

# Bazarra, Dennis K.

## (1916–1999)

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### MOSES LUUTU GOLOLA

Moses Luutu Golola, Ph.D. (Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda), is a retired educator, having served as deputy secretary of Inter-University Council for East Africa, deputy director of National Council for Higher Education, Uganda, and vice chancellor of Bugema University. Prior to that, Golola served as dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Eastern Africa, Baraton, Kenya. He is married to Irene and they have four grown up children.

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Dennis K. Bazarra, Adventist evangelist and administrator, was the first Ugandan to take the mantle of leadership as president of the Uganda Mission Field of Seventh-day Adventists in Uganda (1963) and was later to become the first African to be president of the East African Union, based in Nairobi, Kenya.<sup>1</sup>



Dennis K. Bazarra

From Bugema University photo gallery.

## Early Life

The fourth of five children, Dennis K. Bazarra was born on September 16, 1916, in a small village known as Nkenda, which lay on the border between Bunyoro and Toro Kingdoms of Western Uganda, now Kibale District. He was a Mutoro by tribe. He was born eleven years before the arrival of the first SDA missionaries in Uganda in 1927 to plant the seeds for the Adventist church. His father was an itinerant trader who travelled long distances and belonged to a breakaway sect from the Anglican Church known as “Malakites,” which taught, among other things, the importance of the seventh-day Sabbath. However, his father was a nominal Christian and did little to teach his children about Christianity.

At the age of 10, Bazarra received some of the basics of Christianity when he attended a small mission school near his home, where he learned to read, to write, and to count. When he came of age, he found an employment with the Ministry of Works in the Roads Department. Here he worked his way through the ranks to serving as a Road Supervisor. While he worked with the Works Department, he enlisted in the Army—the East African Forces—and participated in World War II.<sup>2</sup>

## Marriage and Conversion to Adventism

Bazarra married Peresika in May 1938. A year after their traditional marriage, they were privileged to attend a series of evangelistic meetings that were conducted by a Danish missionary, Pastor E. W. Pedersen, who was a teacher at Nchwanga Mission Training School. Bazarra and Peresika yielded to the prompting of the Holy Spirit and were baptized in the Seventh-day Adventist church in 1939. Three years down the Christian road, the Bazarra's sought to solemnize their marriage through the church rights of holy matrimony, and so were wedded in church in June 1942.<sup>3</sup>

## Education

Bazarra had an ambition to join the ministry but realized that he had very little education. He decided in 1944, at the age of 28, to attend Nchwanga S.D.A Primary School (or Elementary School) which he completed in 1946 and became a teacher at lower grades under the principalship of Mr. G. J. Coetzee, who hailed from South Africa.

## Ministerial Training and Service

In 1948, he attended an English medium ministerial training class at Nchwanga under the leadership of a British missionary, Conrad Hyde. His class had a total of 12 students, of whom 4 were Ugandans, 6 Kenyans, and 2 Tanzanians. He completed the course in 1950 and was posted at Kazingo at the foot of the Rwenzori Mountains to serve as a district leader. He was ordained on July 4, 1953, as a Minister of the Gospel in the Seventh-day Adventist Church at Katikamu, 30 miles to the north of Kampala (Uganda's capital city). He was a keen evangelist and personally led a number of evangelistic campaigns in the then Rwenzori Mission territory. In 1956, Bazarra participated in the Harvest Ingathering Campaign in Fort-Portal, his hometown. He visited the King of Toro, who gave his offering in kind—a piece of land—to the church in Fort-Portal. He led out in the first evangelistic effort in Hoima in 1963,<sup>4</sup> and subsequently in Masindi, Masaka,<sup>4</sup> and in other parts of Uganda Field.

In 1957, he accepted the call to serve as an instructor of the Ministerial Course at Bugema Missionary College. In that year his first child John was born, to be followed by his daughter Ruth two years later.

In 1960, he was elected vice-president of Uganda Mission Field. While in this office, he took a study leave of one year to pursue a course in leadership at Solusi College (now University) in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) in 1961. Bazarra found this course very useful because it gave him a whole new perspective on the church, the world, and his own life. He served in this office until 1962, at the end of which he was elected president of Uganda Mission Field, an office he held until the end of 1969.

During Bazarra's tenure as president of the Uganda Mission Field, Uganda as a nation transitioned from the British colonial rule to self-governance, referred to as Independence, in 1962. The years that followed this independence were characterized with turbulence in the entire country. However, Bazarra, as the spiritual

leader of the Adventist Church, remained steady and steered the church with great care and astute diplomacy through the years of instability.

In April 1969, he received a call to become the administrative secretary of the East African Union based in Nairobi, Kenya. However, after a short time in the office, he received a call in January 1970, to serve as the field and stewardship director for the Afro-Mid East Division, which was based in Beirut, Lebanon.<sup>5</sup>

## Union President (1973-1986)

In 1973, Bazarra became the first African president of the East African Union, which included territories of Uganda and Kenya<sup>6</sup>. Prior to his appointment, leadership of the church at that level had been held by expatriate missionaries from Europe or U.S.A. He held this office until he retired to his homeland in 1986. In retirement he was a very useful advisor to the pastors and leaders of the SDA Church in Uganda and was very instrumental in the formation of Uganda Union, which was inaugurated in 1987.

He died in Kampala on August 28, 1999, at the age of 84, and was buried at Kireka Hill (Home of the Central Uganda Conference).

Bazarra displayed devotion to biblical principles not only in his ordinary living, but also in his leadership. He was an effective communicator in English and many African languages including his own, Rutoro. He was also a strong believer in Christian education and played a key role in the establishment of a Seventh-day Adventist Church-sponsored University of Eastern Africa, Baraton, Kenya, in the early 1980s.

Bazarra related with ease with everyday people as well as with dignitaries. His philosophy on leadership is best captured in his own words when he said:

God did not put me into church leadership because of my abilities, but because He wanted to be sure that He alone could receive the credit for all the wonderful things He desired to do for His people during that time. No man, no school, no advanced culture or civilization must receive the glory for the work He attempted to accomplish.<sup>7</sup>

## Contributions

He added value to the leadership of the Church in Uganda, Lebanon, and in East Africa. During his leadership, the church experienced growth in membership and infrastructure.

He played a key role in securing over 300 acres of land and other property from the Kenya government for the founding of the University of Eastern Africa, Baraton, located at Kapsabet, 50 km from Eldoret, Kenya.

Bazarra, D K. Unpublished Autobiography. A copy in the author's private collection.

Pifer, R. D. "Monument in Rwenzori." *Trans-Africa Division Outlook*, March 15, 1965.

*Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*. Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1971, 1973/4.

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## NOTES

1. Denis K. Bazzara, unpublished autobiography, a copy in the author's private collection.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. R. D. Pifer, "Monument in Rwenzori," *Trans-Africa Division Outlook*, March 15, 1965, 10.
5. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1971).
6. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, 1973/4.
7. Denis K. Bazzara, unpublished autobiography, 46.

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