

Introduction: A Recommissioning of Latter-day Saint Historians

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SCHOLARLY OBSERVERS OF the Christian tradition—of which The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a part—are beginning to expand their visions of a Christian past, present, and future to embrace a truly global Christianity.¹ In a groundbreaking article, “Eusebius Tries Again,” missiologist Andrew F. Walls argues that “The situation of the global church at the end of the second millennium calls us to a reconception of the task of the Christian historian and offers a new vision to direct the study, teaching, and writing of Christian history.” However, he is not merely calling for a retooling of existing chroniclers of the religious past. He believes this paradigm shift will “require a new breed of church historians with all the skills and virtues nourished in the older school but with a range of others as well, skills and virtues demanded by the new environment of Christianity in the southern continents.” Walls concludes with a professional call to arms: “It is time for the recommissioning of church historians.”²

1. See especially Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); and Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).
2. Andrew F. Walls, “Eusebius Tries Again: Reconceiving the Study of Christian History,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 24, no. 3 (2000): 111.

This same revolution needs to happen in Mormon studies. While a doctoral candidate in religious studies, I was invited to help coauthor a historiographic survey on international Mormonism, given my research interest in the expansion of American religions into the Pacific basin.³ The lead author of the essay asked me to collect, reference, and summarize everything that has been written about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in post-World War II Asia and Oceania. I wish I could say it was an overwhelming task, but it was not. I was disappointed to learn how little has been written about the international Church in these regions.⁴ Most of the sources I discovered were short periodical pieces brimming with testimony and faith but lacking scholarly depth and analysis. Many were written by returned-missionaries-turned-amateur-historians and by second- and third-generation members who had immigrated to America. Coming to terms with the lack of histories written by local members was perhaps the most disheartening part of the project.

As I have contemplated the international lacuna in our documented past, I have come up with a number of reasons to suggest why we have struggled. To begin with, some Mormon historians mistakenly feel that international Church history is too recent to chronicle. Many of the countries currently friendly to Church proselyting have only been open since World War II or, in the case of Eastern Europe, since the fall of communism. Most of the historical actors are still alive, they point out. Second, the hub of Mormon studies is in northern Utah, particularly at Brigham Young University (BYU), Utah Valley University, and Utah State University. Although

3. See Kahlile B. Mehr, Mark L. Grover, Reid L. Neilson, Donald Q. Cannon, and Grant Underwood, "Growth and Internationalization: The LDS Church Since 1945," in *Excavating Mormon Pasts: The New Historiography of the Last Half Century*, ed. Lavina Fielding Anderson and Newell G. Bringhurst (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2004), 199–228.
4. The scholarship of R. Lanier Britsch on Mormonism in the Pacific Basin and Asia is a noteworthy exception to this rule.

these intermountain universities offer a number of courses on Mormonism, I am aware of only one class on global Mormonism, The International Church, at BYU. Most Utah students are more familiar and seemingly interested in the foundational periods of Mormonism, essentially the presidential administrations of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young. A lack of foreign-language proficiency is a third reason why English-speaking scholars have shied from the international Church. The level of fluency required and attained by most young missionaries abroad is conversational at best and often does not include mastery of foreign writing systems. Lastly, many historians within the Church wrongly assume that international Church history lacks the pizzazz of early American Mormonism, with its angels, visions, golden plates, and seer stones. Yet the study of global Mormonism offers a wonderful window into larger scholarly themes such as ethnicity, enculturation, transnationalism, globalization, and regionalism.

I am, therefore, not surprised when many of my colleagues say, “I don’t do international Church history.” But just as scholar Ann Braude argued for the primacy of women’s history in the larger field of American religious studies, I likewise maintain that international Church history *is* Church history. Church members need to realize that much of our most interesting history occurred abroad. We must remember that the Restoration of the gospel continues every time a new country is dedicated by apostolic authority for proselyting. In other words, the original 1830 New York Restoration, was replicated in Great Britain in 1837, Japan in 1901, Brazil in 1935, Ghana in 1970, Russia in 1989, and Mongolia in 1992. Therefore, Latter-day Saint historians need to refocus their scholarly gaze from Palmyra, Kirtland, Nauvoo, and Salt Lake City to Tokyo, Santiago, Warsaw, Johannesburg, and Nairobi. In the coming years, these international cities and their histories will become increasingly important to our sacred history. We need to tell these non-North American stories with greater frequency and with better skill. I hope this volume of essays will be a small wave in a sea change.

Fortunately, there are some bright spots in the study of global Mormonism. Over the past seventeen years, the International Society, backed by Brigham Young University's David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies, Marriott School of Management, J. Reuben Clark Law School, Department of Educational Leadership, and Alumni Association, has hosted an annual conference in Provo, Utah, on the globalization of Mormonism. Past themes include "Education, the Church, and Globalization," "The Challenge of Sharing Religious Beliefs in a Global Setting," "Out of Obscurity: Public Affairs and the Worldwide Church," "Muslims and Latter-day Saints: Building Bridges," "BYU's Role in Assisting the International Mission of the Church," and "Church Development in the Developing World" (see appendix for complete list of past conference themes). Following each symposium, the proceedings have been collected, edited, published in magazine form, and made available to International Society members, as well as the larger Church and academic community.

As both an undergraduate and graduate student—and now as an assistant professor—at Brigham Young University, I have attended a number of these yearly gatherings. I have left these meetings both educated and edified about the many opportunities and challenges facing The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the twenty-first century. Desiring my students, colleagues, and fellow Latter-day Saints to likewise be up-to-date on the recent trajectories and contours of international Mormonism, I concluded that these conference papers warranted a wider distribution channel to reach a larger audience. Taken together, these annual addresses constitute perhaps the most important public dialogue on the globalization of Mormonism. After surveying the past decade of conference proceedings, I selected twenty essays for publication, which I have organized into five themed parts: "Joseph Smith, Mormonism, and the World," "Missionary Work in a Global Village," "Humanitarian Outreach and the Latter-day Saints," "Church Education Initiatives in an Era of Globalization," and "International Challenges Facing the Church." Although some of the statistics in a few of the essays

are outdated, the larger questions they raise and issues they tackle still resonate today.

In the first part, “Joseph Smith, Mormonism, and the World,” four Church leaders and scholars survey the impact of the Prophet Joseph Smith and his American religion from a global perspective. In the opening essay, “Joseph Smith and the Rise of a World Religion,” religious educator Robert L. Millet surveys the scriptures and words of latter-day prophets concerning the prophesied rise of the Church of Jesus Christ in the final dispensation. He offers ten markers of a world religion and suggests how Mormonism will eventually fulfill them all. Historian Grant Underwood, in “Joseph Smith’s Legacy in Latin America and the Pacific,” describes the Prophet’s inspired view of the identity and destiny of the native inhabitants of Oceania and the New World. He argues that Church leaders have consistently taught that the descendants of Lehi have a special place in God’s latter-day work. In “The Prophet’s Impact on Europe, Then and Now,” Elder Keith K. Hilbig looks back on Joseph Smith’s contributions to the gospel in Great Britain through the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Moreover, he describes the Church’s more recent expansion throughout Eastern Europe. Lastly, Elder Robert S. Wood discusses the issues of developmentalism and multiculturalism from a Church perspective in “‘A Babe upon Its Mother’s Lap’: Church Development in a Developing World.” He reflects on how far the Church has come since 1834, when Joseph Smith prophesied that it would someday fill not only the Americas but also the world.

Part 2, “Missionary Work in a Global Village,” focuses on how Mormonism has spread throughout the world through its impressive proselyting program, while also discussing contemporary evangelism challenges. In “Sharing the Gospel in a Global Setting,” Elder Lance B. Wickman describes his and Apostle Dallin H. Oaks’s contribution to the Emory University School of Law’s project on law and religion. He offers an excellent overview of the historical background, aims, and message of the Church’s missionary program. Attorney Hugh M. Matheson, in “Challenges from Religious Communities

in *Spreading the Gospel*,” relates his experiences working as the Church’s international legal counsel in Africa and as the director of public affairs for the Africa Area. He shares some of the Church’s ongoing challenges as it seeks to proclaim its message to the African people. Latter-day Saints not only need to protect their own religious freedom but also others’ religious freedom, according to the eleventh article of faith, argues legal scholar W. Cole Durham Jr. in “The Impact of Secularization on Proselytism in Europe: A Minority Religion Perspective.” Using Europe as a case study, he warns of modern-day Sherems and Korihors dressed in the guise of secularization, who threaten religious minorities and proselyting success. Finally, Middle East scholar James A. Toronto provides a survey of Church involvement in the Muslim world in “Challenges to Establishing the Church in the Middle East.” He concludes his comments by suggesting a number of opportunities and challenges facing Mormonism in that region of the world.

“Humanitarian Outreach and the Latter-day Saints,” part 3, describes the Church’s involvement with humanitarian projects around the globe. Elder James O. Mason discusses the scriptural mandate for the Church and its membership to help the poor in “Humanitarian Aid: The Challenge of Self-Reliance.” He also explains how the Lord and His prophets have outlined this temporal uplifting according to spiritual principles. In the “Panel on Church Welfare Initiatives,” three Church welfare and humanitarian-aid administrators reflect on their own temporal stewardships in the international Church. Harold C. Brown tells of his experiences helping to administer the Church’s welfare program worldwide. A. Terry Oakes discusses what the Church is doing to help the downtrodden find employment. The third panelist, E. Kent Hinckley, discusses the activities of the Production and Distribution division of Welfare Services. The final essay in this section, “Building Bridges of Understanding through Church Humanitarian Assistance,” by Garry R. Flake, provides an overview of how the Church blesses lives and strengthens relation-

ships with individuals, peoples, and governments through its generous aid programs.

This volume's fourth part, "Church Education Initiatives in an Era of Globalization," looks at how Church leaders and laity have sought—and are still seeking—to expand learning and training opportunities to help worldwide church members improve their spiritual and temporal lives. Elder Joe J. Christensen, in "The Globalization of the Church Educational System," chronicles the growth and development of the Church's schooling organization. He describes the rise and internationalization of seminaries and institutes. In "Education, the Church, and Globalization," Elder John K. Carmack makes it clear that President Gordon B. Hinckley and other Church leaders are committed to lifting up the global poor through education. The Perpetual Education Fund will provide increased opportunities for Church members to create a Zion society by both giving and receiving learning opportunities. The Church is constantly trying to improve its educational offerings in order to help its members find spiritual and temporal success, religious educator A. Bryan Weston relates in "Education and Provident Living in an Expanding Church." He describes how the international institute programs help young adults stay anchored to the gospel. Two scholars of education, E. Vance Randall and Chris Wilson, in "Private Education Initiatives by Latter-day Saints," offer a historical survey of Church involvement in primary, secondary, and postsecondary schooling. They also highlight what individual Latter-day Saints are accomplishing through private educational programs based on gospel principles.

"International Challenges Facing the Church," the final section, contains five essays that complicate the picture of future Church expansion in the twenty-first century. Elder Alexander B. Morrison begins by appraising major global trends and issues that humankind will be facing in the coming years in "The Tumultuous Twenty-first Century: Turbulence and Uncertainty." He suggests some worrisome implications of globalization, including a failing environment, political upheaval, pandemics, and a growing gap between rich and poor

worldwide. In “Family and the Global Church: Cultural and Political Challenges,” Elder Bruce D. Porter links the growth of the Church internationally with doctrines professed in the Church’s “Proclamation on the Family,” which seem at odds with many secular philosophies. He suggests five ways in which the Church will continue to progress, despite global challenges. There are a variety of moral issues inherent in the globalization of any organization, including the Church, David A. Shuler contends in “An Ethical Dilemma: The Imposition of Values on Other Cultures.” He reexamines the notions of change, idealism, values, and development as they relate to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Elder Charles Didier, in “The Paradox of Religious Pluralism and Religious Uniqueness,” describes how Latter-day Saints must advocate the truthfulness of the Restoration while maintaining ecumenical relationships in a religiously plural world. He maintains that Church members are obligated to proclaim what they believe to be true. Lastly, President Dieter F. Uchtdorf makes the case that although there are great challenges in the world today, there are also great opportunities for the Church and its members, in “The Church in a Cross-Cultural World.” Latter-day Saints need to be lights unto the world through their beliefs and actions in order for the message of the Restoration to take hold in every land.

WHEN I FIRST conceived of this book project, I casually bounced the idea off Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, publications director for the Religious Studies Center at Brigham Young University. In characteristic fashion, Richard immediately grasped the idea, calculated its scholarly contribution, and committed both of us to its prompt publication. My mind was spinning as I walked back to my office that spring day—not only does Richard publish prodigiously himself, he empowers others to do likewise, I had quickly learned. Within days, he had secured the administrative approval and financial backing of Religious Education’s Administrative Council. I am grateful for their support and trust, especially from Terry B. Ball, Dennis A. Wright, and Arnold K. Garr.

Having secured the sponsorship of the Religious Studies Center and Religious Education, I next contacted Paul Hyer, the current executive director of the International Society, to see if his organization would be interested in my plan. Not only did Paul likewise see merit in the proposal, but he also became a tireless advocate of the project, acted as a facilitator between our campus organizations, and kindly agreed to write the book's foreword. This volume would have never seen the light of day without his smile and work. The International Society's current board of directors—Paul D. Rytting (President), Paul Hyer (Executive Director), William F. Atkin, Roger E. Baker, J. Michael Busenbark, Lew W. Cramer, W. Cole Durham Jr., William "Mac" Epps, Cynthia Saldanha Halliday, Michael Judson, Cory Leonard, E. Vance Randall, Jeffrey Ringer, and Blaine Tueller—are to be thanked for their encouragement, as are the many conference planning committee members and editors who originally prepared the annual conference proceedings for publication.

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