



JAMAICAN MISSIONARIES TO GHANA

The Jamaicans who fanned the Gospel into flame in Ghana

Danish missionary Andreas Riis arrived in Ghana in 1832 and survived, unlike 80 per cent of the European missionaries who travelled there. Some died within weeks or months of arrival. After eight years with no converts, Riis convinced the Basel Missionary Society to allow him travel to Jamaica to seek missionary volunteers among the descendants of freed slaves. This was because one of the paramount chiefs, Omanhene of Akuapem, is supposed to have said, "If you could show us some Africans who could read the Bible, then we would surely follow you."

Twenty-three Jamaicans (and one Antiguan) volunteered; all of them committed and respected Christians. One of them, Catherine Mulgrave, had been rescued from slavery. Another, John Walker, said: "There were moments when I thought: 'Don't go, they will enslave you or kill you.' But at such moments there was no peace in my heart. When I thought: 'I will go where my good Lord wants me to go', I felt contented."

At their commissioning service, they stated: "When we go to Africa, we go not to a foreign country. Africa is our country and our home. Our grandfathers and great-grandfathers were taken from there and brought here. We go there to witness the Grace of God not only to the European, but also to the African and our only prayer is that the eyes of the Africans whom we regard as our brothers may be opened to see Jesus Christ as Saviour of the World."

The Jamaicans were the essential bridge to share the Gospel with the people in the then Gold Coast (now Ghana). After they arrived in 1843, the Basel mission saw a turnaround. They were much better able to deal with the climate, because they had grown up in a tropical environment, and only one missionary died in the next years. The first baptisms took place in 1847 when a seminary was established. Education was a vital part of their ministry, and Catherine Mulgrave started three girls' schools. Many other schools were founded, and mission stations spread across the region and to the north. Today, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana traces its roots to these faithful saints.

The great-granddaughter of one of those first missionaries and the granddaughter of the first moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (Peter Hall) still lives in Akropong, the place of the first mission station. You can visit the graves of those Jamaican missionaries; most never returned home and played a vital part in the spread of the Gospel to the lost.

Sources:

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