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Book Review:
Even Unto Bloodshed: An LDS Perspective on War, by Duane Boyce

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Boyce, Duane (2015) *Even Unto Bloodshed: An LDS Perspective on War*, Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books.

A typical LDS family reads the Book of Mormon every morning. A participating young child, as soon as she can understand the language, is thus exposed very early to 1 Nephi 4:7-19 in which Nephi kills Laban for the good of his people. A little later on, she hears about the Ammonites giving up their weapons of war and burying them in the ground, then allowing themselves to be killed rather than to shed the blood of an enemy. Then she hears about Captain Moroni, a righteous man who counsels his people to defend themselves for their families...and their religion (Alma 43:47.) He and others refrain from killing some of the time, but do not hesitate to do so at other times (Alma 44:17.)

When she gets to the Old Testament, in Sunday School or at home, she learns the sixth commandment, thou shalt not kill. No exceptions. Except that David, in 1 Samuel 17, relying on the Lord, does not hesitate to kill Goliath and is celebrated for it. In fact he is described as chosen by the Lord (1 Samuel 16:7.)

Another child sings the Star Spangled Banner (hymn 340 in our hymnal) in sacrament meeting, gets to the last verse and comes to the words, "Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just..." (Hmm. This was written during the War of 1812. Was the cause just in that case? We'll have to ask Francis Scott Key.) Hymns 246, 248, 250, 251, 253 and others are replete with military terms and symbols. In a famous painting, Washington is shown praying in the forest during the Revolutionary War. The book of Psalms has much battle language.

A third child reads in the Sermon on the Mount, "...resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also...love your enemies...do good to them that hate you..." (Matt. 5:39-44; 3 Ne. 12:39-44.)

A fourth child reads in Revelation 12:7, "And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon: and the dragon fought and his angels."

I would like to be a fly on the wall during a family home evening when these things are discussed by the family with these children!

Duane Boyce, in his book, *Even Unto Bloodshed: An LDS Perspective on War*, considers scriptures and related texts, such as the above, which relate to matters of war and violence, particularly from an LDS point of view. He concentrates mainly on the Book of Mormon although he alludes to other scriptures and texts occasionally. Historical matters such as wars in Europe and elsewhere in the world, or in which the USA has been involved, are mentioned only rarely in this book.

War and violence should be matters of great concern to us. Look at D. & C. 45:39, written in 1831: "Ye hear of wars in foreign lands; but behold, I say unto you, they are nigh, even at your doors, and not many years hence ye shall hear of wars in your own lands." This might well refer to the U. S. Civil War (War Between the States), but disquietingly it says "wars", not "war." Or consider Joseph Smith's comment (cited in Boyce, p. 135), that "it may be that the Saints will have to beat their ploughs into swords, for it will not do for men to sit down patiently and see their children destroyed" (TPJS, p. 366.) Or realize that the scripture cited above also says "lands", not "land." The Church has members in many nations, and war is an occurrence or may be one in many places in years to come. Clearly, the topic of war is a matter about which we need to be informed. Is there Church policy on war? What do the scriptures say about it? What do we as individuals, or a people, do about it if it comes our way?

This is a topic not often discussed, although there may be occasional sacrament meeting talks or Sunday School lessons that address it. We can do better. But can we settle all questions in that time? Of course not.

One of the reviewers cited on the back of the book (Daniel C. Peterson) says, "The question of how (or whether) participation in war can be reconciled with Christian ethics has occupied the mind of such great thinkers as Augustine, Aquinas, and Grotius. Latter-day Saints, however, have given little systematic attention to the matter thus far. But it's time. This book brilliantly opens a long overdue conversation..." But, you say: "Well, the account of Captain Moroni in Alma clearly indicates that we can defend ourselves against aggression. What more is there to be said?"

Actually, unbeknownst to many members, there have been quite a few notable Mormon pacifists. I suppose most readers of this review will have heard of Hugh Nibley, one of the foremost LDS scholars of the 20th century. Would it surprise them to know that Professor Nibley, who wrote scads of stuff about the Book of Mormon, and whose works can be found on Deseret Bookstore shelves and in the BYU library, advocated the view that the Book of Mormon is a pacifist book? (Pacifism is defined in this book (p. 17) as the view that “war is prohibited in all circumstances as a matter of principle.”) This represents Nibley’s view, and his writings are discussed extensively in Boyce’s book. Would it surprise readers to know that J. Reuben Clark, Jr., who was a member of the First Presidency for many years and who was a brilliant legal mind, was also a pacifist? (He is mentioned in this book, although briefly. For further treatment of his views, see article by Martin B. Hickman and Ray C. Hillam and President Clark’s 1946 conference talk, as referenced (number 38) in “The Decision to Drop the Bomb: Personal Observations, Study, and Reflections,” by this reviewer, in this issue of SquareTwo.) As also, Eugene England, a long-time professor of humanities and celebrated LDS thinker, felt his faith called him to be a pacifist. Thus the question of whether membership in the LDS Church means to adopt a pacifist stance is a pressing one.

What are we to answer our children when they say, “The sixth commandment says ‘Thou shalt not kill’ ”? Or when they ask, “What did Jesus mean when He said, “Do good to them that hate you?” Or how come Nephi was allowed, nay, commanded, to kill Laban? Does the Lord condone killing? Or was Nephi a liar and a murderer? And if he was, what does that say about the books of 1 Nephi and 2 Nephi, written by him? What about Mormon, who wrote approvingly of Captain Moroni and who even led his people in battle? Is he lying to us, or at the very least, is he misled? And if Mormon can’t be trusted, what does that say about the entire Book of Mormon?

These and other comments relating to religion and war are not idle questions. We and our children will meet them from people throughout the world, to say nothing of others of our faith who ask these. As an example, I cite Nobel Prize-winning physicist Steven Weinberg: “With or without religion, good people can behave well and bad people can do evil; but for good people to do evil—that takes religion.” Weinberg does not mention war specifically here, but from other things this reviewer has heard him say, he would clearly include war in the evil that people do. Weinberg, incidentally, is one of the most prominent atheists in the world.

So how does Boyce approach these matters? His discussion engages the question of whether pacifism—as defined above, i.e., the view that war is prohibited in all circumstances as a matter of principle—consistent with, or required by, the gospel of Jesus Christ, particularly as it is presented in the Book of Mormon? On one of the opening pages of his book, Boyce reprints the abridged text of a 1942 First Presidency statement: “The Church is and must be against war... The Church... cannot regard war as a righteous means of settling international disputes; these should and could be settled--- the nations agreeing—by peaceful negotiation and adjustment.” A quick reading of this statement may appear that it is indeed a statement of pacifism; but a closer look shows that “... it does *not* assert that no war, under any circumstances, is ever justified. That would be an additional claim, over and above the view that international hostilities should be settled by peaceful negotiation, ‘the nations agreeing’ .” (Italics added.)

Boyce considers secular views on war in his first chapter and then discusses in depth arguments for pacifism advocated by many, including Nibley, laying out what he feels to be their errors. How deep does Boyce go? In Chapter 13 he lists 46 “Direct Claims Related to Pacifism” and 33 “Corollaries of

the Direct Claims”. I cite only the last one of the latter as an illustration of what one would have to believe to accept the pacifist argument: “God is a being who changes” (page 222.) The context for that remark is Boyce pointing out that Christ in the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5, apparently seems to speak against violence, but then suffers violence when He is crucified. Shortly afterward, as described in 3 Nephi 9, Christ destroys 15 Nephite cities, thus seeming to have changed His mind from the Sermon on the Mount—as a result of His being crucified? Then, in 3 Nephi 12, again shortly afterward, Christ delivers a sermon very similar to the Sermon on the Mount, again apparently speaking against violence, and seeming to have changed His mind again!

Boyce shows many such contradictions that arise from the pacifist view. In contrast, he demonstrates that various apparently conflicting scriptures, particularly in the Book of Mormon, can actually be reconciled with each other with no inconsistency. From that basis, Boyce presents, in the last chapter, a framework—not a formula—for an LDS view of war. The framework requires righteousness on the part of people engaging in war and considers guidelines for situations, in which war can be justified, or in which conduct within war can be justified, and thus in which God’s help may be invoked. The bottom line for Boyce is: war is permissible, but only under certain conditions, consistent with LDS views on morality. His framework is well worth study, by scholars and practitioners alike.

Despite the depth of Boyce’s arguments, he writes for the general reader, who may read at any of several levels. The reader may, for example, read Boyce’s last chapter about the proposed LDS framework, then explore the background for that, then read the secular considerations, then finally study the detailed discussion of the arguments that the Book of Mormon is a pacifist book and Boyce’s answers for each, using primarily the Book of Mormon itself.

Let us refer back to the examples given at the beginning of this review and see how Boyce handles each.

Nephi’s killing of Laban

On pages 111-112 and 126-128 the author notes first the charges made that Nephi was a liar and a murderer and then answers them (p. 127) by noting that Nephi “wielded the sword of Laban” in defense of his people and made many swords in order to protect the Nephites from Lamanite attack (Jacob 1:9 and 2 Nephi 5:14), raising the question, “If the Lord is actually pacifist...then why didn’t he ever explain this to Nephi at *some* point over the course of Nephi’s life?” He further notes, “...it is hard to explain the numerous accounts of Nephi’s divine manifestations on one hand, while accommodating both his murder of Laban and his continued violent conduct on the other. The Lord does not normally bless liars and murderers with revelations, visions, angelic visitations, and his own presence.” Further, “To repudiate the text regarding Nephi’s righteousness is to repudiate the text regarding his miraculous experiences, and to do this is to repudiate the text regarding the authenticity of his teachings.” (These last three quotes are found on pp. 127-128.) From the last quote one sees that assuming Nephi is a liar and a murderer calls into question the entire text of 1 and 2 Nephi.

The behavior of the Ammonites

To assume that the Ammonites were pacifists, as is done by Nibley and Eugene England, is to ignore the following facts (as discussed several places in Boyce, e.g., pp 63-65.)

1. The Ammonites had repented of sins and murders that they had done and had made a covenant not to shed blood again. Their allowing themselves to be slain by other Lamanites was not an act of renouncing war but a condition of their repentance.

2. It also showed their love for their brethren.
3. They materially supported the Nephites in their battles against the Lamanites.
4. They considered taking up arms again in defense of their country and were persuaded not to do so only by arguments by Helaman and his brethren.
5. The Ammonite sons made a covenant of their own to “fight for the liberty of the Nephites...” and as noted in Alma they were protected and blessed because of it. Pages 65-71 elaborate on these points.

In sum, it would be difficult to label the Ammonites as purely pacifist.

Captain Moroni

Boyce notes Captain Moroni’s righteousness at the same time that he was building up defenses, fortifying cities, and leading his people in battle, as described in the long war between the Nephites and Lamanites (Alma 43-62) (in which, incidentally, the Lord played a significant role in helping the Nephites.) Moroni was a man “like unto Ammon” and even like Alma. (pp. 243-246) As with Nephi, it is difficult to square these characteristics with that of a man under God’s condemnation.

The Sermon on the Mount

This sermon, from the gospel of Matthew in the Bible and as recapitulated in book of 3 Nephi in the Book of Mormon, is the subject of an entire chapter (Chapter 14), which is written *in support of* the proposed LDS Framework Regarding War (Chapter 17). In other words, Boyce does not consider the Sermon on the Mount to be a pacifist treatise. This reviewer will not present the extended discussion but will refer the reader to that chapter.

The Sixth Commandment and David and Goliath.

This matter is not discussed in this book. Boyce limits himself mainly to discussion of the Book of Mormon, although some references to the Bible and the D&C are made.

The War in Heaven

We know little about the war in heaven, such as what sort of war it was. Again, this is an episode from the Bible which is not discussed extensively by Boyce. He makes a few comments on pp. 189-190 and then simply notes (p. 222) that a corollary to the pacifist view is that “there would have been no war in heaven if only Michael, the Savior, and the Father had stopped ‘fighting or competing’ with Lucifer, because Lucifer would then have abandoned his aggressive and malevolent aims.” The author and I leave it to the reader to judge the plausibility of that statement.

Boyce’s book makes several contributions to LDS discourse on war and peace. What follows are a few observations by this reviewer in this regard:

1. Chapter 17, the chapter where Boyce lays out his understanding of Mormon doctrine as non-pacifist, is a framework. It is not a formula into which one plugs the parameters of a particular war and automatically gets the answer about whether it is just or not. There is much individual thinking to be done about any war considered. The controversy among the LDS surrounding the Iraq war shows the necessity of this. Another example is the use of the atomic bomb in World War II (see this reviewer’s article on that topic in this issue of SquareTwo.)

2. The book is by necessity incomplete, even though it is about 300 pages. There has been much classical, though not so much LDS, writing on war. Matters such as the war in heaven cannot be fully treated because we have practically no information on it. There are many unanswered questions about the Lord's actions in connection with war and violence. For example, why did the Lord drown all those people in Noah's flood? (This reviewer's opinion is that this can be explained only by considering the full plan of salvation, with the life before this and the life after and continued work of salvation there.)
3. This book will not answer everyone's questions or opinions. The case it makes is very thorough; but there will be those who disagree with its conclusions. Were he still alive, Hugh Nibley might be one of them. That is not to fault him; he was a man who did enormous service for the Church. The same can be said for Eugene England, whose writings are discussed by Boyce and who also was a firm believer in the gospel of Jesus Christ. (It needs to be said that Boyce is fair with these writers, discussing their opinions extensively.) Another faithful deceased LDS individual who undoubtedly would have useful opinions on an LDS view of war is Phillip Flammer, who was a Professor of Military History at BYU. What an interesting discussion it would be with Boyce, Nibley, England, and Flammer all in the same room.
4. In some ways, the questions raised in this book are very fundamental. As the author notes in a number of places, they relate to the truth of the Book of Mormon, including the writings of Nephi and of Mormon and Moroni. They require an acceptance of Book of Mormon by faith. That includes a belief in its internal consistency. Boyce's "LDS Framework for Regarding War" manifests the consistency that he sees in the Book of Mormon.
5. Another basic article of faith, which Latter-day Saints implicitly accept, is that *God is good*. Once one grants that basic article of faith, it follows that everything He does—and also Jesus Christ, who is one with the Father in purpose—is good. From that it follows that His support of just war and His destruction of the wicked are also good. Part of that goodness is His respect for the fundamental principle of human agency. Only in that way can one account for His casting out of Satan and his followers into what must be a horrible fate (D&C 76:44-48.) (The author makes this point briefly in discussing the invocation of Immanuel Kant by Eugene England on pp. 184-185.) (This may disappoint readers who may feel that God did not command some of the slaughter ascribed to Him, such as in the Old Testament.)

As noted above, the book is incomplete. The author says that he is only joining the discussion. More can be written and said. For example, I would like to see a comparison between David O. McKay's 1942 thoughtful approval of war in some circumstances and J. Reuben Clark's 1946 comments espousing a pacifist view, both made when they were counselors in the First Presidency. Both are mentioned in Boyce, but there is no in-depth treatment of these statements.

I recommend this book as an excellent treatment of an LDS point of view of war. Boyce has clearly spent much effort in studying and understanding Book of Mormon and other texts bearing on war and violence and in studying and answering the arguments of those who feel it is a pacifist book. I suggest any that any interested Latter-day Saint buy it and read it. That includes teachers, parents, young people, old people. As for me, I am going to give it to our children for Christmas.



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