

The "Traditional" Religion of Akrampa -

Dear Friends,

In this article I'd like to help you see the reality of the challenges we have had to face over the years doing ministry among the people of Akrampa. Please understand that we didn't start in a vacuum or gray area, if you might describe it as such. The African's world view of religion and worship is that there has always existed a form of religion, except that it is different from Christianity - the white man's religion - as it was called, before the missionaries brought the Christian religion as part of the trading adventures and colonization agenda.

Our forebears were religious only they didn't know the Christian God we worship, because they were ignorant about Him. This is reminiscent of what Paul encountered in Athens (Acts 17: 16-28), where the people worshipped so many 'gods' (idols) and even had an altar that had the inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN. Paul proceeded to share the Gospel with them and many were curious to learn more.

The African, and for that matter, the Ghanaian, is "*notoriously religious and religion permeates into all the departments of life so that it is not easy or possible to isolate it*". This is the thesis of a popular Kenyan, an African Christian Philosopher, and endorsed by all who study African religions. This universally accepted view has evolved the maxim that, in the African context, "no man is an island unto himself; what affects one affects all, and each is his brother's keeper". That is the basis for my last article (September) on 'twins', in the framework of the African religious context. The question then is, what is the form of African religion that the people of Akrampa have practiced over the years?

When we began our mission in Akrampa Christianity was not known or practiced. The religion of the people in Akrampa at that time could be defined as a system that is based on their understanding of morality. The people understood morality as:

"The conduct, values and beliefs generally held to be right, and conduct, values and beliefs generally held to be wrong among a particular people, society, or community."

This religion is commonly referred to as 'traditional religion' and has suffered from all types of description by various writers over the years. It has been described variously as ancestor worship, animism, paganism, fetishism, and polytheism, among others, all of which are grossly inadequate. This is because the religion is a part of the rich heritage that has been passed on from generations past to their children. It is a heritage that comes as a comprehensive package encompassing the historical, cultural and religious heritage of the entire African people of which the Efutus and Awutus are a part.

In the complex religious background of Akrampa we have, by the grace of God, brought the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, to set them free so they also can move and have their being in Christ Jesus (Acts 17:28). In this age of internet information, you can quickly 'Google' the background information into what **animism, paganism, fetishism and polytheism** mean. Even a quick browse through that information will bring understanding and appreciation of the efforts that have gone into bringing the Gospel to Akrampa and what has taken place since.

In my September article on **twins**, I mentioned the religious connection of that belief, and what pertained as their value-based belief system. The **twins festival** is only one of the festivals in their religious cycle. Twins who submit themselves to this ritual put themselves in a situation that is supposed to protect them from ultimate harassment from the spirit by which they believe they were conceived and

born. Until the purification rites are done for them they cannot be deemed as fully belonging in the community. Their beliefs existed before the foreign religions came, therefore the term 'traditional' is used to make a contrast between this religion and the others, like Christianity, etc.

Theirs is such a complex system such that all of the activities/festivals, are part of the entire religious fabric of the society. The celebrations take about six months - half of each year - in monthly succession, leaving the remaining months free until the cycle is repeated. The religious cycle starts in April and ends in September, each year. The festivities are observed and are common heritage. The activities/festivals that take place involve the 'priests' and 'priestesses' who perform rituals. The activities/festivals, initiate a cycle of ceremonies that lead to the celebration and observance of the main festival, the Deer Hunt and beyond, till it ends with the washing of the chief idol.

The people of Akrampa have religious values that are expressive of the way and means they carry out the activities, including the festivals. For them the celebrations are intrinsic to their faith and practices. I have in my September article about the twins indicated that the rite is essentially, religious, that, for most Efutus (people of Akrampa) religion is very much expressed in the celebrations system and the related activities that go on during the year. They believe that all those activities, for them are religious and meaningful to their ethnic integrity and coherence.

In the activities that go on during the year the people spend money, or wealth on it. The food that is prepared, the sacrifices and the elaborate ceremonies cost money and time. The rituals that go on, during the celebrations, include remembering the dead with food, pouring of libation and the scarifying that the twins endure, coupled with the sacrifices, can be quite expensive. The food that is shared around during the memorials (remembering the dead) is quite plenty and requires a lot of resources whose procuring cost money. One would imagine that in the reality of their poverty ridden circumstances, they will be circumspect in spending their scarce resources on idol worship. It is this attitude that causes the viciousness of their dire situation.

The people of Akrampa in earlier years were willing to sacrifice humans for the 'god'. Indeed, those who offered themselves to be sacrificed thought nothing of themselves except that they are dying at the wish of the 'god' and for the community. The readiness to die for the 'god' (religion) is one reason that made them consider the religion valuable, relevant and of essence. It was always their desire to sacrifice the best for their religion.

As we preached the love of our Lord God, and the Christ who died for them, they realized that they were becoming citizens of heaven by faith in Christ Jesus, but also and more importantly, in contrast, the God of Christianity is a better alternative to their blood-thirsty idol. Considering all this, we can say with humility that the Gospel of the Lord Jesus has made a huge turnaround in their lives, most especially in the continuing generation of their children and grandchildren.

Our work in Akrampa is not done. There is still much to be done to help the people of Akrampa in their journey of faith. We pray each day to bring them one step closer in their personal relationship and walk with Jesus. We are also working hard to help them in their daily life. Education, food, and ways to be self-sustaining are still very vital. Please keep the people of Akrampa in your prayers.

Blessings, Pastor Ben