

African Proverb of the Month January, 2001

Anyeminu ni le kusum le, ledzi moni ke onukpai yeo nii. (Ga)

The brother or sister who does not respect the traditions of the elders will not be allowed to eat with the elders. (English)

Ga ([Ghana](#)) Proverb

Explanation:

Among the Ga-speaking people of Ghana the use of proverbs is very common in everyday speech. The Ga proverbs are funny and sometimes are a play on words. No wonder then that proverbs creep in everything we say and do. Proverbs express the time-tried wisdom of the elders and contain the traditions of the elders. Ga-speaking people are big on traditions. The words may change, but the main truths remain in, and are transmitted from generation to generation through, our Oral Traditions.

Take the proverb: *The brother or sister who does not respect the traditions of the elders will not be allowed to eat with the elders* . This is a very simple proverb among many which encourages young men and women alike to learn and respect the honored ways of the family and the community and not to be tempted to adopt foreign ethical values which have not been tried by the family and the community.

In my theological view, if we consider all men and women as brothers and sisters then we can easily refer to God as our Father ("WOTSHE"). My experience is that we only express this view without actually living it. My religion teaches me that my relationship with others depends on how I think of myself. The important question therefore is not: **Who is my brother or sister**

? but

Am I a brother or a sister

? Am I acting and living like a brother or a sister?

Biblical Parallels

Using the "Story of the Good Samaritan" (*Luke 10:25-37*) in relation to the Ga Proverb on "Brotherhood and Sisterhood" above we can consider a new perspective. In the biblical story we notice that Jesus never really tells the lawyer who his neighbor, brother or sister is. Jesus rather tells the story in a way to ask the lawyer

who he is

. In other words, as I see it, no one is your neighbor or brother or sister unless, and until, you think of yourself as that other person's brother or sister or even neighbor. As I have often told my students: You cannot have a brother or a sister or a neighbor without being a brother or a sister or a neighbor yourself.

In this way the responsibility is put squarely where it really belongs: **right on ourselves** . As another proverb puts it:

If two brothers (or sisters) fight they only break the heart of the Father (God).

And if we respect the traditional wisdom of the elders not only do we make our Father happy but then we will understand

Psalm

133:1: "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brothers (and sisters) to dwell together in unity."

Religious Use and Application

I believe that there is a great potential in using African proverbs in our teaching and preaching for the followers of Christ ("KRISTOFOL"). Ga Proverbs such as these two proverbs on "Brotherhood and Sisterhood" in particular are a key to understanding life and are an important way of understanding the Ga people and their culture. Naturally a greater

understanding of any culture has a direct relationship to biblical understanding.

The two proverbs used here have ethical and moral concepts that can easily be used in sermons, Sunday School Instructions, talks, etc. and are easily applicable to general teaching inside and outside of the Church. In the same manner there are other proverbs that are not as easily adaptable to biblical use, for example, the Ga Proverb about how hard it is to get rid of the cockroach: *Only the cockroach takes a lot of dangerous and death defying chances and gets away with it* .

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