

## **The Trokosi: Religious Slavery Today**

By [Chuck Missler](#)

Slavery in the West has largely become a shamed subject of history. Most Westerners are unaware of the thousands of slaves still suffering and dying in various locations around the world. One such group are the Trokosi slaves of Ghana.

Guayo was never told why her family gave her to the fetish priest when she was a young child. Raped by the priest from the age of 12, Guayo gave birth to four children over the years. The priest had no obligation to provide for Guayo's basic needs or for her children, who were also considered his slaves. The young mother has lived in constant despair, seeking to feed herself and her children while working hard long days for the priest. Now Guayo is 30 and has few skills and no education. Yet, since the priest has died, nobody will dare to help her, since the community believes she is owned by the gods.

Guayo's situation is typical of the Trokosi slaves in Ghana. In the ju-ju religious system in Ghana, the local fetish priest is the mediator between the villagers and the gods. There is great fear among the villagers that if they do not abide by the priest's demands, they will be cursed and die. If the priest says there must be a payment made for some sin in the family, families will give a virgin daughter to become his property and she will go to live at the shrine in the service of 'the gods' - often for the rest of her life.

Trokosi is a word meaning, "wife of the gods", showing the sexual side of the servitude. Most Trokosi girls are given to be slaves prior to adolescence, some as young children, and spend their days working long hours without pay in the priest's fields or serving the gods in the shrine. These girls are forced to serve the priest sexually according to his demands, and then must often scrounge for food, as they are responsible to provide for themselves. If a girl escapes back to her family, she will be returned to the priest. Trokosi slavery is known to exist in Benin, Nigeria and Togo, but most of the information about the practice has been gleaned from women in Ghana. The government in Ghana has outlawed the Trokosi practice, but there has been little effort by the government to stop the tradition.

A number of groups have been working to free and rehabilitate Trokosi slaves, usually by redeeming the slave and her children from the fetish priest for a price. Through working with the fetish priests themselves, dozens of shrines have been shut down (though many more remain.) The freed women are assisted in returning to society and are taught skills that help them become self sufficient. I.N. Network Ghana, for instance, has an entire rehabilitation program in which these women are taught to read, given counseling and nutritious food, and are taught a trade, such as dressmaking or hair styling. This and other Christian groups that free Trokosi slaves also teach these women about the great value

they have in Christ Jesus, and help these women heal from the damage caused by living a life void of any love or nurturing.