

## A Cultural &amp; Historical Tour of Ghana - Part 4 - Children

Dear Friends,

This is part 4 of the ongoing series that I began in April and May, which were both about my hometown, in Ghana. This article continues to provide more information about the traditions and cultural practices of my people (the Akans of Ghana). This will touch on three topics, all related to children in our society. This is a brief overview of the structure of parental responsibility.

### Family Traditions: Parenting and Children

The natural expectation of getting married is making a family. It is in our society, the means of perpetuating the *Clan*, (known in our circumstances as *Ebusua*). This is composed of all kinds and types of unique homes and families. In the *Akan ethnic* group in Ghana, we have seven groups. In the ethnic traditions, making a family *is not a private matter!* Unlike many people in the western world (America, Europe, etc.), friends and family will want to know why there is *no child* after the husband & wife have been married for a couple of years. They will either approach the couple directly or find out from the immediate family members 'why' there is no child, yet.

Often, an American, or European couple will not be asked why they have not born a child, because it is not uncommon in their culture to be without a child. But in our Ghanaian society, it is an *oddiy for a couple not to have a child*. For us it is as if the family line is being destroyed, and the generations become extinct if no child is born to the couple - and this is severely objectionable.

Making of children and parenting are mutually related. In some very exclusive societies a couple without any child (children), is refused recognition in family matters. It is known that some become so stigmatized that they end up taking their own lives. Horrible, even in the extreme cases, so unacceptable, but in the matter of perpetuity, the family would show no sympathy nor understanding why a couple doesn't have a child. The whole community will come together to assist the family to find a cure, so the couple may bear a child. In some situations, not having a child may be a good enough reason to dissolve a marriage.

### Family Traditions: Children with Extended Family

In the traditional Akan family, the children of any couple belong to the entire family. This therefore raises the responsibility of the upbringing of the child (children) to the level of total involvement of the whole family. Of course, the mother and father are the first and natural respondents, but the entire society considers itself as partners in raising the child to be part of the society at large. The mother and father of the child have to endeavor to bring up the child to be a part of the society, such that the child accepts his/her place in the society as belonging to the society.

The second respondents, in the bringing up of the child as a socially sensitive and responsible individual, are the uncles and aunties. Where the grandparents are well resourced, they are expected to be part of the upbringing of the child. Indeed, the child will sometimes spend some days, during school holidays, with uncles, aunties, and the grandparents. In many cases, the child will go to the uncle more than any other kin. In the traditional system, the uncle has the direct responsibility to take over the upbringing of the nephew/niece, especially in situations where the child becomes orphaned. In a sense, the child does not *belong to the biological parents* alone but to the family - and it is the responsibility of the parents and uncles and aunties, and grandparents, to nurture the child. In a sense of the word, our family *system* is described as *extended*.

### Family Traditions: Children in the Society

Outside of the *extended family*, the child is regarded as the product of the society, because the parents and extended family are members of the nucleus society. It is the belief of the society that every member is the image of the society and therefore all have to participate in preserving the cohesiveness of the society for the good of all. *No individual is allowed to conduct his or her life in a way that is detrimental to the society in general, by everyone observing and practicing the institutions of the society.* It is normal for the elders of the society to call the parents, or where it becomes necessary, the uncle, aunty, grandparent of the child to demand an explanation to why the child appears to be anti-society. Where that happens, it is assumed that these persons have failed in their responsibility in training the child, whose behavior is tarnishing the image of the entire society.

Blessings, Pastor Ben Wilson