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RICH VEIN OR FOOLS GOLD?

Morgan Deane

Review of Patrick Q. Mason and J. David Pulsipher, *Proclaim Peace: The Restoration's Answer to an Age of Conflict* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2021). 290 pages \$19.99 (softcover).

Abstract: *Proclaim Peace is the first full-length volume discussing nonviolent theology in Latter-day Saint thought. It seeks to provide a new understanding of Restoration texts that aligns Mormon thought with modern pacifist traditions. Unfortunately, the book suffers from methodology issues that include an overly creative reading of some scriptures to support pacifist theories and the minimization of others' theories. The book fails to interact with just-war ethics in meaningful ways that could enhance their ethic of peace. As a result, the book is longer than other pacifist texts but suffers from the same problems as previous entries in talking past those with differing opinion. The text will likely only appeal to a small audience of like-minded individuals who already share the same theories.*

The study of unique Latter-day Saint scriptures and how they apply to nonviolent theology and just war remains in its infancy. This process started to change with the important 2011 volume, *War and Peace in Our Times*,¹ and the conversation continues with Patrick Mason and David Pulsipher's latest offering, *Proclaim Peace: The Restoration's Answer to*

1. *War and Peace in Our Times: Mormon Perspectives*, ed. Patrick Q. Mason, J. David Pulsipher, Richard L. Bushman (West Jordan, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2012). For a review of the book, see Benjamin R. Hertzberg, "Just War and Mormon Ethics," *Mormon Studies Review* 1, no. 1 (2014), 144–54, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr2/vol1/iss1/15/>.

an Age of Conflict.² The book is an attempt to use nonviolent theology to help bring about an Enoch-like Zion and peace on earth. They mostly rely on novel interpretations of the scriptures buttressed with famous pacifists and nonviolent theologians. Several chapters address major objections their theories would likely encounter like the clear just-war verses in restoration scripture and divine violence. The book concludes with several chapters that contain practical advice.

Proclaim Peace is the most comprehensive and systematic enunciation of nonviolent theology to date. Unfortunately, the text relies on several dubious methodologies that include a narrative-driven analysis that skews their interpretation; a sole and “absolute” focus on Christ’s life that ignores, contradicts, or minimizes a broad range of sacred text; and a failure to do more than minimally interact with just-war theory. These problems fatally undermine the strength and applicability of the text.

Narrative Over Close Reading

Despite one of the authors describing the limits of nonviolent methodology, this book perpetuates those limits. In an essay that appears in an earlier book, David Pulsipher described the contortions theologians make to promote a nonviolent theology:

Crafting an argument against *any* violence — even defensive warfare — requires navigating a scriptural minefield The Book of Mormon . . . contains the most hazards. Compiled by a seasoned general, the text often exudes a just war sensibility. To diffuse the power of that story, Latter-day Saint pacifists resort to . . . arguing that a careful observation of the larger Book of Mormon narrative speaks to the futility of violence, its endless cycles, and its inability to achieve lasting peace.³

To be clear, the authors of *Proclaim Peace* do not condemn all violence. Most of their work, though, is clearly in that vein. They cite a bevy of nonviolent theologians and faith leaders and focus on just a few scriptures. In multiple places they acknowledge the strength of the just-war ethic and divine violence, but they minimize the former, calling it “lesser” by inserting a sanctifying nonviolent option, found nowhere in

2. Patrick Q. Mason and J. David Pulsipher, *Proclaim Peace: The Restoration’s Answer to an Age of Conflict* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship; Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2021).

3. J. David Pulsipher, “The Ammonite Conundrum,” *War and Peace in Our Times*, 1.

D&C 98, that somehow trumps justified warfare (125–28). They do so because it “sounds like the higher law” (130) and not because of anything directly in Section 98.

Despite those acknowledgments, the authors claim that the life of Jesus and the ethic derived from it is the absolute we should follow, or that “war is violation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is always a manifestation of unrighteousness, and the Church of Jesus Christ can never be truly in favor of it” (186). This and many other comments show a sentiment that acknowledges a limited use of force, yet the text’s central message exudes a nonviolent theology to the point it seems that other parts are grudgingly added because they can’t completely navigate through the minefield of just-war texts without admitting their plain message.

Part of that creative reading is perhaps admitted in the introduction. The authors say that readers must look at the Book of Mormon with “new eyes” and the new nonviolent theories can “draw from and be responsive to” scriptures (xix). Both quotes sound like a speculative reading that requires framing the narrative in a way that favors their theology and ignores or minimizes clear scriptures that don’t.

This is seen most clearly in the one just-war scripture they do cite:

Inasmuch as ye are not guilty of the first offense, neither the second, ye shall not suffer yourselves to be slain by the hands of your enemies. And again, the Lord has said that: Ye shall defend your families even unto bloodshed. (Alma 43:46–47)

This key part of the author’s analysis is striking:

Perhaps we can also ask whose blood is being shed here. ... Those committed to loving nonviolence ... affirm that they would rather have their own blood shed than shed the blood of another person. Keep in mind that the Anti-Nephi-Lehis *did* defend their families, even unto bloodshed, but they did so through loving nonviolence and the voluntary shedding of their own blood. On an even broader scale, Jesus chose to defend the entire family of God from evil not through the violent shedding of blood of his “enemies,” but rather through voluntary sacrificing his own body and blood on the cross. (164)

This is a stunning and perplexing reading that shows the rhetorical contortions pacifists attempt to defend their theories. The first major problem with the argument comes from reading the whole verse. They claim that “defend your families even unto bloodshed” means shedding

their *own* blood in preference to shedding the blood of another in defense of family. But the immediately preceding sentence denies that reading: “ye shall not suffer yourselves to be slain.” How can one shed their own blood in preference to the blood of others and still “not suffer yourselves to be slain?” The authors never explain, and the clear meaning of the scripture is not considered.

In their analysis (164) the authors limit the scope of a just defense to one’s family, which implicitly rejects any larger social obligations to one’s community or nation. This is further evidenced by claiming that nationalism has replaced God as the “ultimate concern” (176–77), a common pacifist argument that denigrates patriotism.⁴ Yet the authors are quick to apply a “broader scale” of family (“the entire family of God”) when it suits their purposes.

The bottom line is that the authors’ analysis of Alma 43:47 frames the narrative in a way that favors their theology while ignoring or minimizing readings that don’t. They ignore context to claim a reading that simultaneously minimizes the scope of an opposing ethic while maximizing their own. Operating from within such an incomplete framework, it is no wonder the authors later second-guess Mormon when they question why the Book of Mormon contains 20 chapters about 14 years of warfare, but only 22 verses covering 165 years of peace (210).⁵

The authors’ analysis of Alma 43:47 isn’t the only example, however. D&C 98:16 includes the injunction to “renounce war and proclaim peace,” a reference the authors mention repeatedly. Their claim is that to “proclaim peace” one must renounce all forms of violence (xxiv). The glaring problem is that the verse doesn’t really say what the authors claim. As I later explain, the seeming contradiction between renouncing war while wielding the sword has been addressed by Christian thinkers going back to Augustine. It has been repeatedly addressed by Latter-day

4. Some may assert that there is a difference between nationalism and patriotism and that it was not the authors’ intent to denigrate patriotism. Without the authors making the difference clear and specifically stating that they were addressing just nationalism, such an assertion seems unfounded. Additionally, many consider nationalism and patriotism to be synonyms. See, for example, <https://www.thesaurus.com/browse/patriotism>.

5. This makes me recall a podcast from the group LDS Peace Studies, who laughed at Mormon’s similar focus. Ben Peterson and Shiloh Logan, August 3, 2020, *Latter Day Saint Peace Studies*, podcast, Ep. 11, part 1, 4:15–4:20, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/episode-11-alma-43-52-part-1-of-2/id1515199441?i=1000487016993>

Saint authors.⁶ Though the Mason and Pulsipher are aware of those sources, they don't acknowledge it. Instead, they change the scriptural meaning to fit their narrative.

Mason apparently views missionaries as colonialist and imperialist (222). This builds upon Mason's earlier writings where he lays out what he sees as the limits of King Benjamin's state building and the coercive power of the state.⁷ Here Mason summarizes his interpretation of the Words of Mormon using his preferred narrative:

Within the space of only about a generation, Nephites had entered the land of Zarahemla as a minority, asserted their linguistic, religious, and political dominance over the longtime inhabitants, and eradicated the remainder of the native population that either refused to accept their rule or which they deemed to be dangerously unassimilable. This pattern, with variations, will be familiar to scholars of settler colonialism, particularly as it played out in the modern history of the American West, Canada, South Africa, and Australia.⁸

Mason chooses his vocabulary carefully, but his message is clear — imperialist, colonialist Nephites, led by King Benjamin, dominated ethnic and linguistic others into submission and then oppressively assaulted dissidents, criminalized ethnic minorities, and invaded their Lamanite enemies for little reason beyond asserting their own political power.

But that argument is mostly creative fiction shaped only by ignoring or radically reinterpreting scriptures in the Words of Mormon. To cite a few examples, the Nephites could be called refugees who fled religious persecution instead of colonizing imperialists (Omni 1:12–13). Verse 14

6. Michael K. Young, "Waging War While Proclaiming Peace: International Law and LDS Perspective on War," *A Time of War, a Time of Peace: Latter-day Saint Ethics of War and Diplomacy*, ed. Valerie M. Hudson, Eric Talbot Jensen, Kerry M. Kartchner, (Provo, UT: David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies, Brigham Young University, 2014,) 218, 224 *et seq.* See also Duane Boyce, "Captain Moroni and the Sermon on the Mount: Resolving a Scriptural Tension," *BYU Studies* 60, no. 2 (2021): 127–62, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol60/iss2/5/>.

7. Patrick Q. Mason, "King Benjamin's Statebuilding Project and the Limits of Statist Religion" (paper delivered at the closing symposium of the 2018 Mormon Theology Summer Seminar, "Are We Not All Beggars? Reading Mosiah 4," Assisi, Italy, June 29, 2018), <https://byumiuploads.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2020/04/Benjamins-Statebuilding-Project-Mason.pdf>.

8. *Ibid.*, 6.

in Words of Mormon states that King Benjamin fought “in the strength of the Lord” and verse 17 says he reigned “in righteousness.” Even righteous individuals make mistakes, but both verses strongly undermine Mason’s narrative. He invents an offensive when v. 14’s phrase “driven out” suggests a defensive war.⁹

Mason interprets King Benjamin’s “sharpness” and “punish[ment]” (Words of Mormon 17, 15) towards spiritual enemies in sinister terms. He completely ignores the magnificent speech that, if read closely and without Mason’s narrative, suggests that King Benjamin was better than contemporary rivals because he didn’t claim to be divine (Mosiah 2:10), was chosen by the people (v. 11), served the people (v. 12), didn’t tax them excessively (v. 14), forbade slavery and the use of dungeons (v. 13, also Alma 27:9), and didn’t allow lawless citizens to murder, plunder, and steal without consequences (v. 13).¹⁰

The authors’ narrative dexterity is also seen in their context-deficient treatment of the story of Ammon and the Anti-Nephi-Lehis. For example, they acknowledged that Ammon used the sword twice, but asserted, without explanation, that the narrative really focused on love and service, not his martial prowess (86). A quick scriptural review suggests both are present. The head king was stunned at Ammon’s magnanimous reaction to victory in single combat (Alma 20:24–26), but the love that Ammon had for Lamoni (v. 26) and his correspondingly just terms more closely reflect the concept of just peace (*jus post bello*) rather than the authors’ concept of assertive love. In their summary of just warfare, the authors failed to mention the critical concept of just peace (134–35).

Their narrative rereading doesn’t recognize the servants that Ammon protected, nor the presentation of arms to the Lamanite king, which impressed him to the point of being receptive to Ammon’s preaching.¹¹ King Lamoni asked, “[W]here is this man that has such

9. Morgan Deane, “Offensive Warfare in the Book of Mormon and a Defense of the Bush Doctrine,” *War and Peace in Our Times*, 29–39. In Mason’s defense, he may have misunderstood my explanation of a tactical offensive within a strategically defensive stance.

10. For a full rebuttal see Morgan Deane, “Reclaiming King Benjamin: A Response to Patrick Mason and King Benjamin’s Statebuilding,” *Warfare and the Book of Mormon* (blog), April 24, 2020. <http://mormonwar.blogspot.com/2020/04/reclaiming-king-benjamin-response-to.html>.

11. Ammon’s presentation of his foe’s arms to the king seems to mirror a documented Mesoamerican practice. See Bruce H. Yerman, “Ammon and the Mesoamerican Custom of Smiting off Arms,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*

great power” *before* being impressed by his faithfulness (Alma 18:8, 10). And the king remained stunned at Ammon’s military power *after* learning of his lethal service (v.16). At the very least it is debatable which had more influence and suggests the authors should be more careful in their sweeping pronouncements.

The most important details left out of Mason’s and Pulsipher’s narrative reflect how the conversion and removal of Lamanite kings set in motion a chain of events that resulted in many innocent deaths and an equilibrium that was only restored by Nephite soldiers. Those Lamanites not converted by the assertive love of the Anti-Nephi-Lehis “swore vengeance” and attacked the Nephites at Ammonihah (Alma 16:2, 25:1; see also 27:1).

Mormon presented the destruction of Ammonihah as spiritual punishment for their wickedness against Alma and the members of the church. Yet the account also includes “some around the borders of Noah” and “others” taken captive into the wilderness (Alma 16:3). Presumably, these some and others were righteous members of Nephite society that didn’t deserve the same punishments as those in Ammonihah, yet they were swept up in the Lamanite attack anyway. The account in Alma 16:8 says that the Nephites managed to retrieve the captives after a battle that presumably meant many deaths of innocent Nephite soldiers.

Alma 25 also records multiple battles (Alma 25:3). Again, the death of many Amulonites after their defeat in battle was presented by Mormon as the fulfillment of prophecy. But like the captives from Noah, these battles weren’t bloodless and meant the many Nephite soldiers who died presumably didn’t invite God’s wrath like the people of Ammonihah. All these deaths could reasonably be considered innocent and needless that resulted from the missionaries’ “assertive love.” Even if the authors didn’t produce a voluminous analysis of every scripture, at the very least they should have considered the implications of their favorite stories they exhaustively repeated.

The authors present a good number of scriptures, but the scriptures are sandwiched between rather long discussions of pacifist principles and ignore key context. Their one citation of a just-war verse was the most egregious example, but they ignored key context in their favorite scriptures as well. They fail to recognize that the great stories (like Ammon’s missionary efforts) had dangerous side effects that, ironically, were solved by the just use of force. Strong analytical reading is important,

but it shouldn't ignore, as the authors repeatedly demonstrate, stronger readings of the text.

Sole Ethic

Related to the first methodology problem, there are many seemingly contradictory verses that require systematic examination. But the authors solely focus on the life and ministry of Christ. They do mention some other ethics in a couple places, as already mentioned, but clearly state their preference and focus: "The nonviolence of Jesus's life and example is absolute" (168).

It should go without saying that Jesus is extremely important to Christians. Mason and Pulsipher, however, fall into the same trap as authors like John Howard Yoder, whom they frequently cite. Their approach "obliterates" the tension in Christian and Latter-day Saint ethics by making one set of injunctions absolute and ignoring or minimizing the rest.¹²

Even if we accept the parameters of their debate by ignoring massive chunks of clear and commanding scripture to focus on Jesus's life, we still find actions of Jesus that undermine nonviolent theology. The authors mentioned one example of Christ overturning the tables at the temple. This was a use of force they concede, but then minimize it by saying it was not violence against people, but only against property and animals (161). This was still a significant use of force, and if it violated the rights of people, it was still violence against that person. If done by someone who wasn't Jesus, violence against property would still be considered property crime and a violation of rights that King Benjamin, among others, might have called plunder (Mosiah 2:13). A just king like Benjamin could not let the rights of his subjects be trampled. He would send out soldiers in a police function to apprehend and punish the wrong doers. That is, the force used in clearing the temple would have been enough to invite the use of counterforce from the sovereign authority. As the early modern just-war theorist Hugo Grotius observed using a King Benjamin sounding couplet: "Kings received authority in order that men might enjoy justice."¹³

One could again consider the story of Ammon and the flocks of king Lamoni. Losing the king's flocks would have earned the death penalty

12. David D. Corey and J. Daryl Charles, *The Just War Tradition: An Introduction*, (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2012), 225.

13. Hugo Grotius, *Hugo Grotius on the Law of War and Peace*, trans. Stephen C. Neff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 54–55.

for the servants of the Lamanite king, and the threatened punishment for failing to stop property crime caused Ammon to kill and disarm his opponents (Alma 17:27–29). (Notice in v.29 how Ammon’s heart was “swollen with joy” to show his martial prowess, not assertive love.) Like King Benjamin, violence against property and animals was enough for Ammon to kill the aggressors. Thus, even if one accepts the authors’ minimized account of Jesus’s use of force, other scriptural stories are still incredibly problematic for nonviolent theologians.

This isn’t the only example. There is no record that John the Baptist or Jesus told Roman soldiers to put away their swords. In the New Testament accounts the Roman soldiers were either told to be just or praised for their faith (Luke 3:14; Matthew 8:8–10). Further, if sword wielding was a lesser example of the Law of Moses (as the authors claim D&C 98 says), such would have been done away with by Christ, the literal fulfiller of the Law of Moses (3 Nephi 15:4–5). Yet, there is no record that he ever taught that such was the case.

It is interesting that Mason and Pulsipher spend several detailed pages on the concept of turning the other cheek. Notably, however, when Jesus himself was struck, he didn’t stay mute (John 18:23). In the parable of the great banquet, Jesus’s version of the master “compelled” the people to enter (Luke 14:23). These and other examples demonstrate the severe limits of trying to force an “absolute” ethic on the life and example of Jesus Christ.

The authors seem aware of their shaky interpretative framework because they sound almost militant in preemptively striking all other theories:

We have asserted that Latter-day Saint theology, ethics, and hermeneutics should be centered on the nonviolent life, teachings, ministry, and atonement of Jesus Christ. Any alternative approach has the burden of explaining why Jesus should be decentered and what ought to be put in his place as the lens through which we should read and evaluate all other scripture. (169)

This touches upon a major problem in the book in that the authors try to have their cake and eat it too. As mentioned previously, they acknowledge the just use of force, but their discussion of just war contains few sources and sparse use of scriptures. The text is replete with pacifist rhetoric that makes it seem like they had to include the sections on just war because they wanted to ameliorate the first methodological problem, but they still vastly preferred a nonviolent ethic and created a second

problem by calling it absolute. They spend a great deal of time saying that Latter-day Saints have catching up to do on peace making (xxv), the scriptures renounce all violence (xxiii-xxiv), and violence never fully overcomes violence (92); contemplating using some portions of police and military budgets to create peace armies (117-18); and citing pacifist and nonviolent theologians where it would be stronger and more logical for a scripture.

Most importantly, the authors endlessly talk about love, but never mention the parable of the Good Samaritan that Jesus used to show a Christ-like love of one's neighbor (Luke 10:25-37). This may be because Catholic theologian Paul Ramsey commandingly used this parable to summarize Christian love as the basis for the just use of force.¹⁴ He asked simply, what if the Good Samaritan happened upon the beaten traveler in the middle of the attack? It would be ridiculous to think that he should follow nonviolent theology and turn the other cheek on behalf of the beaten traveler. Instead, the love that the Good Samaritan had for his fellow man would have justified intervention, at some level beyond that advocated by nonviolent theology, and possibly *required* the use of physical force. It would be unjust and unkind not to help the traveler under attack by using appropriate force to stop the attack. The love the Good Samaritan had for his neighbor forms a simple and powerful logical core for why many find military service rewarding or just force compelling. And it is why I found the authors' discussion of military service as a "resigned acknowledgement of the terrestrial duties of citizens" (139) to be rather insulting, as my service and so many others were based on love of God, family, country, and brother-in-arms.¹⁵

Ignoring Stronger Ethical Paradigms

Obviously scriptural references and the ethics they support are debatable. In fact, Biblical verses have been debated by leading theologians for thousands of years. I introduce them here to suggest that making Christ's ministry the authors' sole ethic is not only contradictory to their arguments, but it's not even the strongest ethic. Applying new Latter-day Saint scriptures, mostly D&C 98 and Alma 17-26, to old debates without

14. Paul Ramsey, *The Just War: Force and Political Responsibility*, (New York: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, 2002), (New York: Scribner, 1968), 143.

15. To be fair, the authors are quoting a First Presidency text about conscripted military service, but this is their only mention of military service in the text. Given their rhetoric against any violence and their tone throughout the book, it seems like a fair representation of their opinion on the subject.

(1) properly acknowledging potential criticism of their own ethic and (2) largely ignoring other ethical paradigms undermines the usefulness of their book. The authors somewhat acknowledge this limitation by calling their text an “early chapter” (234) and not the final word on the subject (xxv), but they spend a great deal of time in the body of their text discussing how their nonviolent theology is the best and absolute.

That is a shame because their text would have been much stronger if they seriously engaged the arguments of just-war theorists. The authors quote Bruce Springsteen (xxvi) and the rock band Rush (75), but not Thomas Aquinas, Francisco Vitoria, Francisco Suarez, Hugo Grotius, John Locke, and Emmanuel Kant. (There is a single mention of Augustine on page 164.) Collectively these writers influenced Western ideas regarding humanitarian intervention, human rights, international law, and natural rights. These, in turn, influenced the American Constitution and still undergird the peacekeeping efforts of international bodies. The body of strong and salient issues from wise thinkers makes them a confusing omission for authors that believe in a peace consisting of justice, equity, and abiding commitment to the common good built into structures as the highest goal (xxii),¹⁶ and who hope their assertive love alleviates global economic inequities, the results of centuries of racism and misogyny, and large-scale conflict (217).

Simply put, as I read the book, I got the impression the authors believed that the ideas of just-war theorists weren’t good enough when compared to modern pacifist theologians, so they simply ignored them. That hunch was solidified when they not only summarized just warfare in only several short paragraphs but made statements such as that just-war theory was “neither broad enough nor comprehensive enough” compared to restoration scriptures (135). Such hand waving cannot dismiss centuries of pertinent thought that long ago addressed concepts of peace, war, justice, and the common good before the introduction of fashionable buzzwords such as equity.

Ignoring earlier thinkers creates a strategic blind spot for the authors that hinders their analysis. For example, the focus on the heart is particularly important for just-war theory and provides a stronger interpretation for many of the scriptural verses the authors provided for their nonviolent theology. The focus on the heart in just-war theory negotiates the seeming contradiction between “turn the other cheek”

16. If that sounds like a dog whistle for left-wing beliefs, you would be correct. The authors use the example of racism a page later and take a swipe at television, talk radio, and social media for good measure. *Proclaim Peace*, xxiii, 73.

peacemakers and those who wield the sword. Restoration scriptures might change the vocabulary to something like “renounce war and proclaim peace,” but the dynamic and tension between war and peace remains the same for Latter-day Saints as it has for Christians throughout history.

The Christian writers ignored by Mason and Pulsipher found no contradiction. Augustine summarized this duality with the term “benevolent harshness” or “severity,” depending on the translation, which could sometimes be seen in God himself.¹⁷ Thomas Aquinas said that war is waged for peace, so those fighting “are not opposed to peace, except to the evil peace” that allowed slaughter and injustice to permeate the earth.¹⁸ It sounds like a contradiction in terms, but Augustine used the example of a parent that punishes a child. The punishment may be perceived as harsh, but it is done out of love.¹⁹ Martin Luther compared it to a doctor that must save the patient by sawing off a limb:

For a good physician, when the disease is so deep and virulent that he has to cut off and destroy hand, foot, eye, or ear in order to save the body, seems, when we consider the limb that he cuts off, a terrible, merciless man, yet considering the body that he thus tries to save, he is in truth an excellent, faithful man, and is doing a good.²⁰

17. Augustine, *Letter* 214 2.14, <https://newadvent.org/fathers/1102138.htm>. See also Augustine, *On the Sermon on the Mount* 1.19.59, 1.20.63, 1.22.77 in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: First Series*, vol. 6, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. William Findlay (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004).

18. *The Summa Theologiae of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 2nd ed. revised 1920, Question 40, Article 1, Reply to Objection 3, as found on NewAdvent.org, <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/3040.htm>.

19. To be clear, the culture in which Augustine lived (and, thus, Augustine) viewed corporal punishment as appropriate for children and others in society — this was the type of physical punishment that Augustine had in mind in his example. In most societies in today’s world corporal punishment involving inflicting pain on children with an object such as a strap, switch, or cane is considered child abuse. Disapproving of parenting approaches utilized in Augustine’s time doesn’t mean that one should ignore the arguments put forward by him or others of his time, however. The example may be viewed as inappropriate, but one should not ignore or throw out the entire argument because one doesn’t like the example used.

20. Martin Luther, *Can Soldiers Be Christians?*, trans. W.H. Carruth, p. 527, <https://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1082&context=ocj>. For a different translation with the traditional English title see “Whether Soldiers, Too, Can be Saved” *Works of Martin Luther*, trans. C. M. Jacobs., vol. 5 (Albany, NY: Books for the Ages Digital

The Salamanca School scholar Francisco de Vitoria wrote that only under compulsion and reluctantly should a leader come to the necessity of war,²¹ which doesn't sound too dissimilar from the Book of Mormon description of Nephites who were "sorry" to take up arms (Alma 48:23).

With this framework we can look at scriptural verses that weren't explained away, minimized, or ignored, but used as key pieces of nonviolent theology. For example, the authors cite Mormon 7:4 (xxiii–xxiv), which says, "Know ye that ye must lay down your weapons of war, and delight no more in the shedding of blood."

Knowing the heart of just war leads the reader to see the key to that verse is the second clause, the command to "delight no more in the shedding of blood." This directly refers to attitudes of the heart. Consequently, the sin isn't wielding the sword, as Mason and Pulsipher maintain, but doing so with a delight to shed blood.

The authors quote Ether 8:19: "[N]either doth [the Lord] will that man should shed blood." This sounds like an authoritative verse for their theory of assertive love and nonviolence. Considered in context, though, the scripture says something different, indicating that the blood shedding was based on a foundation of greed and avarice:

And it was the daughter of Jared who put it [the wicked desires to murder, plunder, lie] into his heart to search up these things of old; and Jared put it into the heart of Akish And it came to pass that they formed a secret combination, even as they of old. (Ether 8:16–18)

This leads to the conclusion in the next verse: "For the Lord worketh not in secret combinations, neither doth he will that man should shed blood, but in all things hath forbidden it" (Ether 8:19). Clearly the Lord would never sanction men to shed blood with hearts inspired by Satan. That, however, doesn't apply to men that have a peaceful heart and are sorrowful in taking up arms but feel compelled to protect their loved ones from the barbarous cruelty of invaders (Alma 48:23–24).

Collection, 1997), 25, https://media.sabda.org/alkitab-8/LIBRARY/LUT_WRK5.PDF.

21. *The Principles of Political and International Law in the Work of Francisco de Vitoria*, trans. Antonio Truyol Serra (Madrid: Ediciones Cultura Hispanica, 1946), 98. See Morgan Deane, "Heart Problems, the Book of Mormon, and the Just War Tradition," *Warfare and the Book of Mormon* (blog), March 2, 2021, <https://mormonwar.blogspot.com/2021/03/heart-problems-book-of-mormon-and-just.html>.

This pattern could be repeated throughout scripture, but these two points are sufficient to show how understanding key tenets of just-war theory provide alternative interpretations that illustrate a different and maybe even better path based upon love. As we again consider the story of the Good Samaritan, the heart that is sanctified and driven by pure love for a neighbor can make the correct decision to wield the sword.

Most importantly, with a better knowledge of just war, or anticipating and answering possible criticisms, the authors could address how their assertive love relies on and operates within the framework of just war. As Michael Walzer noted, “[W]hen one wages a ‘war without weapons,’ one appeals for restraint from men with weapons.”²² They rely on the moral foundations and restraints of just war. Gandhi benefited from living in a relatively free society protected by Britain. When the British army left, it led to abject slaughter between Hindus and Muslims, despite the impotent presence of Gandhi’s peace group that Mason and Pulsipher praise (115).

Speaking of Gandhi, George Orwell once wrote that it is difficult to see how nonviolent principles could be applied in a country where opponents of the regime disappear in the middle of the night and are never heard from again.²³ The authors partially acknowledge this weakness when they compensate by repeating variations of the same thought that “violence is still worse, so our nonviolent theology remains better.” For example: [Assertive love] “fail[s] less often than violence” (120).²⁴

In general, any discussion of modern pacifism is only possible due to earlier military victories. Again, the authors seem to unironically acknowledge this when they point out how most members live in peaceful countries in the Western hemisphere which make them seem like a “refuge” to the world (218). They write this line without recognizing

22. Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars, A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, 2nd ed. (New York: BasicBooks, a division of HarperCollins, 1977) 334.

23. As quoted by Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 332 from “Reflections on Gandhi,” *The Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters of George Orwell*, vol. 4 p. 469.

24. The authors provide one book that shows the relative effectiveness of nonviolence resistance (259n47). Those nonviolent protestors still operated within and relied upon the framework of just war. The claims of success often rest on modest government concessions and reform over a short period of time, making this rather limited to the author’s broad goal of an Enoch-like peace and the absolute of Jesus’s nonviolence.

the rights of worship, freedom of speech, and religion may be related to the just use of force that secured those rights. That's also why I found it incredibly galling when the authors cited the importance of nonviolent principles in church manuals immediately before and after World War II — as if there was nothing in between but “destructiveness,” no justifiable use of force (101–102). Indeed, they gloss over and largely ignore the massive, noble efforts of millions of soldiers that protected the freedom to worship and the freedom to print and read those manuals advocating peace. In their discussion of the assertive love of the Anti-Nephi-Lehis, they compare their actions or courage to those of Tank Man²⁵ in Tiananmen Square (99) but fail to mention credible reports of his execution by the authoritarian government days later and the current imprisonment of democracy activists in Hong Kong who publicly remembered the tragedy.

Simply looking at the heartbreaking events in Afghanistan realizes these points in dramatic ways. The image of Afghans hanging off the sides of planes remains etched in the memories of everyone who saw it. Women will likely be denied education and forced into marriage as childhood brides and sex slaves. Echoing the point of George Orwell about the effectiveness of assertive love in a repressive regime, people are randomly beaten in the streets and most are deathly afraid of a knock on the door. Does anyone seriously believe that Ukrainian citizens practicing assertive love and nonviolent opposition would prosper as Russian tanks and missiles level their cities?

The outpouring of love and sympathy for those in Afghanistan and Ukraine is admirable. And that love led to two separate and often competing courses of action. The desire to intervene using force (as in the earlier considerations about the story of the Good Samaritan) or using assertive love. The authors let their readers down by not fully explaining the alternative and at least acknowledging how applicable just-war theory is to modern problems. Their theories are asserted in a philosophical vacuum.

25. “Tank Man” is one nickname given to the unidentified man who stood in front of the tanks leaving Tiananmen Square after the brutal reaction of the Chinese government to the previous day's protests. For additional information, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tank_Man.

Does Nonviolence Really Work?

The authors state in the introduction and conclusion that they want to start a dialogue that leads to peace. Is that desire reasonable? Is such a dialogue even possible in today's world?

Personally, I think that reasonable, measured dialogue is a noble goal that most everyone shares. Unfortunately, dialogue isn't always kind and peaceful, and the actions of those professing nonviolence can undermine the theories they profess. To be clear, I am not talking about the actions of Mason and Pulsipher; I am referring to the actions of many others who profess the same ideas that Mason and Pulsipher proffer in their book.

I've been writing about warfare for decades. This has resulted in my being on the receiving end of numerous insults and derision for stating thoughtful, well-supported opinions on the use of force which, obviously, contradicts nonviolent theology. I personally understand what Duane Boyce called the "reproach without evidence" style and what theorist Colin Gray called a "near demonic reputation."²⁶ While Mason and Pulsipher have always remained professional and very kind, they are not the only people in this "thought arena" and it is the vociferous and un-Christlike responses of many others to which I'm referring. Considering the behavior of all of those in the arena allows us to consider whether the nonviolent approach suggested by the authors is even possible.

To use the authors' term, the "cultural violence" in response to my critical opinions in this review will show that many don't like philosophical opposition, let alone show love when they encounter criticism (xxiii). The authors expect readers to believe that the love of nonviolent proponents — which can't even overcome mild criticism among culturally similar people having a low-stakes academic discussion in online forums — is supposed to produce a Zion-like peace that transforms centuries of ethnic strife, geopolitical tension, and genocidal hatred. Is such an expectation reasonable? My experiences don't indicate it is. The inability of many to express nonviolent assertive love in open discussions makes me question the viability of the theory overall.

26. Duane Boyce, *Even Unto Bloodshed: An LDS Perspective on War* (Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2015), 171–173. Colin S. Gray, *The Implications of Preemptive and Preventive War Doctrines: A Reconsideration*, (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College Press, 2007), 28, <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/monographs/677>.

Such personal attacks not only undermine the theory of assertive love advocated by Mason, Pulsipher, and others, but become very personal to me. As a former Marine it was my military brothers that were put in harm's way and died in the Kabul terrorist attack. My older familial brother served in Desert Storm and died shortly thereafter. My stepfather died in the Fort Bragg mass shooting. I have a personal stake in peace and have, arguably, seen the effects of violence more "up close and personal" than any other Latter-day Saint academic. I don't want war, not in the least because I know those that will fight the war and I come from a double gold star family. Yet I also recognize the dangers of unchecked violence and support the use of force to stop it. Those who throw around terms like "war monger" or "hawk" against just-war theorists with reckless abandon not only undermine their theory but engage in ignorant and uncalled for personal attacks.

What does any of this have to do with Mason and Pulsipher's book? After all, as I mentioned earlier, they have always been professional and very kind. However, my personal experience is that there are many others who claim the same moral high road marked by Mason and Pulsipher who are more than happy to respond to academic criticism with vitriol, vituperation, vilification, and personal denigration of those expressing the criticism. This isn't a case of academic discussion or responding to criticism with similar criticism — it is a case of "ratcheting up" the response and effectively shooting the messenger because one doesn't like the message. In other words, many of those professing to Mason and Pulsipher's standard don't practice what they preach.

When proponents of nonviolent theology can create a nonviolent conversation among Latter-day Saint scholars and members it will be an important first step towards making nonviolence a reality. Until then, it seems like many proponents of the theory are simply sharing their fashionable vocabulary with a likeminded audience, and too many of that audience quickly abandon the theory when encountering those with whom they disagree.

Conclusion

Mason and Pulsipher provide the most comprehensive Mormon theology of peace to date. Unfortunately, their methodological problems will limit their audience to likeminded advocates. Despite being aware of the dangers of fancy narrative footwork, the authors ignore solid readings of stronger scriptural verses and ideas to promote their tenuous theories. The authors are torn trying to have it both ways. Most of the

book sounds like an exclusively nonviolent text, and they use the same language and vocabulary as nonviolent theologians and frequently cite them. Yet they also, in a limited fashion, acknowledge just war and divine violence. After conceding some alternatives, they immediately repudiate and minimize those alternatives or their usefulness by claiming the “absolute” example of Jesus’s life and ministry as their sole ethic.

The authors mention just war several times, but frequently claim to possess the higher, sanctified, and celestial way. Unfortunately, Mason and Pulsipher ignore just-war theorists and theories that contain significant application to their stated goals about making the world a better place and using love to achieve it. They don’t recognize the framework of just war that makes nonviolence possible. Their minimization of the theory limits its use to most Latter-day Saints, especially military service members.

All together, these problems make *Proclaim Peace* another in a long line of limited pacifist texts (241n34), only this one has Latter-day Saint scriptures sprinkled among its pages. The result is that the book simplistically offers pacifist theories in a faulty framework of the authors’ own making.

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