

# AFRICA SOUTHEAST LOCAL PAGES

## AREA PRESIDENCY MESSAGE

### Faith and Doubt in the Latter Days

By Elder Kevin S. Hamilton

Second Counselor in the Area Presidency

I recently met with a husband and wife, both long-time members of the Church, who were experiencing doubts about their testimony of the restored Church of Jesus Christ. They were concerned about various items and incidents in the history of the Church that they had read from sources on the Internet that were difficult for them to understand. Their crisis of faith even led them to have doubts about Jesus Christ and His role as Redeemer of the world.

As I listened to their concerns, I was reminded of the Savior's teachings about this period of time we know as the latter days. This is our time, the last and final dispensation of all time. The Savior taught that in our day "there shall also arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders, insomuch, that, if possible, they shall deceive the very elect, who are the elect according to the covenant" (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:22). The "elect according to the covenant" are members of the Church, those who have made covenants at baptism and in the temple.

At one point in our conversation, I felt impressed to ask the question, "In your opinion, where does faith fit into this?" We explored the doctrine of faith found in Alma 32:21, where Alma teaches that "faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things; therefore if ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true."

Our scriptures teach that "truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come" (D&C 93:24). There is a truth about all things, and it stands "independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself" (D&C 93:30). There is a truth about what Joseph Smith saw and heard in the Sacred Grove, there is a truth about the Book of Mormon, and there is a truth about the divinity of God's restored Church. There is also a truth about any questions that may arise from our wonderful and occasionally complex history. We might question what that truth actually is, but there still is a truth.

Furthermore, the vast majority of our doctrine is not in question.



*Kevin S. Hamilton, Africa Southeast Area Presidency*

God is our eternal, perfect, loving Father in Heaven. He created a plan, which included mortal life on earth, that would eventually permit us to return to His presence and become like Him. "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, . . . that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him" (Moroni 7:48).

The Atonement of Jesus Christ enables this great plan to come to pass, and He is rightfully called our Savior and Redeemer because He saved us and redeemed us from death and sin.<sup>1</sup> He lived, taught truth, established a Church "upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, . . . himself being the

chief corner stone” (Ephesians 2:20), was put to death, and rose again the third day.

He has restored His Church again in these latter days and will come again to personally rule and reign upon the earth during a period of time known as the Millennium. Joseph Smith was the prophet of the Restoration, and Thomas S. Monson is the Lord’s prophet on the earth today. Given that we have such great and marvelous truths, it seems reasonable that when we have questions or doubts, we could simply wait a bit, be patient, and let the further light and knowledge that the Father has promised come (see 2 Corinthians 4:6).



Consider father Adam and mother Eve when they were driven from the Garden of Eden. One of the first things they were commanded to do was to “offer the firstlings of their flocks, for an offering unto the Lord” (Moses 5:5). This must have seemed a strange and difficult doctrine to accept. Think about the mechanics of building an altar, raising animals, choosing the firstborn, sacrificing its life, and then burning it by fire upon

the altar. When the angel of the Lord appeared to Adam and Eve and inquired why they were doing what they were doing, Adam responded by simply saying, “I know not, save the Lord commanded me” (Moses 5:6). Essentially he was saying, “I don’t really understand this somewhat strange practice, but I know who God is and I know that He instructed me to do this, so I am patiently waiting on the Lord to give me further information. In the meantime, I will continue to do what I was asked to do.” This could be a model for us to follow as we set our doubts and questions aside for the moment and focus on what we do know, while we patiently wait to receive greater understanding.

If during this life “we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7), then ultimately we will know all things and see all things. As Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has taught:

“Brothers and sisters, this is a divine work in process, with the manifestations and blessings of it abounding in every direction, so please don’t hyperventilate if from time to time issues arise that need to be examined, understood, and resolved. They do and they will. *In this Church,*

*what we know will always trump what we do not know.”<sup>2</sup>*

The disciples of Christ were tested from time to time to see if they were truly anchored to the gospel He taught. In what is known as the Bread of Life Sermon found in John 6, the Savior taught hard-to-understand doctrines without giving His disciples much background or context. As a result, “many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?” (John 6:60). Or in the context of today, many seem to say, “The position of the Church on (fill in the blank) is difficult for me to accept. I think the Brethren are out of touch with current events.”

The Gospel writer continues, “When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, doth this offend you?” because “there are some of you that believe not” (John 6:61, 64). As a result, “from that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him” (John 6:66). Can you not almost hear this today? The social media sites are abuzz with opinions and comments and judgments about some of the issues of the day that people seem to be bothered by. Some are offended. Some turn aside

and “walk no more” after the Savior. In my mind’s eye, I can picture some of the early-day disciples coming to Peter and saying, “This is really difficult doctrine, and I don’t think I can accept it. Eat of His body? Drink of His blood? This is a little too difficult for me.” I can also imagine Peter saying something like, “Yes, it is a bit different, and to be honest, I don’t really understand it yet either, but I know that He is the Christ.”

The story concludes: “Then said Jesus unto the twelve, will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God” (John 6:67–69). In today’s language Peter would have said, “I perhaps do not fully understand the doctrine, but I know that you are the Messiah, and I am patient and faithful and willing to wait until I do fully understand it.”

Blog posts and comments seem to focus on individual opinions and only rarely on inspired doctrine. We see the words “I” and “me” in almost every sentence. “I think . . .”, “I believe . . .”, “It seems to me. . . .” We rarely hear these commentators speak about what God thinks

or believes. We hear them talk at great length about “the Church,” but we don’t hear them talk much about the Savior. We see them dive deep into the history and organization of the Church, but we hear very little about the Atonement of Jesus Christ. We hear them speak about the culture of the gospel, but we don’t hear them discuss much about God’s plan for the salvation of His children.

A true disciple or follower of Christ is willing to follow the example of Jesus Christ in submitting His will to the will of the Father. Disciples of Christ understand the teachings of King Benjamin: “For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father” (Mosiah 3:19). This humble, meek, submissive spirit seems very different sometimes from the strident calls by some for change in the doctrines and

practices of the Lord’s Church.

Are there some difficult doctrines? Perhaps. Are there some occasional historical anomalies that we wonder about? Maybe, but remember, “What we know will always trump what we do not know.”<sup>3</sup> We can be very comfortable just patiently waiting, for we know that the Lord will eventually reveal all things. “The time will come when the knowledge of the Savior shall spread throughout



every nation, kindred, tongue, and people” (Mosiah 3:20).

Ultimately, all questions will be answered to our complete satisfaction. The Father’s perfect plan for the salvation and exaltation of His children requires that we walk by faith since the witness does not come “until after the trial of your faith” (Ether 12:6).

The answer to a faith crisis in this latter-day period of time

is to focus on what we know to be true, be patient with the questions that may occasionally arise, and remember that in time all things will be made known to our complete and total understanding. To quote Elder Jeffrey R. Holland again:

“In moments of fear or doubt or troubling times, hold the ground you have already won, even if that ground is limited. . . . When . . . moments come and issues surface, the resolution of which is not immediately forthcoming, *hold fast to what you already know and*

*stand strong until additional knowledge comes.*”<sup>4</sup>

I know that we can each hold fast to our faith in these latter-day times of occasional doubt. With patience and faith, we will come to know the truth of all things and will experience “peace in this world, and eternal life in the world to come” (D&C 59:23). ■

#### NOTES

1. See Guide to the Scriptures, “Redeemer.”
2. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Lord, I Believe,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2013, 94.
3. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Lord, I Believe,” 93.
4. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Lord, I Believe,” 93–94.

## LOCAL NEWS

# Traditions vs. the Gospel

By Elder Khumbulani D. Mdletshe

Area Seventy

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles addressed members of the Church in Africa in his landmark talk, “The Gospel Culture.”<sup>1</sup> In that address he explained, “Many African traditions are consistent with the gospel culture and help our members keep the commandments of God.” He praised Africans for their strong family culture and their tradition of modesty, “another African strength.” However, he also warned members that “some cultural traditions in parts of Africa are negative when measured against gospel culture and values. Several of these concern family



**Elder Khumbulani D. Mdletshe, Area Seventy**

relationships—what is done at birth, at marriage, and upon death.”

In response to that talk, the Area Presidency, under the direction of Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, is hosting a series of special adult meetings in stakes and districts to help people deal with those traditions that might lead us away from fully participating in gospel ordinances. These meetings will also help those who have already participated in ordinances to stay on the straight path.

The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines tradition as “a way of thinking, behaving, or doing something . . . by the people in a particular group, family, society, etc., for a long time.”<sup>2</sup> Some things that have been done “for a long time” have no rhyme or reason to them, but they continue with the excuse, “It’s always been done that way; it’s tradition!” However, traditions are subject to change

since they are man's creation, whereas the commandments of God are eternal.

That is why Church leaders encourage us to review all traditions against eternal Church standards. In Matthew 15, the scribes and Pharisees accused Jesus, asking, "Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread" (Matthew 15:2).

The Savior countered that they themselves had violated the *eternal* commandment to honor their father and mother, saying, "Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition" (Matthew 15:6; see also verses 3–5). He made it clear which kind of tradition can be discarded and which must be followed.

My own history is a case in point. I was born and raised in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. In this corner of our country, the majority of the people speak Zulu and practice a number of traditions associated with being Zulu speakers. These gave me a great sense of pride as a boy.

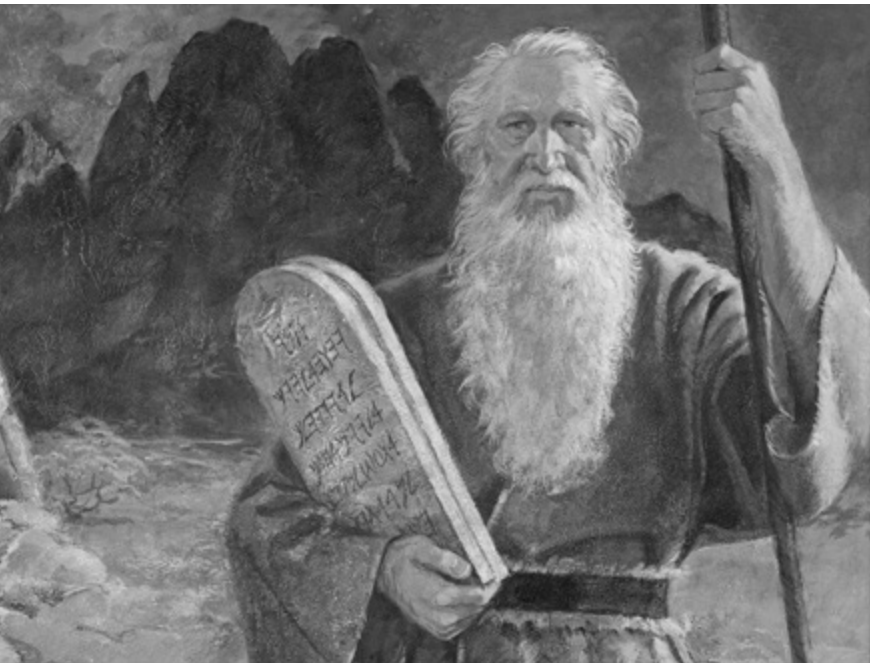
I joined the Church in my early teens and at 19 years old I accepted a mission call to England. Right after my mission I spend six years of college study in the United States. In those eight years away from my homeland, I associated closely with Church members. My experiences with them challenged some of the traditions I held dear as a young boy. However, the gospel of Jesus Christ informed my life. I asked myself repeatedly if old traditions reconciled with the doctrines of the restored gospel.

For example, when my mother died, all members of the family were expected to wear a blue cloth on their sleeves as a sign of mourning. At that time I was a branch president. I remember the Sunday following my mother's death; I got dressed for Church and looked in the mirror. Looking back at me was a priesthood leader wearing a white shirt and tie with

a dark suit—that had a blue cloth on the sleeve. It looked strangely out of place. Although it didn't meet Elder Oaks's definition of a negative tradition as "one that interfered with my keeping the commandments of God," it was somehow unseemly as the priesthood leader I was supposed to be. Despite all the respect I had for my mother, I removed it.

Ten years later, my father died. Since I was the eldest surviving male, I was expected to provide direction to the family. I asked everyone if they felt a need to wear the blue cloth. To my surprise, everyone supported the idea of *not* wearing it. Family members decided that this long-held tradition had run its course. Even when a tradition appears harmless, it deserves a second look.

The experience of today's African Latter-day Saints is similar to those who were converted in the days of Joseph Smith. According to the *Doctrine and Covenants Student Manual*, "Many of the early converts came from a Congregationalist background, that is, from churches in which anyone had the right to proclaim doctrine if the rest of the congregation concurred."<sup>3</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 28:11–13 refers to Hiram Page who had found a stone through which he claimed to be receiving revelation for the entire Church. The Lord directs Joseph Smith to "take thy brother, Hiram Page, between him and thee alone, and tell him that those things which he hath written from that stone are not of me and that Satan deceiveth him; for, behold, these things have not been appointed unto him, neither shall anything be appointed unto any of this church contrary to the church covenants. For all things must be done in order, and by common consent in the church, by the prayer of faith." Today, many converts with traditions from their previous lives are joining the Church, and the Church responds by correcting these traditions as it did with Hiram Page.



The Old Testament, New Testament, Book of Mormon, and Doctrine and Covenants are replete with warnings about the traditions that separate us from God and His ordinances. Our living prophets

are like unto Moses who gave the children of Israel the Ten Commandments (see Exodus 20), or Jesus Christ who gave the Saints of His time the Beatitudes (see Matthew 5). Both of these directives were given to people with a tendency to return to evil traditions. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World”<sup>4</sup> is a warning to us in our day from modern prophets who saw traditions developing that attacked the family.

The Holy Ghost can help us discern and then discard unwholesome traditions. If we are faithful, we are promised that the still small voice will whisper truth unto our hearts. It is not easy to move away from those things that once defined us in our family or other groups, but a testimony of living prophets and a still small voice from the Holy Ghost can return us safely home. ■

#### NOTES

1. Dallin H. Oaks, “The Gospel Culture,” *Ensign*, Mar. 2012, 43; *Liahona*, Mar. 2012, 23.
2. “Tradition,” merriam-webster.com.
3. *Doctrine and Covenants Student Manual* (2001), 57.
4. *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2010, 129.

## Africa Southeast Area Welcomes Elder and Sister Ellis

By Sister Midge W. Nielsen

Sister Kathryn K. and Elder Stanley G. Ellis have arrived in the Africa Southeast Area, where Elder Ellis will serve as First Counselor in the Area Presidency. They were called in April to report August 1, 2014, after President Dale G. Renlund and his wife, Ruth, completed their service in late May. The good-natured couple love the

missionary rule to “stay with your companion.” They clearly enjoy being together. Since their wedding in 1969, they have welcomed nine children and 29 grandchildren (with one on the way). They have enjoyed a life of travel, family growth, and Church service.

Stan, as he is known to his friends, was shaped by four

important life experiences: first of all, he is proud to identify himself as “a farm boy.” Raised on a farm near Burley, Idaho, USA, he learned to work hard and work smart. He also learned the importance of timing, explaining, “If you don’t plant at the right time, an early frost can destroy the harvest.” This farm boy learned to do what was

needed, regardless of what was enjoyable, and most of all, he learned to be direct. He often asks his Church audiences, “Do you want me to speak directly or indirectly? With ‘sugar’ or without it?” So far, the Saints have chosen “Without!” every time.

His second life-changing experience was the combination of attending Harvard University and serving a mission. Many of his fellow freshmen were National Merit Scholarship finalists who had attended exclusive prep schools. Compared to them, he felt inadequate, and he struggled his first semester, earning the worst grades of his life. Happily, though, he received strength and inspiration from an excellent institute of religion teacher: Boyd K. Packer. President David O. McKay (1873–1970) had foreseen the need for a strong spiritual presence on the Harvard campus and had extended the *additional* calling to New England States Mission President Packer.

Elder Ellis interrupted his education to serve in the Brazilian Mission, where he gained substantial confidence and faith. Upon returning to Harvard, he improved his grades and graduated with a degree in government. Subsequently, he enjoyed being a member of

Brigham Young University’s first-ever class of the J. Reuben Clark Law School.

His third life experience was working his way through both college and law school selling books door-to-door. He explains, “My parents were farmers with seven children; they simply could not pay for our post-high school educations. I knew I was on my own, so I worked hard to get scholarships and jobs. Selling books 84 hours a week and

recruiting and managing other salespeople gave me experience and skill that I relied on subsequently when I entered the world of business.”

He also relied on his energetic wife. Kathryn was born into a world full of Kathleens, Katherines, Kathryns, and Katharinas, all using the nickname “Kathy.” Since her maiden name was Kloepfer, she opted instead for “KK,” which suits her perfectly; she is one of a kind.

***Sister Kathryn K. and Elder Stanley G. Ellis***



Though her family was kind and loving, they had drifted into Church inactivity over the years. When her grandparents from Idaho, stalwart Church members, visited in California, they were appalled to find their 12-year-old granddaughter had never been baptized. Before they left town, her grandparents saw the ordinance performed, but then KK was on her own. She walked to Church alone, attended meetings all by herself, and participated in Church functions without her family. She smiles and says, “I knew the Church was true. I knew what I was doing was right and what the Savior wanted me to do. I loved the other members, and their example made it easier to stay true to the gospel.”

During her senior year of high school, she applied only to BYU, though her parents preferred that she attend college in California as her older brothers had done. She had earned a scholarship, and her parents finally relented and allowed her to go on the promise that she would graduate before marriage, a promise that she *almost* kept. The Ellises were married on June 7 after her junior year; KK lacked only six credit hours to graduate. These she completed by correspondence, graduating with her

class the next year with a major in humanities.

The newlywed couple charted an amazing odyssey noting, “We moved 22 times in 10 years.” The first of their nine children was born while they were still involved in university and law-school studies. KK explains cheerfully, “We and our first four children each have our own birth state: California, Idaho, Massachusetts, Utah, New Mexico, and Tennessee.”

The last five were born in Texas, a state they never expected to call home. They first drove through the Lone Star State in their non-air-conditioned car during a very hot August. They rolled down their car windows, panting, and asked each other, “Who would ever live here?” However, they moved to Houston in 1979 and loved it. They still maintain their family home there.

Another place they came to love over the years is the country of Brazil. As a teenager, Stanley Ellis first went to Brazil as an American Field Service (AFS) exchange student for two months. Then at 19 he returned to serve as a full-time missionary in the Brazilian Mission (12/1966–12/1968). Later in his life (1999–2002), he served as president of the Brazil São Paulo

North Mission. Sister Ellis says, “We came to love the 500+ missionaries we served with. They were like our own children.”

All of their children have chosen to serve missions themselves—all nine of them. “Yes! Even the girls!” Elder Ellis says, adding, “I am biased when it comes to missionary service for young women. I believe in it!” Their youngest daughter, Emily, is currently serving in the South Korea Seoul Mission.

Elder Ellis has also served as an Area Seventy, stake president, counselor in a stake presidency, high councilor, counselor in a bishopric, elders quorum president, and ward and stake Young Men president.

Sister Ellis, already wearing an African-bead necklace, says, “We are thrilled to be here now. We can’t wait to learn more about the people of the Africa Southeast Area and help the Lord with the work of the Church.” She adds, “It is the direct fulfilment of my patriarchal blessing given long ago, that I would ‘witness the growth of the Church.’ It is a privilege to serve here.”

Elder and Sister Ellis are at the right place at the right time to be such witnesses and contributors to its growth. The Africa Southeast Area is blessed to have them. ■