

Glenn L. Pace. *Safe Journey: An African Adventure*.

Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003

Emmanuel Abu Kissi. *Walking in the Sand: A History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Ghana*.

Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2004

Reviewed by William C. Olsen

While both volumes were published by LDS Church-owned presses around the same time, and both deal with the experiences of General Authorities primarily in West Africa, it should be emphasized that these are two very different accounts of many of the same places during roughly the same time period. Readers should approach *Walking in the Sand* as a general, and quite thorough, introduction to the details of expansion of the Church in Ghana. It is written by a firsthand witness to many of the early developments and setbacks to Church growth in that region, and it culminates in the dedication of the Accra Temple in 2004. The book is also valuable because the author personally knows most of the local leaders, early missionaries, and General Authorities sent to work in Ghana. This is an insider's view of Church history in Africa from a Ghanaian who witnessed the Church struggle and yet continue to develop its own African identity. On the other hand, *Safe Journey* portrays an outsider's limited understanding of African culture and society in the late twentieth century. Thus, observations about Africa that are not related to Church activity and its members often seem unnecessary and out of place.

Safe Journey pivots between two broad themes: the author's own experiences as a General Authority handling routine activities and crises, and a personal analysis of people, things, and places. The book is most successful with the former theme. The earliest involvement in Africa for Glenn L. Pace, now a General Authority emeritus, came in 1985, when he headed the Church's humanitarian relief efforts to victims of drought in Ethiopia. The drought was unquestionably one of the two worst natural disasters in the last twenty-five years in Africa—the other being the Mozambican flood of 2000. This introduction to catastrophe is significant for the author since the book begins with the same question that a majority of travelers from the Western world ask themselves when visiting or living in the Third World: "Why all this suffering?" Attempts in this book to answer that

question dwell on issues that range from theological to sometimes satirical. The author's personal thinking about the suffering question utilizes several pre-1978 statements on Africans and the priesthood, specifically those addressing the succession of premortal behavior and its implications for mortal station and privilege. Younger readers might not be acquainted with these references, and they may find his reasoning on this issue peculiar or offensive. However, Elder Pace does warn that it is "dangerous to jump to conclusions as to the exact whys and wherefores. If we are not careful we can begin to make judgments about people and their circumstances of birth. . . . Each of us as a daughter or son of Heavenly Parents have received the genes of godhood" (13–15).

Many personally enriching and endearing experiences in Africa took Elder Pace to a broader appreciation of people's individual struggles and commitment to the gospel despite their economic and political restrictions. For example, his experiences in central Africa came during times of civil war and political upheaval. Visits to the Congo were particularly challenging since the political crisis of the mid-1990s, and the change of government in that region demonstrates some of the worst of post-World War II governments in Africa. For Elder Pace, the presence of faithful Latter-day Saints—even when their numbers are in a stark minority—at regular sacrament meetings, missionary training sessions, and special fire-sides indicates the enduring nature of faith, love, and the light of gospel truth that forever changes the soul of an individual under any circumstances.

Our members had been living in the bush to escape the war and were just working their way back to their empty homes. . . . Here I was looking at people who were as impoverished as any of our members in the world, and I was impressed to speak very boldly about tithing. I was surprised with the strong feeling I had that that was the most important thing they could do as they began rebuilding their lives. (190)

The insight into the detail behind the government permission for construction of the Accra Temple is a particularly interesting point of the book. Notes from speeches given by Elder Pace given to Church members in Ghana provide spiritual background to a further comprehension of the great value of the temple in the region.

Our current leaders are stressing the payment of a full tithe. . . . We should be challenging members to get ready to go to the temple. We cannot lower our standards of worthiness. Local bishops cannot compromise standards. The humble Saints throughout the world will be blessed spiritually and temporally as they live the gospel, including the law of the tithe. (206)

His narrative then tells about the work of Church leaders, both local and general, in persuading government officials to grant permission to build a temple on the site that had long before been purchased by the Church. Some of the details of these discussions are given. But, for my own reading, not nearly enough is revealed about the contents of meetings with Jerry Rawlings (president of Ghana) and other top officials who generally operate in this part of the world only under conditions in which one side “passes the envelope” to the other to obtain political favors. It would be interesting to know what sorts of diplomatic steps were taken and how persuasion was gained in such meetings.

One can sense throughout the book the enormous dedication that Elder Pace brings to building the kingdom in Africa: “Never have I felt so dependent upon instant revelation as I did during my years in Africa” (160). His account shows very clearly that he was often operating in uncharted territory, which challenged his common sense of bureaucracy, practical expediency, and familiar resourcefulness. Aside from his valiant efforts and successes during times of civil war, political violence, and natural disaster, Elder Pace attests to his abiding faith in the Lord to make important decisions regarding Church business and individual members.

Outsider perspectives on difficult daily living conditions surface in numerous references to awkward or peculiar experiences that happen to anyone who has lived in the Third World: problems with transportation, food, hot weather, power outages, clean water, bugs, disease, and so forth. These stories will provide the most valuable reading for senior couples who are called to serve or contemplating being missionaries in developing countries.

Walking in the Sand by Elder Emmanuel Kissi is a detailed history of the Church in Ghana. The book sometimes turns autobiographical, but that usually adds to the narrative’s immediacy, as Kissi was one of the early and most important local members in Ghana. He and his family joined the Church in 1979 while he was in England attending medical school. Rather than accept professional employment in Europe or America, Elder Kissi chose to return to Ghana, where he joined the medical staff at the large Korle Bu hospital in Accra and also lectured at the medical college at the university. Eventually he left employment at Korle Bu and, along with his wife, took over operations of a large clinic in an Accra suburb to give medical relief to many who can afford only partial payment of their expenses. The clinic has grown into a small hospital, and Elder Kissi and his spouse, who is a midwife, are still quite active in running the medical operations there. The unit today is called Deseret Hospital.

The great value of this book emerges in recounted discussions between the author and numerous local and general authorities as they try to

organize local wards and stakes. Middle chapters demonstrate both the personal style of early authorities and also the applications of their various individual talents to solve particular problems and administer to a rapidly expanding Church membership in both urban and semi-urban areas. Training issues, administrative concerns, and the stress for accountability in church assignments are part of the narrative. Numerous journal entries give an account of the fledgling congregations in diverse regions:

[On Sunday, 8 May 1988, at Sankubenase Branch conference, there were about] 86 people in attendance. At this time they [had] to meet outside in the back of the [branch president's] home, under a palm-branch bowery, erected mainly for the purpose of keeping the members out of the hot sun or the rain, when they [met] together on the Sabbath day. (151, brackets in original)

Or in another entry:

The next day, Sunday 31 August [1980] we were scheduled to hold a baptismal service in Accra. There was a water shortage so we all went to the Black Star beach for the service. The waves were so powerful out where the water was deep enough [for baptizing] that the waves knocked us off our feet before we could perform the ordinance. Sister Kissi suggested that we form a human chain circle around the [area for the baptism] so as to break the impact of the waves. We were able to baptize all of the candidates[.] We returned to the Mission Home for their confirmations and a Sacrament Meeting. (58, brackets in original)

Walking in the Sand will have a particular appeal for the now numerous North American missionary couples and regular missionaries who have served in Ghana. Elder Kissi cites the names of the first three young North American missionaries who arrived early in 1996. I spoke with these elders in Accra three months after their arrival, and they divulged to me their culture shock and fears.

A broader appeal of the book comes in the chapters dedicated to persecution and ridicule of the LDS Church from other Christian congregations—mostly the pastors of those churches. This persecution culminated in the “Freeze,” in which all proselytizing was banned, missionaries were expelled from the country, and some Church buildings were seized by the government. The Freeze lasted for seventeen months beginning in June 1989. Many members of the Church in Ghana, then and now, see this time as their own personal experience similar to the travails of early Mormon pioneers in Missouri and Illinois. It had a similar purifying effect.

Some of the members yielded to the buffetings of the enemy. Members were ridiculed and called names. Articles against the Latter-day Saint faith were orchestrated in the largely biased media. Some members wandered, and their faith was shaken. Some of them went back to their

former churches with the excuse that they would return if the Freeze was lifted. (239)

And then when the Freeze was lifted, “the joy of the Saints was indescribable. It was like a dream” (239).

Elder Kissi’s prose reveals his Ghanaian English, which is always honest and open. This is another reason why the book has a vernacular feel to it. It demonstrates the gratitude, strength, and faith of a man who has been an insider to Church expansion in a developing country. The value of this book lies in its ability to portray the struggles and events of the Church among some of the first black African members in the continent and in its ability to inspire other missionary couples to be readily engaged in the work. It is good that this book has already seen a second printing in Ghana, where it memorializes among the local Saints the powerful story of their own sands of life.

The publication of both works reviewed here coincided with the dedication of the temple in Accra in early 2004. Similarly, both books recreate the front lines of doing missionary work and living as Latter-day Saints in an environment that is challenging and endearing.

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