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Unwavering Commitment to Jesus Christ

God invites us to cast our old ways completely out of reach and begin a new life in Christ.

Last April, I had the privilege of dedicating the Kinshasa Democratic Republic of the Congo Temple.¹ Words cannot express the joy the faithful Congolese and I felt to see a temple dedicated in their land.

Individuals who enter the Kinshasa Temple see an original painting entitled *Congo Falls*.² It uniquely reminds temple-goers of the unwavering commitment required to anchor themselves to Jesus Christ and to follow the covenant path of our Heavenly Father’s plan. The waterfalls depicted in the painting call to mind a practice that was common more than a century ago among early converts to Christianity in Congo.



Kinshasa Democratic Republic of the Congo Temple

Before their conversion, they worshipped inanimate objects, believing that the items possessed supernatural powers.³ After conversion, many made a pilgrimage to one of the countless waterfalls along the Congo River, such as the Nzongo Falls.⁴ These converts threw their previously idolized objects into the waterfalls as a symbol to God and others that they had discarded their old traditions and accepted Jesus Christ. They intentionally did not throw their objects into calm, shallow waters; they



Congo Falls, by David Meikle

threw them into the churning waters of a massive waterfall, where the items became unrecoverable. These actions were a token of a new but unwavering commitment to Jesus Christ.

People in other places and ages demonstrated their commitment to Jesus Christ in similar ways.⁵ The Book of Mormon people known as the Anti-Nephi-Lehies “laid down the weapons of their rebellion,” burying them “deep in the earth” as “a testimony to God . . . that they never would use [their] weapons again.”⁶ In doing so, they promised to follow God’s teachings and never go back on their commitment. This action was the beginning of being “converted unto the Lord” and never falling away.⁷

Being “converted unto the Lord” means leaving one course of action, directed by an old belief system, and adopting a new one based on faith in Heavenly Father’s plan and in Jesus Christ and His Atonement. This change is more than an intellectual acceptance of gospel teachings. It shapes our identity, transforms our understanding of life’s meaning, and leads to unchanging fidelity to God. Personal desires that are contrary to being anchored to the Savior and to following the covenant path fade away and are replaced by a determination to submit to the will of Heavenly Father.

Being converted unto the Lord starts with an unwavering commitment to God, followed by making that commitment part of who we are. Internalizing such a commitment is a lifelong process that requires patience and ongoing repentance. Eventually, this commitment becomes part of who we are, embedded in our sense of self, and ever present in our lives. Just as we never forget our own name no matter what else we are thinking about, we never forget a commitment that is etched in our hearts.⁸



God invites us to cast our old ways completely out of reach and begin a new life in Christ. This happens as we develop faith in the Savior, which begins by hearing the testimony of those who have faith.⁹ Thereafter, faith deepens as we act in ways that anchor us more firmly to Him.¹⁰

Now, it would be nice if increased faith were transmitted like the flu or the common cold. Then a simple “spiritual sneeze” would build faith in others. But it does not work that way. The only way faith grows is for an individual to act in faith. These actions are often prompted by invitations extended by others, but we cannot “grow” someone else’s faith or rely solely on others to bolster our own. For our faith to grow, we must choose faith-building actions, such as praying, studying the scriptures, partaking of the sacrament, keeping the commandments, and serving others.

As our faith in Jesus Christ grows, God invites us to make promises with Him. These covenants, as such promises are known, are manifestations of our conversion. Covenants also create a sure foundation for spiritual progression. As we choose to be baptized, we begin to take upon ourselves the name of Jesus Christ¹¹ and choose to identify ourselves with Him. We pledge to become like Him and to develop His attributes.

Covenants anchor us to the Savior and propel us along the path that leads to our heavenly home. The power of covenants helps us maintain the mighty change of heart, deepen our conversion to the Lord, and receive Christ’s image more fully in our countenance.¹² But a half-hearted commitment to our covenants will not guarantee us anything.¹³ We may be tempted to equivocate, throw our old ways in calm water, or bury our

weapons of rebellion with the handles sticking out. But an ambivalent commitment to our covenants will not open the door to the sanctifying power of Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ.

Our commitment to keep our covenants should not be conditional or vary with changing circumstances in our lives. Our constancy to God should be like the dependable Congo River that flows near the Kinshasa Temple. This river, unlike most rivers in the world, has constant flow all year¹⁴ and pours nearly 11 million gallons (41.5 million L) of water per second into the Atlantic Ocean.

The Savior invited His disciples to be this dependable and steadfast. He said, “Wherefore, settle this in your hearts, that ye will do the things which I shall teach, and command you.”¹⁵ A “settled” determination to keep our covenants allows for the full realization of God’s promise of enduring joy.¹⁶

Many faithful Latter-day Saints have demonstrated that they are “settled” in keeping their covenants with God and are forever changed. Let me tell you about three such individuals—Brother Banza Mucioko, Sister Banza Régine, and Brother Mbuyi Nkitabungi.

In 1977 the Banzas lived in Kinshasa in the country of Zaire, now known as the Democratic Republic of the Congo. They were highly respected in their Protestant church community. Because of their talents, their church arranged for their young family to go to Switzerland to study and provided a university scholarship.

While in Geneva, on the bus route to school, Brother Banza frequently saw a small meetinghouse with the name “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.” He wondered, “Does Jesus Christ have Saints now, in the latter days?” He eventually decided to go and see.

Brother and Sister Banza were greeted warmly at the branch. They asked some of the persistent questions they had about the nature of God, such as, “If God is a spirit, like the wind, how could we be created in His likeness? How could He sit on a throne?” They had never received a satisfactory answer until the missionaries explained restored doctrine in a brief lesson. When the missionaries



left, the Banzas looked at each other and said, “Isn’t this the truth that we have heard?” They continued coming to church and meeting with the missionaries. They knew that baptism in the restored Church of Jesus Christ would have consequences. They would be stripped of their scholarships, their visas would be revoked, and they and their two young children would be required to leave Switzerland. They chose to be baptized and confirmed in October 1979.

Two weeks after their baptism, Brother and Sister Banza returned to Kinshasa as the first and second members of the Church in their country. The members of the Geneva Branch stayed in contact with them and helped them connect with Church leaders. The Banzas were encouraged to faithfully await the promised time when God would establish His Church in Zaire.

Meanwhile, another exchange student from Zaire, Brother Mbuyi, was studying in Belgium. He was baptized in 1980 in the Brussels Ward. Soon thereafter, he served a full-time mission to England. And God worked His miracles. Brother Mbuyi returned to Zaire as the third member of the Church in his country. With parental permission, Church meetings were held in his family home. In February 1986 a petition was made for official government recognition of the Church. The signatures of three citizens of Zaire were required. The three happy signatories of the petition were Brother Banza, Sister Banza, and Brother Mbuyi.

These stalwart members knew the truth when they heard it; they made a covenant at baptism that anchored them to the Savior. They metaphorically threw their old ways into a churning waterfall with no intention of retrieving them. The covenant path was never easy. Political turmoil, infrequent contact with Church leaders, and challenges inherent in building a community of Saints might have deterred less-committed individuals. But Brother and Sister Banza and Brother Mbuyi persevered in their faith. They were present at the dedication of the Kinshasa Temple, 33 years after they signed the petition that led to the official recognition of the Church in Zaire.



Banza Mucioko, Banza Régine, and their sons



Mbuyi Nkitabungi as a full-time missionary

The Banzas are here in the Conference Center today. They are accompanied by their two sons, Junior and Phil, and daughters-in-law, Annie and Youyou. In 1986, Junior and Phil were the first two individuals baptized into the Church in Zaire. Brother Mbuyi is watching these proceedings from Kinshasa with his wife, Maguy, and their five children.

These pioneers understand the meaning and consequences of covenants through which they have been brought “to the knowledge of the Lord their God, and to rejoice in Jesus Christ their Redeemer.”¹⁷

How do we anchor ourselves to the Savior and remain faithful like these and many tens of thousands of Congolese Saints who followed them and millions of others throughout the world? The Savior taught us how. Each week we partake of the sacrament and make a covenant with our Heavenly Father. We promise to link our identity with the Savior’s by pledging our willingness to take upon us His name, to always remember Him, and to keep His commandments.¹⁸ Conscientiously preparing for and worthily making these covenants each week anchors us to the Savior, helps us internalize our commitment,¹⁹ and powerfully propels us along the covenant path.

I invite you to commit to a life-long process of discipleship. Make

and keep covenants. Throw your old ways into deep, churning waterfalls. Completely bury your weapons of rebellion with no handles sticking out. Because of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, making covenants with a real intent to reliably honor them will bless your life forever. You will become more like the Savior as you always remember Him, follow Him, and adore Him. I testify that He is the firm foundation. He is dependable, and His promises are sure. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. The dedication took place on Palm Sunday, April 14, 2019, as assigned by President Russell M. Nelson.
2. The artist, David Meikle, painted *Congo Falls* working from photos of Kiubu Falls. The Kiubu Falls are located approximately 249 miles (400 km) north of Lubumbashi in the southeastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.
3. These objects were known as *inkisi* in Kikongo and as *fétiches* in French. The word translates into English as “amulets,” “talismans,” or “fetishes.”
4. David Meikle also painted *Nzongo Falls* working from photos of the falls. The Nzongo Falls are located approximately 81 miles (130 km) from Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo. The river at these falls became known as *Nzadi Inkisi*, or “River of Fetishes.” The name reflects the practice described in the text.
5. In AD 1000, the heads of the Icelandic clans met together for their annual, two-week *Allting*, an informal assembly that made laws that would be binding on all. A man named Thorgeir was asked to make the

decision for everyone about conversion to Christianity or continuing to worship Norse gods. After three days of seclusion in his tent, Thorgeir announced his decision: the clans would become Christian. As Thorgeir was returning to his village, he took his cherished Norse-god idols and cast them into a waterfall, now known as *Godafoss*, or “Waterfall of the Gods.” This action signified Thorgeir’s complete conversion to Christianity.

6. Alma 23:13; 24:17–18.
7. See Alma 23:6; David A. Bednar, “Converted unto the Lord,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2012, 106–9.
8. See Ezekiel 11:19–20; 2 Corinthians 3:3.
9. See Romans 10:14, 17.
10. See *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service*, rev. ed. (2018), 203.
11. See Dallin H. Oaks, “Taking upon Us the Name of Jesus Christ,” *Ensign*, May 1985, 80–83.
12. See Alma 5:12–14.
13. See Doctrine and Covenants 82:10.
14. The Congo River is the deepest, second-most powerful, and ninth-longest river in the world. Because it crosses the equator twice, at least one section of the river is always in a rainy season, resulting in regular water flow. The flow is relatively consistent all year long, averaging 41,000 cubic meters of water per second, even though the flow rate may vary over the years (range of 23,000–75,000 cubic meters per second).
15. Joseph Smith Translation, Luke 14:28 (in Luke 14:27, footnote b).
16. See 2 Nephi 9:18; Russell M. Nelson, “Joy and Spiritual Survival,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2016, 81–84. President Nelson said, “Joy is a gift for the faithful” (page 84).
17. Alma 37:9.
18. See Doctrine and Covenants 20:77. In the mission leadership seminar in June 2019, after partaking of the sacrament, before beginning his formal message, President Russell M. Nelson said: “A thought has occurred to me that my making a covenant today is a lot more important than the message that I have prepared. I made a covenant as I partook of the sacrament that I would be willing to take upon me the name of Jesus Christ and that I am willing to obey His commandments. Often, I hear the expression that we partake of the sacrament to renew covenants made at baptism. While that’s true, it’s much more than that. I’ve made a new covenant. You have made new covenants. . . . Now in return for which He makes the statement that we will always have His Spirit to be with us. What a blessing!”
19. See 3 Nephi 18:12.



Banza Régine and Banza Mucioko



Mbuyi Nkitabungi and Mbuyi Maguy