

SUCCESS 24 – THE FIRST “BLACK” MISSIONARIES TO GHANA AND THE MOVE THAT TURNED THE BASEL MISSION AROUND

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Life on the Gold Coast, which is modern-day Ghana, was very threatening for foreign missionaries. Four young men who were trained by the Basel missionary society were sent to the danish protectorate of Gold Coast.^[1] These men were supposed to be the future of mission work in Africa. In 1828 on December 17, these four young hopeful missionaries arrived at the Gold Coast. Unfortunately, they caught the climate fever and all died.

Despite this unfortunate situation, three other men signed up to serve their Lord overseas. Of the three, Andreas Riis was the lone surviving missionary in Gold Coast. His friends died due to the wild kill of malaria fever. He was determined to make it as a missionary on the gold coast. His determination was soon attacked by the fever, which he submitted to local treatment and got well.^[2] It is interesting to note that all these missionaries served in the coastal areas, but after a short while, they passed away. Andreas Riis seemed to be able to relate better with the locals. He criticized his mates for not taking the time to understand their new location.^[3] In this article, we will take a look at how the Basel missionaries succeeded in their mission despite the previous failures they had encountered.

Before this work by the Basel missionary society in the Gold Coast, the Moravians attempted to bring the gospel to the Gold Coast. In an article by Daws Mark (2003), Dr. Antwi commented,^[4] that as early as 1735, the Moravians of Herrnhut in Saxony, Germany, brought in an inhabitant of Gold Coast and trained him at the University of Copenhagen but on his return, he could hardly speak his mother tongue. Andreas Riis however was revolutionary; according

to Dr. Amtwi, “He became an African to Africans.”

Andreas Riis decided to move the mission from the coastal area where he only served the Danes to a much healthier region of the country, Akropong. His move was successful even though it was fought for many reasons. Andreas was the people’s man. Like any missionary who thirsts for souls to be won, He did all he could to reach the local people of Akropong. His life and methods have come under heavy criticism, but he was hungry for what he wanted to see, that locals were Christianized. He tried his best to expand the mission but it was not successful. He couldn’t account for even a soul for eight good years on the gold coast. The Basel mission society decided, it was time to close the missionary endeavor. They called Riis to return to Switzerland.^[5]

Upon returning, he made a case for a group of people he felt were better fitted for such a mission field. He requested that the freed slaves in the West Indies be recruited and sent to the Gold Coast, and that, it may work. The mission was convinced that somehow in bringing freed Africans from the West Indies to do the work of evangelizing Gold Coast, they will turn from their ways and accept the gospel.^[6] The Basel Mission was convinced and sent Riis to Jamaica in 1842 to recruit freed slaves who were evangelicals for his Gold Coast mission.

Is it possible that some mission fields are currently not responding because of the kind of people there? Andreas Riis became a local. He ate their food and learned the language. It still didn’t work. But How did the people see him? It is worthy to note that Ri-

^[1] Nana Opare Kwakye, A. (2018). Returning African Christians in Mission to the Gold Coast. *Studies in World Christianity*, 24(1), 25-45.

^[2] Quartey, S. (2007). *Missionary practices on the Gold Coast, 1832-1895*. Cambria Press.

^[3] Quartey, S. (2007). *Missionary practices on the Gold Coast, 1832-1895*. Cambria Press. Page 61

^[4] Daws Mark (2003) contributed by Daniel J. Antwi. A Ghanaian church built by Jamaicans. published: Tuesday | October 7, 2003

^[5] Quartey, S. (2007). *Missionary practices on the Gold Coast, 1832-1895*. Cambria Press.

^[6] Quartey, S. (2007). *Missionary practices on the Gold Coast, 1832-1895*. Cambria Press.

is's idea to include the freed slaves from West Indies was because of a comment made by the then Paramount Chief of Akropong, Nana Addo Dankwa. In his words, he said this: "When God created the world, He made a book for the white man and juju for the black man. But if you could show me some Black man who could read the white man's book, then we would surely follow you"^[7] This became his mission, to bring black men who could not only read what the Chief called 'the white man's book', but black men who also knew God.

When Riis arrived on the island of Jamaica, he met with a Moravian superintendent minister, Rev. Jacob Zorn who had founded a school to train Christian missionaries for Africa.^[8] This is when preparation meets appointment. Riis traveled all through the island to convince people to get on board this mission endeavor. Riis was a man with a zeal for the work of missions. If he couldn't succeed, then he was ready to succeed in another way. What a way to approach the noble work of missions! Success at all costs!

He got 25 people for the mission. 24 of them were Jamaicans, and one was from Antigua. However before they left for the Gold Coast, Rev. Zorn insisted on an agreement to be established between them and the Basel missionary society. It included:

1. The way the Moravians worshipped and disciplined should be accepted and kept.
2. The West Indians were to work willingly and in return, the Basel Mission was to provide for them for the first two years.
3. The Basel Mission was to give them a house and land to work once a week.
4. If any of the West Indians after five years wanted to go back, the Basel Mission was to pay for their passage back home, except for immoral living.^[9]

For the success of every missionary endeavor, the parties involved must take time to consider the nit-

ty-gritty. This helps parties involved in the mission to have an understanding that supports the success of mission work. The Basel mission turned around.

The effect of this move turned the tables for the Basel Mission. To start with, they realized, the Jamaicans could handle the tough climate, unlike the European missionaries. The mission didn't have to worry about how fatal the mission was. Some lives were lost, but it was not as frequent as it had been with the European missionaries.^[10]

Also, the simple presence of Africans who were living as Christians was a witness to the people of Akropong that they could also serve God and live for Him. This bridge was a necessity. The chasm was too great to communicate, but thanks be to God, they saw Africans who were Christians.^[11]

Another effect was in the area of education, which was the main tool the mission used to reach the Gold Coast. Catherine Mulgrave and Alexander Worthy Clerk were the two of the West Indies missionaries who worked specifically in the area of education. The focus of the school was not only to educate in disciplines but also in biblical studies. Catherine Mulgrave was the pioneer of the education of girls. She started three girl's schools. One in Abokobi, Osu, and Odumase.^[12] Education was a great tool in the hand of the Basel Caribbean mission. Many Indigenous people were trained through the schools, who became even better bridges to the indigenes of the Gold Coast.

Another teacher worthy of note is Rose Ann Miller. Daughter of Mary and Joseph Miller, both missionaries who were part of the 24 who turned the mission around. She was only twelve when she began to assist the leader of a girl's school in Akropong. Later on, she moved to Aburi, where she started a girls' boarding school in 1859.^[13]

Imagine the souls that were brought in through

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^[9] Nana Opere Kwakye, A. (2018). Returning African Christians in Mission to the Gold Coast. Studies in World Christianity, 24(1), 25-45.

^[10] Nana Opere Kwakye, A. (2018). Returning African Christians in Mission to the Gold Coast. Studies in World Christianity, 24(1), 25-45.

^[11] Nana Opere Kwakye, A. (2018). Returning African Christians in Mission to the Gold Coast. Studies in World Christianity, 24(1), 25-45

^[12] Nana Opere Kwakye, A. (2018). Returning African Christians in Mission to the Gold Coast. Studies in World Christianity, 24(1), 25-45.

these missionary moves. Let us think through the work God used these Jamaican missionaries to do, and consider bridging the chasm by raising cross-cultural missionaries. Africans might be best suited for African fields. Much more, the indigenes of lands are best suited to reach their people.

Conclusion

Today, we have what we call the Presbyterian church, but its roots are deeply buried in the work of these 24 missionaries who sacrificed their lives to

come back home to serve God. It was not an easy task. Some of them died, others also left. But in all, by God's grace, they turned a failed mission around. The Basel Mission still influences Ghana today. These 24, though unknown, have left an indelible mark on our nation. Isn't there a cause for any such drastic action to be taken by those who desire the conversion of the nations? A decision to bridge the gap of culture, to bring the gospel to people in a language they understand. May God help give us the wisdom to bridge gaps and smooth rough edges as we embark on God's Holy Mission.



Having been saved by God's grace through faith in the atoning work of Christ, Mawunyo Kuuku Win-Tamakloe sees clearly how much God loves all people, which is the reason behind his singular passion and drive together with the Holy Spirit to reach the lost and to make disciples of all nations. He is married to his sweetheart Jessie, and together they serve the Lord as missionaries in Sunyani under Oneway ministries. He also serves 'The Heart Church' (a young local disciple making church in Sunyani) as a pastor. He hosts a weekly evangelistic radio broadcast, "the Hour of Decision", which brings the glorious gospel of Christ Jesus with power and clarity to the people of Bono region. He loves music, writes Christian songs and is a worshipper. His dream is to lead at least three million people to Christ Jesus; also, his joy is to see young believers grow to love and obey Jesus.

^[13] Nana Opere Kwakye, A. (2018). Returning African Christians in Mission to the Gold Coast. *Studies in World Christianity*, 24(1), 25-45.