in a letter one day in her early days as an Adventist. "Pastor, the church has given us a goal for tithe from each member. My goal is \$20 for this year. Would you please send that money as I do not want to be the only one not to pay." My mother was faithful to the church, but she could not give faithfully to the church since the church needed money, of which she had none.



You can only give what you have. This point was made very vivid to me when I was in Ukraine conducting a seminar on money management. The seminar was advertized and on the first day a lot of people turned up. The hall was packed with standing room only. After I made my first two presentations teaching the people how to best manage money, one man raised his hand and said something I will never forget. "Sir, before you can teach us how to manage money can you please first teach us where to find this money that we will be managing." Because

the church will not become financially independent.

As a result of the two points I have made above, I would like to suggest that the church should expand its teachings to its members by starting to teach church members how to make money. If the church expects to receive financial support from its members, and such support can only come if people have the means, the church then should extend its work to not only helping people be faithful but also teaching people to know how to work hard and make money.

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I was not prepared to do that, by mid-day I had lost half of the people because very few of them were interested in learning about managing money they did not have. It is not enough, especially at this time, for the church to continue appealing to people to be faithful in returning tithes and offerings. It is said that over 80 percent of the believers in Africa are women and young people below age twenty-five. Most from these two groups do not have jobs and nor do they make money. They can be very faithful, but if they do not have money, they will not give it and

### **The Impact of Aid**

In order to understand what those who have spent time to study and write about the issues of poverty alleviation and aid to Africa say, I recently reviewed three books by Nicolas Van de Walle and Nicole Ball, by Robert Calderisi, and by William Easterly.

There are many things that these authors have said but three points caught my attention.

1. Pouring aid into Africa has not helped Africa to develop. Data show that in spite of over 2.3 trillion dollars that has gone as aid to Africa in the past 60

years, Africa has not become economically better off than it was in the past (Easterly 2006:11). “Around the world, successful countries are those that have chosen the right policies for their own reasons and seen foreign aid as a complement to their own efforts rather than as a bribe for undertaking difficult reforms” (Easterly 2006:7).

2. It will take Africans themselves to develop and solve the problems of Africa. Foreign aid will not solve the poverty or joblessness in Africa. Big plans to change the poverty situation in Africa that come from foreign donors have failed to develop Africa.

3. Research has shown that the best form of aid is that which helps individual people. “The aim should be to make individuals better off, not to transform governments or societies. The outside world cannot fix the governments in Africa, but they can choose to empower individual people who in turn can be self-reliant” (Easterly 2006:368).

### **Seven Suggestions for the Future**

Following are seven suggestions to stimulate the mind and to put something on the table:

1. Expand the teachings of stewardship to include not only teaching people to give faithfully, but helping people know how to start their own businesses so that they can make money. Where possible, employ an extra person to work in the steward-

ship department whose responsibility will be to teach church members how to start businesses and make money.

2. Teach and implement the Bible command of 2 Thess 3:10, “If a man will not work, he shall not eat.” Africans should learn to say “No” to gifts that perpetuate a begging and dependent mentality or alternatively reduce or eradicate a begging mentality. Begging does not go well with self-reliance. And if “begging is done” let it be begging for a hook instead of a fish.

3. Change the current emphasis that stresses the number of people baptized to emphasize the quality of people that are being baptized. Many who are baptized do not even know what being an Adventist or even a Christian means. Emphasize the preparation of people coming into the church by teaching them and nurturing them into true disciples rather than hurrying them into baptism.

4. Implement sound principles of internal control, such as accountability, transparency, etc. This may call for employing local church auditors and pursuing people who defraud the church with legal action.

5. Start creating a culture that encourages people to express their support for God’s work by including support of that work in their written wills.

6. Africans will continue to immigrate to Western countries and many of them may not return to Africa. Since there is

little we can do about that, let us find a way to involve those Africans living outside of Africa in solving the problems of Africa. This would include, but would not be limited to getting them involved in training and human development, the investing of their resources in Africa, and their involvement in the financial support in building Africa. "Until the gifted and enterprising people can be attracted to return, most of the world's peace-making efforts on the continent, and certainly most of its aid, will have

ventist Church in Africa will not only be able to support the work of God on the continent without depending on foreign aid, but will be able to go a step further and share their resources with other parts of the world for the spreading of the gospel of salvation. This will call for doing things differently. Someone defined madness as "doing the same things over and over again, but expecting new results." Africa should try something new that they have not tried before and then see if it will not bear fruit.

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little effect" (Calderisi 2006:5). Aid cannot end poverty. Only homegrown development based on the dynamism of individuals and firms in free markets can end poverty.

7. Start to have continent-wide meetings in Africa where the issues of concern for Africa are discussed and solutions sought.

### **Optimistic View**

Many things may collapse in Africa, and yet one thing that has not yet collapsed is the African spirit of hope. I am optimistic about the future of Africa. Rightly guided, the members of the Ad-

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