

Missionary visit to West Africa – February 2019

Togo

The three weeks of this trip were divided between Togo and Benin. Philip Hynes, preacher and leader in Chalon, came with me, which was a great asset to the visit, as he is a fine preacher, and a help for me. It was his third visit, the first one in three years. After a 4 hour delay in Paris (with the added bonus that both my flights only cost me €3,85, not quite 5USD), we landed in Lomé, Togo, to be met by Julien Naka, our colleague for Benin-Togo, and Paul NGORAN who had just flown in from Ivory Coast. Julien is the pastor of the Grace Church in Bohicon, Benin, and a fine preacher. He also travels extensively in Benin and Togo to distribute the Europresse books. Paul is the pastor of the Grace Church in Gagnoa, Ivory Coast, and oversees part of the african work.

Atakpamé – We travelled the next day to this large town, 80 miles north of Lomé. We used to go there in the past to preach in a couple of places. The contact had been lost through various circumstances. However, we were able to meet again with some of the friends, although we did not preach there this time. One Christian lady, who manages a fairly large business in the region, had invited us to preach. She opened her conference room in her firm, and about 30 people came on the 2 evenings we preached. We also had time to talk with those who had come, many having some searching questions. One morning, we went to preach to a small gathering recently formed on one of the hills. Again, after the message (obviously new to them), we were faced with searching and interesting questions. It was a joy to be able to direct their thoughts to the one who is a victorious Saviour. A number of the people there bought some books. It is always such a joy in Africa to see how quickly one can engage in a serious discussion about spiritual things.

Lomé – We had been invited by a Baptist Church in one of the neighbourhoods to lead a week-end retreat. After a providential contact, many years ago, we have preached there a number of times now, and we have some old friends. Koffi, the new pastor, has been in charge of this congregation and 3 small annexes for about a year. He was very welcoming



Pastor Mesmin & family

and obviously attentive to the message (he also came to the Grace conference and again listened to the message with attention). We had several teaching sessions throughout the week-end. On Sunday, we split to 4 different places to preach. I had the pleasure to preach where Mesmin is endeavouring to plant a Church. This younger man trained at the Belgian Bible Institute in Brussels, and it was encouraging for him to have a visitor preaching the same truths he seeks to teach his congregation. This was my first time there and I hope not the last one.

While in Lomé, we had a couple of meetings in the home of Florent, a retired man who is blind. Several years ago, he heard the Gospel through one of our radio programmes broadcast on a local station. Since then, his love for the free grace of God in Christ alone is contagious, and he doesn't miss an opportunity to get it preached in his home, where he invites friends and neighbours to come. Because of his handicap, he cannot meet with the Grace Church which is located a long way from him.

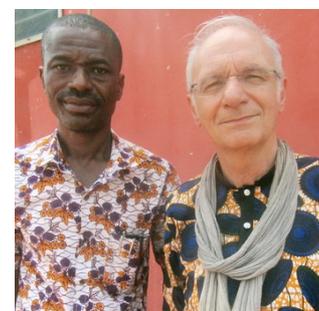
On the Sunday afternoon, I had a long meeting with the young adults from the Baptist Church and its annexes. Over 100 of them came and, after looking at some



Most of the young people at the Sunday afternoon meeting

of their questions, we delved into the Word to answer the question:

«What is a Christian, and how does one become a Christian?» This is an important subject for young people who have often been brought up in a religious environment and who live in a very religious culture.



Pastor Koffi, from Lomé



Brother Florent, from Lomé

West Africa Grace Conference

This year, the conference was held in a new place, a hotel by the beach near the historic city of Ouidah, in south Benin. The place was ideal and finding it a providential direction from the Lord. Actually, Julien's wife saw its



A view of the main meeting room (Philip Hynes at the front)

potential for our gathering when they had a few days' holidays in the place last August! The Lord uses everyone's gifts and works even when His servants rest! Although the cost for the conference has gone up in this new venue, I think we have found the location we've been looking for all these years

115 people came this year, from Benin, Togo, Ivory Coast and Burkina. Several friends were not able to come



Dining room. with a view of the sea

at the last minute because of work commitments. There was a wonderful mixing among the attendants and many new contacts were made and strengthened. Both during the conference and most of the visit, I felt that there was a «bristling» of anticipation among the believers, with a renewed interest in spiritual truths and an expectation to see the Lord at work.

The teaching was also very uplifting and biblical. Several men from Benin preached, as well as Mesmin from Lomé, together with Paul and our colleague Vincent (who had joined us by then). Vincent is a very gifted preacher and distributes the Europresse books in Ivory Coast. Philip gave 3 outstanding messages («The law cannot justify the sinner», «The law cannot sanctify the saint», «The first hymn in Revelation»). I am hoping to publish these as small booklets in the near future. I gave three messages on 1 John 3:1-3, a passage which was such a delight for me to work on («The status, security & sight of the believer»).

Benin

Porto Novo - After the conference, Julien stayed in Cotonou to visit customers. Philip flew back to Europe as his work beckoned. He drives local buses in Chalon, a job he has chosen because it gives him large sections of free time when he can prepare for the ministry.

Paul, Vincent and I went to Porto Novo, where the local Grace Church had planned a small retreat. You may remember that the brethren there were divided in 2 factions until last year when the Lord wonderfully worked



The chapel for the Porto Novo Grace Church



With Cyriaque, Claire & Michée Aholou

out a reunion under the oversight of Cyriaque Aholou, a fine preacher and pastor, originally from Bohicon in central Benin.

It was a wonderful sight to see the room full to capacity and the former divided «leaders» sitting together with joy to be fed with the Word. We need to continue to pray for this congregation as there are still a few minor points to sort out, and because the enemy will most certainly not give up the fight so easily. On the Tuesday, we observed the Lord Supper, a very moving time as it was the first anniversary of the reunion of the brethren. We preached in the evening for the 3 days of our stay. In the mornings, Paul and Vincent went to preach in outlying villages where there are a few people ready to hear the Gospel. As these villages are situated on the lake,

the trip is by small boats, a first experience for our 2 brethren.

On the last evening, I was invited to preach in Kraké, a very small village a few miles away from the Nigerian border where a number of people meet regularly to hear the Gospel. Some men from the town of Ekpè, close by, come to preach regularly in Kraké.

Ekpè - There is a number of believers in this growing town between Porto Novo and Cotonou, and a small fellowship was formed many years ago – I remember visiting them with the late Bill Clark in 1995.



After the meeting in Kraké

Sadly, there was a division in the Church some 10 years ago, mainly because of misunderstandings. Last August, one of the leaders of one side had shared with me that, in view of what had happened in Porto Novo, they were wondering whether they should not consider reuniting. During the intervening months, we kept in touch to see how to put this into effect. Then, on the last Thursday of my present visit, a number of the men from both «sides» came and we spent several hours looking at the situation and trying to understand where the Lord is leading them. There is still a long way to go, but I am hopeful that good steps were taken. I have since heard that these men have met together to pray for the Lord's leading. We want to pray that the Lord would give a spirit of humility and thankfulness to the men, and that He would bring a man of His choice to Ekpè as He did in Porto Novo.



Paul & Vincent going to preach by boat

It is interesting to see that what the Lord has accomplished in Porto Novo, bringing men back to following the Saviour is now touching others, inspiring them with new hope and vision. It is one thing to know that He can do it, and a totally new thing to see Him do it! There is also a new and growing realisation that the ministry of the Word and the leading of God's

people are fundamental aspects of the faith and that one needs to get involved, even financially, in this.

Cotonou - My last week-end was spent preaching with Vincent at a retreat organised by the Cotonou Grace Church. This was a wonderful time. Many friends came from the whole region and there was hardly room for anybody else. Every square inch of the premises was put to good use for the occasion. There again, there seemed to a sense of excitement at listening to the Word and being challenged by it, to a point I have rarely experienced. Besides the main messages, the Church had planned several meetings for various groups (couples, ladies and young adults). The Lord really blessed these times with people being quite free to ask questions and to spend time looking into the Word for answers. For the meeting with the ladies, a dear sister translated me. She admitted afterward shaking with apprehension most of the time. I did not tell her that I was too!



Part of the meeting place in Cotonou



Several of the young people in Cotonou

While Vincent and I were in Cotonou, Paul travelled with Julien to Bohicon (100 miles north) to encourage the brethren there. They pressed him with meetings every night of that week. As I made my way to the airport to get back home, I had the definite sense of having been blessed to live a special time in the three weeks there, a real great Gospel Feast. I do not think that I have been blessed to that extent in the 20 years I've been travelling to Africa.

May the Lord bring fruit for His glory out of all that was done! And, yes, I was again upgraded on both flights, inbound & outbound! Quite easy to get used to this!

Jean-Claude



Hauling the net to shore – everyone pulling, as in the Church



A lighter moment before breakfast at the conference