

“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

June 2006

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Dear Brethren,

Only infrequently do we reflect upon the wondrous legacy transmitted to us via the Reformation of the sixteenth century. One such inestimable treasure is literacy, a blessing often taken for granted.

Neither Reformation nor gospel work can thrive in ignorance. The dismal bondage of humanity’s mind during the Middle Ages and across the darkness of paganism can only come to an end through the enlightenment of Scriptures. The Lord wants the common man to know the truth that he might be set free.

The Reformation conquered kingdoms mounted upon the chariot of Gutenberg’s wonderful printing press, whose initial production was 200 copies of the Word of God. Printing and literature in the hands of the literate cannot be underestimated in the progress of the kingdom of heaven.

God is literate. He not only speaks, He writes. Paul commands that his letters be read to all the brethren (I Thess. 5:27; Col. 4:16). Common men are commanded to read and reason from the written Word of God for themselves (Isa. 34:16); even children are to gain their doctrine from the Scriptures directly (2 Tim. 3:15).

When asked, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?,” Jesus replied, “What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?” (Lk.10:25,26). A thrice repeated “It is written” (Mt.4:4,6,10) effectively silenced the oral assaults of the devil against the Son of God.

Literacy transports a man beyond the narrow circle of his immediate environment and the smallness of his own thoughts. Vast unimagined vistas and concepts heretofore never contemplated thus make their debut.

By writing, the living thought is captured as a word and imprisoned on paper while continuing to live therein. Thus the printed page provides an unchanging reference point for repeated reflection. By it, thoughts and convictions can span generations. Thereby, waywardness can be arrested by bringing original declarations into present circumstances (Isa. 30:8).

When introduced to an illiterate oral society, writing awakens at once the horrifying recognition that the entire past history and record of that people has been lost through lack of literature. He discovers that there is no past treasure of written

wisdom, only the vagary of oral tradition which can so easily be twisted to meet the demands of the moment in the mouth of he who speaks.

Promises, being merely verbal and not written, can conveniently be modified by the authoritative and crafty. Devious twists of falsehood spring from the unwritten page. Expediency and deception dictate when definite data is unrecorded.

And so it is that tradition fastens its iron grip on whole societies. It is all that they have known for generations. Then when the white man comes with his magical book of power (for so the Bible is perceived by many), cultures clash, suspicions are aroused, and confusion clouds the now awakened conscience.

It is so where we are, here in Rotappr. Literacy in this area is somewhere around 10%. A thin veneer of Islam coats the animistic substrate to which it adheres. Few infants and children do not wear talismans as protective charms against evil. In times past, villagers would not pass by the very site where our house now stands for fear of the bush devil that supposedly inhabits the place.

Strangers are observed minutely to discern their true character and intents. We will be under close scrutiny for a long time to come.

Previous contacts with whites have been with foreign companies exploiting the bauxite in the area and long, long ago with Roman Catholics who built some schools. They do not recall white men actually coming to live among them, much less ones who eat their food and drink their water.

They will gradually know who we are and why we are here. The leading men and women of the village along with the elders, headman, chief imam, and sectional chief all heard of the Lord Jesus Christ when they came to officially welcome us to the area.

The foremost hunter, from whom we purchased a freshly killed bush rat (a marmot-like rodent, about 3kg), also heard in his own tongue the story of the sower, to which he replied, "This is a good story. I will think about it and come again to hear more." Such men employ charms, enchantments, and spiritual powers in their hunting exploits.

Between eight and 20 children hear the glorious gospel two to three times a week from Patti as she tutors them in English and math here at the house. Twenty-five or more gathered under the mango trees in the center of the village and listened attentively to the old, old story of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Many questions followed and they themselves will mobilize the entire village to another session this coming week.

Eight men reason with us from the Scriptures for some two hours weekly, considering the nature of the new birth and true Christianity. Questions abound and the Word sheds its blessed light.

Kindness in treating medical problems preaches its own message. Cups of rice and cooking oil along with some peppers and vegetables, minister to those who've not

eaten for a whole day. Embracing black skin as if it were your own conveys love indiscriminately, which shines back in grateful eyes.

And thus the work is begun.

Do continue to pray for us that Christ might be seen, welcomed, and received among these who abide in this land of darkness and the shadow of death.

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

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