

“We do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as bondservants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor. 4:5)

“You also joining in helping us through your prayers” (2 Cor. 1:11)

West African Mission Update

March 2006

Steve & Patricia Phillips

Dear Brethren,

Let me introduce you to Suleman Kamara. He is a young boy of the Temene tribe who is staying in Rotaprr [pronounced row-che-poo], in the provinces of Sierra Leone.

He thinks he is about 15 years old, but is unsure, as he has never met his father. He has not known his father because his mother does not know which of her lovers might have fathered him. Kamara was chosen as a surname because he liked the sound of it.

When he was a very small child, his mother visited her sister in the village with Suleman. “Oh,” she exclaimed, “I need to go to the local street market to buy some things. Can you watch Suleman for me until I return?” “Of course,” the sister agreed. His mother disappeared, never to be seen again.

What was to be done with the child? Won’t the auntie care for him and bring him up as her own? Far from it. She drove him out of her house to find his way as best he could.

Eventually he found a place to lay his head in a mud walled, grass thatched hut where an old widowed grandma stayed. In exchange for his fetching water, gathering firewood, and other chores, he was allowed to stay there. Neither had, nor have, any tangible means of support. They manage to eke out a meager existence by cultivating a small plot of cassava and by dependence upon others who might be willing from time to time to give them some foodstuffs.

But I must interrupt Suleman’s story as a not infrequent palaver has erupted outside the round mud hut across from us. The two wives of their shared Muslim husband are shouting at each other, loud enough for the rest of the village to hear. Clad in nothing but a piece of cloth loosely gathered around the waist, bitterness and rage spewed forth in multiplied abuses as is so common in polygamous homes.

Eventually the annoyed husband intervened by out-shouting the two and shaming them into silence in his hot displeasure. Sullen and stone-faced, the

embittered rivals stared off into the bush in opposite directions. The immediate storm was quelled, but the seething jealousy and unrest continued to boil under the surface until the repressed steam would vent itself once again in the not-too-distant future.

Grateful flies converged and sucked eagerly on the open sore of Suleman's leg. He was unconcerned. Consciousness about disease and preventative hygiene is at a minimal level of understanding in a land where medical facilities are so few and far between as to make them practically non-existent. There is no pharmacy or dispensary in Rotaprr, and even if there were, the knowledge of proper application and treatment is decidedly lacking.

Tears of sorrow coursed down his cheeks as he sobbed out the saga of his early days. He evinced both shame and bewilderment in recounting the plight of his life up until the present. He was asked, "Suleman, are you a Muslim or a Christian?"

Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang! The discarded piece of iron rod rang out its unmelodious announcement as it struck the rusty tire rim salvaged for that purpose. Students were being summoned to assemble at the school grounds.

The government had erected a few decent classrooms, nicely painted and impressive to the eye from the main road as one passes by to Port Loko. But that is only how it appears from a distance.

Students began to drift in, barefoot and sporting tattered attempts at uniforms. They milled about in small groups on the dusty field in the rising heat of the day. Today, there would be class.

The one teacher for the entire primary grades once again undertook the futile effort of instructing all levels at once. His salary? \$16.66 per month [83 cents per day] – that is, when he is paid, which is not always. There are no books. Sometimes classes don't hold as this lone instructor has to engage in other means of livelihood as well in order to survive.

The drifting would-be scholars sauntered lazily over, to gaze at the novelty of a white man and his power woodworking tools. The whining roar and flying dust of the Skilsaw captured their attention for some time until they lost interest and faded into the savanna grass.

"I'm a Muslim and a Christian," Suleman confidently replied. "Why are you a Muslim?" "Because that's what I met my forefathers practicing." "But why then do you say that you are also a Christian?" "Because we do sing some choruses once and awhile when I go to school." The original school was established many years ago by Roman Catholics, but has long since lost any connection with them and their religion. Only this vestige remains.

Neither Islam nor Christianity is understood by the multitudes inhabiting the provinces. They are as ignorant of the Qur'an as they are of the Bible. All that they know of religion is outward ceremonies that they have observed by tradition.

The primary motivations for continuing in Islamic practices for some 70% of Sierra Leoneans are [1] the fear of being cast out to fend for oneself by family and village residents and [2] the extreme dread of having no one to properly bury one after death.

The Muslims promise to provide a proper burial upon death for any who are "in the faith." They threaten any who would consider departing from Islam with the horrific prospect of having no decent burial should they die a non-Muslim. The typical African believes that if burial is not performed according to accepted tradition, he may be doomed to restlessly rove about as a haunting spirit and never reach the expected transition to glory. It is a real fear that imprisons many in a seemingly inescapable bondage.

"Suleman, singing a song now and then does not make you a Christian. Let me tell you what a Christian truly is." And so, brother Williams, one of the young men I have been teaching and discipling, explained in his native Temene tongue the old, old story; ever new, ever the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Sierra Leonean.

That day, Suleman heard for the first time of the love of God in Christ Jesus the Lord, who loved us and gave Himself for us, to redeem us from all iniquity and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.

We expect to see Suleman again soon; we are moving to Rotaprr by the end of April in the will of the Lord.

Do pray that there might be a wide door for effective service and that, as with Lydia, the Lord might be pleased to open hearts to respond to the things that are spoken.

**With all our love,
Steve and Patti Phillips**

West African Book Project

Christian books with solid biblical teaching are extremely rare and hard to come by in West Africa. Many of the best works are out of print.

We are therefore requesting of you brethren, that if you have copies that you would be willing to sell or donate to contribute to the building up of the disciples here, we would be most interested.

Commentaries, expositional, and devotional works by the following authors in particular are what we are hoping to obtain.

- • C.A. Coates
- • H.A. Ironside
- • H.C.G. Moule
- • A.B. Simpson
- • William Erdman
- • Samuel Ridout
- • J.G. Bellet
- • F.W. Grant
- • F.B. Meyer
- • G. Campbell Morgan
- • and W.E. Vine.

If you would like to participate, you may contact Bob Haines, who will coordinate all arrangements. His address is:

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With many thanks,
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