

Jesus Christ vs. the Society

Dear Friends,

I bring you greetings from Akrampa and from my family. We want to thank you for your continued support of the work committed to our hands, that is, continuing the effort to make Christ known and received by the people as their Lord and Savior. The objective of this effort has not changed even though we have been in the same place for over 20 years. Our vision (bringing the salvation message to a people who need to know of the saving love of the Lord Jesus Christ) and mission (helping them to see their lives holistically) to this community are still relevant because of the impact **WE** continue to make on the ground (among the people and nearby communities). In my February letter we talked about **Jesus Christ vs. the god of mud & clay - the gods of their ancestors**. If you missed last month's letter, or any of my letters, please go to the FLC website. I am thankful for the opportunity to remind you that all of my letters/articles are posted on the website, so you can catch up at anytime. www.firstlutheranlorain.org then Outreach > Ghana > Ghana Archive.

In this article I am going to talk mostly about the past. Times have changed, and the village of Akrampa has changed over the years. I'm going to tell you about the society that Akrampa is part of now, but mainly about the role that they played before the advent of our work among them.

I have had the opportunity to talk about Akrampa being an important part of the traditional set up of the chieftaincy in the area, previously serving as the executioners for the stool of the chieftaincy, for which reason they were stigmatized and viewed with skepticism. They were not trusted in relationships and some level of uncertainty existed about their reliability and dependability socially. Society at large shunned their company, causing them to go without many amenities, like for instance, a school and clean drinking water. (Things which we have provided since we began our ministry in Akrampa.) The location of the village, almost remote from the main towns and close to a protected forest, was more physical evidence that they were ostracized and stigmatized.

The people of Akrampa, like most Ghanaian families and communities, and for that matter, most Africans, are very much attached to the ancestors, the forebears of their culture and traditions. Such things are passed on and are expected to remain in the community and among the families that identify themselves with a totem. The totem is the symbol of the family and differs from clan to clan, family to family. The people of any totem are expected to live according to the beliefs and practices handed down by the ancestors, by the forebears.

Akrampa is no exception to this, hence their devotion to the god made of mud & clay that stands at the entrance of the village. It was our entrance into their community and their resultant reception and acceptance of Christ that began to change them. I wish to restate that our work has tremendously changed their outlook from being devotees of a clay-made figure to acknowledging and serving the true God - Jesus, their Creator.

In the past society shunned them. This caused them to avoid people most of the time, unless it had to do with things concerning their special role as executioners of the chief. Some of the

villagers who had children that moved out to be with family members in the bigger towns like Accra and Kumasi, or other big towns, were given the opportunity to attend school there. But rarely would a child of Akrampa attend school in the chief town in which the paramount chief lives. Their houses were evidences of the backwardness of life they lived, compared with the houses in the nearby towns. The chief town had pipe born water, school, electric power and other basic amenities that towns have, but not Akrampa. It is this that attracted FLC and myself to go there: to bring the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to them, to help them come out of their reclusive way of life, and prepare the children of school-going age to attend school and be educated. Then we were able to bring water and a school to them!

As a village that was set apart to provide the unfortunate service of executioners to the chief, the people around them were unhappy with them. It must be explained that they didn't just kill anybody at the command of the chief. Those who were killed (in those long-ago days) were the people who had been proven guilty by a native court of law. Some of these people were die-hard malefactors, while others were people who had allegedly killed or murdered fellow citizens. Still others were sometimes mistakenly judged and condemned to be killed. Some of those people happened to be strangers. Akrampa is no longer a village of executioners. Although their history is dark, we pray to be able to continue to bring them into the light and life of Jesus Christ.

The chief who was alive at the time when the mission work started is no longer there and a younger nephew of his reigns in his stead. The chieftaincy at Akrampa, and indeed the people called Akans, practice a succession plan that is called matrilineal. It works out this way: the mother's child is the one who may inherit the brother of the child's mother, that is, the uncle, insofar as inheritance and succession is concerned. In other words, when a chief dies, he is succeeded by his sister's son and not his own son. Then the mother becomes the queen mother. In the instance where there is already a queen mother, this queen mother is the one with the sole right to name a successor to the king/chief. The current chief is the fourth that has succeeded the one during whose reign the mission was started.

Blessings, Pastor Ben