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A Valuable Book for the Increasingly International Church

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A VALUABLE BOOK FOR THE INCREASINGLY INTERNATIONAL CHURCH

Jeff Lindsay

Abstract: *As the Church expands among the many nations, peoples, and tongues of the earth, new challenges arise that require the organization and the members of the Church to better meet the needs of the peoples in various nations and to cope with the specific challenges that may exist there. In this article I review a valuable book that can help in that expanding effort.*

Review of Reid L. Neilson and Wayne D. Crosby, eds., *Lengthening Our Stride: Globalization of the Church* (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, and Deseret Book, 2018), 400 pp. \$27.99.

It was a rainy day here in Shanghai when I learned of the passing of President Monson. It was a day on which I would contemplate his legacy and the new role that Russell M. Nelson would play. I thought about President Nelson's unique ties to China and his recent visit to Shanghai, where he shared some of his thoughts on the international role of the Church. He is profoundly qualified and prepared to continue and accelerate the momentum of the Church internationally and to further develop its potential to do good and make life better for people across the globe.¹

1. On some of the unique abilities and attributes of President Nelson, see Jeff Lindsay, "Learning from Russell M. Nelson's Response to an Inspired Recommendation from President Kimball," *Mormanity*, Oct. 8, 2017, <http://mormanity.blogspot.com/2017/10/learning-from-president-nelsons.html>. See also "The Miracle of Elder Nelson in China," *Mormanity*, Oct. 26, 2015, <https://mormanity.blogspot.com/2015/10/the-miracle-of-elder-nelson-in-china.html> and "A Lesson From Russell M. Nelson's On-the-Fly Heart Surgery Innovation: Sometimes Revelation Can Be Detailed and Technical," *Mormanity*, Aug. 16, 2015, <https://mormanity.blogspot.com/2015/08/a-lesson-from-russel-m-nelsons.html>.

On rainy days I try to take a bus to work instead of riding my bike, giving me some extra time to read. On my bus ride on that particular day, I took the wrapping off a newly received book, *Lengthening Our Stride: Globalization of the Church*. It would prove to be the most inspiring bus ride I've had in a long time. What I read that morning influenced my thinking when I learned later in the day of President Monson's passing. Many times since then, I've been drawn to that book and its varied perspectives from multiple authors. It has been a valuable read, and I would recommend it to anyone seeking to understand the growing international presence of the Church, the role it can play in blessing others around the globe whether they care about our missionary message or not, and the challenges yet to be overcome in many lands in a world that desperately needs the Gospel to be preached to every people and in every tongue.

Lengthening Our Stride is divided into five parts containing 21 chapters from a host of prominent thinkers and servants with deep international experience. Part 1, "Poverty and Humanitarian Work," discusses some of the global needs addressed by the teachings, programs, and resources of the Church. Part 2, "Public Perceptions and Relations," deals with the international public relations progress the Church has made and ongoing challenges still to overcome as well as perceptions of the Church related to its humanitarian work. Part 3, "Peacemaking and Diplomacy," is a reminder of the need to continue proclaiming and promoting peace in spite of the ongoing tragedy of war between nations and among peoples, one of the most crucial things the global Church can do in spite of our small numbers. I found particular value in Part 4, "Religious Freedom and Oppression," a section treating the brutal reality that many people in the world lack religious liberty, a need often marginalized these days when it can be just as important to many as access to food and water. Finally there is Part 5, "Growth and Globalization," dealing with some of the challenges and opportunities the Church faces in the global community, including issues such as migration, tension between religion and law, and the tension between the Church and the Islamic world.

The vision of the book expressed in the editor's preface captured my imagination and turned my mind to the inspiring words of President Kimball many years ago when he expressed the need for the Church to prepare for its global mission.² Those words, spoken while

2. See Spencer W. Kimball, "The Uttermost Parts of the Earth," *Ensign*, July 1979, <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1979/07/the-uttermost-parts-of-the-earth?lang=eng>. This could well have been reprinted in *Lengthening Our Stride*.

I was on my mission in the international hotspot of Switzerland (where I taught people from 56 countries, by my count), inspired me to sign up for Mandarin Chinese classes when I got back to BYU to continue my chemical engineering education. Those few extra-major classes gave me a head start when I came to live in China decades later and helped open doors for numerous friendships and cherished experiences. If only I had been more diligent!

The decision to begin the book with consideration of the painful needs of people in many parts of the world was a wise one, in my opinion. It sets the stage for *why* the Church needs to be increasingly global. It is not about expanding numbers of members but expanding the good that the Church can do in a world with perpetual poverty and pain. Many of the programs and activities of the Church as well as the service and zeal of numerous members internationally will often make little sense unless one understands the caring that ultimately motivates the globalization of the Church and the expansion of its influence in the world.

As I began reading Part 1, I was completely captivated by Valerie Hudson's essay, "Demographic and Gender-Related Trends" (1–14), a rather tame title compared to her moving and eye-opening discussion on gendercide and the "profound devaluation of female life" in many parts of the globe. I recalled the Hmong woman we once had over for dinner, a refugee from genocide in Laos who had been able to flee to Wisconsin, where we lived at the time. In our conversation, she explained to us in all seriousness that as a woman, her opinion did not matter and that her voice and her life were just "a leaf blowing in the wind." We tried our best to persuade her otherwise, but it was not easy. In her experiences and in later tragic experiences we would share in part with her older daughter, my wife and I could see up close some of the sorrow the devaluation of female life brings.

Hudson, well known as a Mormon feminist and intellectual, has a perspective that needs to be shared and contemplated. After raising the devastating problems of gendercide, devaluation, and abuse facing women across the globe and exploring the different stages of evolving misogyny in society (sometimes celebrated as "liberation" and "progress"), Hudson offers a profound vision of how these problems can be cured: "The restored gospel of Jesus Christ is the strongest and most progressive force for women in the world today. The most profound feminist act one can commit is to share the gospel" (9). She explores the revolutionary views the restored gospel brings and points out that the Church is the place to find the kind of men who have been trained to

respect women, to be faithful to them, to actively take part in raising children, and to abhor abuse and neglect.

As the Church rises in support of women and as priesthood holders begin to conceive of themselves as part of a covenant brotherhood that has sworn to uphold, among other things, the equality, safety, and flourishing of all the daughters of God, you will see the eyes of all women turn to this Church. And as the eyes of the women turn and they begin to assess their men according to the Lord's criteria, you will see men begin to turn as well. For men are clearly no victors in any of the forms of civilizational misogyny — they suffer profoundly as well. Misogyny breeds misery for men as well as women. (13)

How great is the need to let the women and men of this planet know who they are!

There are many other outstanding chapters. Sharon Eubank's discussion of LDS Charities in "Zion's Foundations" (39–56) reminds us of the importance of our humanitarian work — not because of its potential to lead to missionary work later, as many wrongly assume, but because our brothers and sisters around the globe are in need and need our love. Many underestimate how sincere and intense is the Latter-day Saint yearning for the physical welfare of others. My years in China have shown me numerous examples of Latter-day Saints doing much to help others faced with poverty or illness with absolutely no hope of converting others or expectation that missionary work would be done. Silent, selfless service abounds in the Church and is one of the key things that members naturally do around the world on their own and with the help of Church organization as well.

Other essays I particularly enjoyed include Cole Durham's significant "Protection of Religious Liberties" (207–224), coming from one of the world's great advocates of religious liberty. He critiques the world's downplaying of religious liberty, often swept aside as something we can ignore until we've taken care of poverty and other needs. Here he quotes Paul A. Marshall: "It is a moral travesty of the highest order to maintain that because people are hungry or cold, it is legitimate to repress their beliefs as well" (209). Exactly. Durham treats some of the secular and political threats to religious liberty and discusses initiatives to preserve it. The work he has launched needs ongoing attention and support. Thank you, Brother Durham!

William Atkin’s “Let Them Worship How, Where, or What They May” (199–206), emphasizing the importance of religious liberty, is another valuable contribution, as is “Erosion of Religious Freedom: Impact on Churches” by Michael K. Young (225–242), former president and chancellor of the University of Utah.

On the other hand, one of the weaknesses of this excellent book is that some of the essays are dated. This is, perhaps, to be expected, as the essays are chosen from among those presented to the International Society³ over a number of years. For example, Michael Young’s valuable contribution is from a 2011 presentation. Much of that essay retains its currency, but a particularly important and alarming portion addresses a pending (at the time) case before the US Supreme Court that threatened the elimination of the “ministerial exemption” allowing churches to select their own clergy without complying with local employment laws and their anti-discrimination policies (232–233). Young implied that the possible outcomes of that case could include a requirement to apply all employment laws in selecting bishops, stake presidents, and all the other lay leaders we call in the Church. The concern was legitimate and remains a cause for vigilance, but fortunately the case of *Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church and School v. EEOC* was decided in favor of religious freedom with a 9–0 vote.⁴ That decision was issued Jan. 12, 2012 — now six years ago. An update of some kind would have strengthened the book.

Elder Lance B. Wickman’s essay, “The Church in the Twenty-First Century” (59–76), was from 2008. It discussed the rapidly evolving status of the church in a variety of nations, including Vietnam, China, and one disguised as “Andalasia” due to the sensitive nature of the topic at the time. In the decade since Elder Wickman’s presentation, much has changed and the book would be stronger if there were at least an addendum of some kind to update the information (though the sensitive nature of the topic in that land is still painfully current). Still, the basic issues and the nature of the challenges we face globally remain valid, and for places like Russia and China, religious liberty remains a delicate issue requiring faith, patience, and especially caution from members,

3. As explained in the book’s foreword, the International Society was formed in 1987 to bring together the experiences and expertise of LDS professionals working around the globe, whether in “academia, government, business, or law” (xii).

4. “*Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church and School v. EEOC*,” *SCOTUS Blog* (Supreme Court of the United States), January 11, 2012; <http://www.scotusblog.com/case-files/cases/hosanna-tabor-evangelical-lutheran-church-and-school-v-eEOC/>, accessed Feb. 24, 2018.

including visitors who may not understand local regulations. In China, for example, there has been remarkable kindness from the government shown toward the expatriate congregations of the Church, but the healthy relationship with authorities requires careful observance of the rules we have in order to maintain trust. I constantly worry that one well-meaning tourist or new resident could result in painful setbacks. (Important Safety Tip: Please don't try to pass out religious literature or do missionary work of some kind on your visit to China!)

A few others essays would also benefit from an update of some kind, perhaps on a website to support the book. For example, Warner P. Woodworth's chapter, "Private Humanitarian Initiatives and International Perceptions of the Church" (77–92), is from a 2008 presentation. There is so much more that has happened since then. Elder Anthony Perkins' "Out of Obscurity" (93–114) also helps us understand how the Church has risen in visibility in Asia and elsewhere, but much has happened since his 2012 presentation. Michael Otterson's essay, "In the Public Eye" (115–132), gives his inside perspective on public relations progress for the Church around the world from his role as managing director of the public affairs department of the Church (at the time), but that was back in 2012 when he gave the speech printed here. His discussion of the impact of LDS celebrities and politicians is now somewhat dated, though still useful. I'll also give bonus points to Otterson for mentioning LDS bloggers as having something of a role in the public perception of the Church.

The book would have been stronger with a 2017 addition covering recent developments such as the refugee crisis from the Near East and elsewhere and some recent developments on various continents. To be completely current is an impossible moving target for a book such as this, but it would have been helpful to get some updates and added perspectives from 2017.

In spite of this weakness, this is an inspiring book that will prepare us for the years ahead.

We are an international Church, and many more of us need now to lengthen our stride to step into the global community. President Russell M. Nelson will continue to be a powerful example of that. In spite of his age, I was deeply impressed when he strode into the ballroom in Shanghai where foreign LDS members meet and walked to the stage. As a very tall man, his physical stride is truly impressive. Ninety-two years old at that time, yet so vigorous. But it is his spiritual stride that will challenge even the fastest of us. May we lengthen ours

and prepare for the ongoing globalization of the Church, that we may better bless the lives of our brothers and sisters in every land, whether they care about our missionary message or not.

Jeffrey Dean Lindsay and his wife Kendra are residents of Shanghai, China. Jeff has been providing online materials defending the LDS faith for over 20 years, primarily at JeffLindsay.com. His Mormonity blog (<http://mormonity.blogspot.com>) has been in operation since 2004. He also wrote weekly for Orson Scott Card's Nauvoo Times (NauvooTimes.com) from 2012 through 2016. Jeff has a PhD in chemical engineering from BYU and is a registered US patent agent. He serves as head of intellectual property for Asia Pulp and Paper, one of the world's largest paper companies. Formerly, he was associate professor at the Institute of Paper Science (now the Renewable Bioproducts Institute) and at Georgia Tech, then went into R&D at Kimberly-Clark Corporation, eventually becoming corporate patent strategist and senior research fellow. He then spent several years at Innovationedge in Neenah, Wisconsin, helping many companies with innovation and IP strategy. Jeff has been in China for five years, where he works with various APP companies and mills in advancing their intellectual property and innovation. Since 2015, Jeff has been recognized as a leading IP strategist by Intellectual Asset Magazine in their global IAM300 listing based on peer input. He is also lead author of *Conquering Innovation Fatigue* (John Wiley & Sons, 2009). He is active in the chemical engineering community and was recently named a Fellow of the American Institute of Chemical Engineers. Jeff served a mission in the German-speaking Switzerland Zurich Mission and currently serves as counselor in the district presidency of the Shanghai International District. He and his wife Kendra are the parents of four boys and have nine grandchildren.