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A VITAL RESOURCE FOR UNDERSTANDING LDS PERSPECTIVES ON WAR

Morgan Deane

Review of Duane Boyce, Even Unto Bloodshed: An LDS Perspective on War (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2015). 312 pp., including appendices and index. \$29.95.

Abstract: Even Unto Bloodshed: An LDS Perspective of War by Duane Boyce is a thorough and engrossing philosophical discussion describing the failure of secular and spiritual pacifism. Boyce provides a detailed summary of secular views regarding just war and pacifism, and systematic rebuttals of almost every major pacifist thinker in LDS thought. The text is far more brief describing the LDS theory of just war, but remains an essential resource for creating that theory.

Our age isn't unique in facing dangerous threats and deadly conflicts, and Latter-day Saints no doubt hear the phrase *wars and rumors of wars* often enough. Thankfully, in addition to clichés and predetermined positions, there is a growing body of Mormon literature on war. Most of this literature, such as the Greg Kofford volume *War and Peace in Our Time: Mormon Perspectives*¹ tends to focus on anti-war strands in LDS thought.² Others, such as my volume *Bleached Bones and Wicked Serpents: Ancient Warfare in the Book of Mormon*,³ focus on a historical approach. In his new book, *Even Unto Bloodshed: An LDS Perspective on*

1 Patrick Q. Mason, J. David Pulsipher, and Richard L. Bushman, eds., *War and Peace in Our Times: Mormon Perspectives* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2012), 267.

2 Full disclosure: I contributed to this volume, though I was defending the notion of preemptive war using the Book of Mormon. See Morgan Deane, "Offensive Warfare in the Book of Mormon and a Defense of the Bush Doctrine," in *War and Peace in Our Times*, 29–39.

3 Morgan Deane, *Bleached Bones and Wicked Serpents: Ancient Warfare in the Book of Mormon* (Sudbury, MA: eBookit, 2014).

War, Duane Boyce offers a substantive philosophical contribution to this field. Boyce argues that the framework for secular and spiritual pacifism fails and seeks to replace it with an LDS framework for just war theory (2). Because of his methodical approach, succinct style, and profound insights, he succeeds beautifully in contesting the rationale for pacifism, though the work remains too brief to do full justice to a full LDS just war theology.

The book is divided into three sections. In the first, Boyce examines secular arguments for both pacifism and just war theory. He provides concise, insightful, and thorough descriptions and reasoning. This section is particularly helpful since every argument within Mormonism is built upon this “complex, intricate, and largely unarticulated web of other beliefs, assumptions, predispositions, and preconceptions” (213). He includes clear and substantive sources as varied as Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, international law, Emmanuel Kant, and Howard Zinn. This section has little direct relation to Mormon thought but is an excellent primer on the intellectual waters in which Mormons swim.

Boyce also sets the foundation for just war theory by explaining the stark moral difference between the actions of an attacker and those of a defender (23–30). Boyce did this through a somewhat complicated but still accessible discussion of an individual’s rights and their obligations towards each other. When somebody violates our rights, such as the right to life, those violators forfeit the obligation we owe to them. Thus the defender has the moral right, and Boyce would argue in many cases, the obligation to fight back; the violent acts committed by the respective aggressor and defender are not morally equivalent.

Think ... of Cain. He attacks Abel, seeking to kill him, and this he obviously has no right to do. He is not free to use Abel in this way, and his killing of Abel is murder. But what about Abel? Is he free to exercise violence against Cain in self-defense? If every person has the right not to suffer violence, then Cain would also share this right. ... [But Cain] is seeking to kill Abel, and this he has no right to do. Cain thus forfeits his right not to suffer violence. ... [B]ecause he has no right to [murder], he has no right not to be attacked if that is required to prevent him from [murdering]. (29–30).

The second section constitutes the bulk of the book. Here Boyce summarizes and then dismantles the arguments of almost every major pacifist writer in Mormon thought. Particularly commendable is his

criticism of Hugh Nibley's arguments against warfare. Nibley was an excellent, groundbreaking scholar in many different fields, but too many Latter-day Saints have relied upon his light instead of developing their own insights, to the point that his words are sometimes quoted like scripture. For example, Nibley often argued that conflicts were often fought in the Book of Mormon between bad guys and other bad guys. Boyce explained the moral difference between Nephites and Lamanites, even citing Nibley when he said "all Book of Mormon wars take place on Nephite property, not on Lamanite" (76). Boyce also critiques the ideas that the Ammonites were pacifists, a narrative reading of the Book of Mormon as an anti-war text, the immutable covenant found in Doctrine and Covenants 88, and Eugene England's pacifism.

Boyce's discussion of D&C 88 illustrates his ability to explain complex ideas in plain but engrossing prose. Here he explains how the ambiguity of section 88 precludes the definitive and workable injunction against war that many assign to it:

The matter of definition is especially important when we consider the trespass of one state against another. ... When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941, the assault occurred in two waves and involved six aircraft carriers and more than three hundred fifty planes. During the attack the Japanese damaged or sank sixteen U.S. ships, destroyed some one hundred ninety planes, killed twenty-four hundred Americans, and wounded twelve hundred more. Now, which of these numbers is most pertinent to the commandment that an aggressed party (the United States in this case) must suffer "trespass" three times before responding? Would this assault on Pearl Harbor fall short of that threshold altogether since it was only a single attack and occurred in only two waves? If we saw the matter this way, then it would seem that the United States was obligated to suffer two more attacks from the Japanese before being justified in declaring war in response. (156–157)

The third section describes an LDS framework for just war theory. This section's brevity is disappointing. The first chapter is largely a summary of section two and why pacifism fails as a moral framework. The second and third chapters expound on fundamental LDS texts regarding war including the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7), Alma 48, and Gordon B. Hinckley's 2003 talk concerning the war in

Iraq.⁴ Here, again, the author spends considerable effort dismantling counterarguments based on D&C 88 and Spencer W. Kimball's "False Gods" talk.⁵ These chapters continue his strong emphasis on analytical precision and profound thought, so they are still an enjoyable read. But explanation of LDS just war theory covered merely seven explicit pages (271–278) in the last chapter and eight features of war in Alma 48 found in the previous chapter (241–250). This rather thin coverage seemed inadequate to the task.

In a similar vein, the author included only scattered historical application throughout his book. As quoted above, he cites Pearl Harbor, and at several other places he referred to historical events. Outside of a detailed, but still fairly short, case study of the Grenada invasion (192–205), Boyce did not provide any substantive discussion drawing on historical case studies. For example, he defended preemptive war conceptually (247–249) but didn't comment upon the Iraq War. He did, however, reprove those that "reproach without evidence" (171–173), a technique used by many pacifists towards ancient and modern prophets while they advance their theories. Since much of the glibness and mutual reproach between just war and anti-war advocates involves discussions of contemporary American foreign policy, this seemed to me a missed opportunity to apply his framework to the Iraq War in practical terms. As somebody who has personally suffered from the "reproach without evidence" method and been called a war-mongering, brainwashing, propagandizing sophist who twisted the scriptures in support of the Iraq War, I would have appreciated this as well.

The author also failed to discuss many of the current texts used (and misused) by LDS anti-war authors, including J. Reuben Clark's words and David O. McKay's General Conference statements from World War II. Boyce argues that since neither was serving as Church President at the time, such remarks do not merit discussion (224). I disagree. Any practicing Mormon knows the semi-doctrinal aura that attaches to any formal apostolic remarks. So Boyce's decision to exclude a discussion of these texts seems odd.

These are, however, still relatively minor complaints that arise at least in part because his analysis was so superb for every topic which he *did* address. It seems a pity we did not get that same analytical ability applied to texts that anti-war theorists have relied upon.

4 Gordon B. Hinckley, "War and Peace," *Ensign*, May 2003.

5 Spencer W. Kimball, "The False Gods We Worship," *Ensign*, June 1976.

Even Unto Bloodshed is a critical text for anybody that wishes to understand Mormon thought on war and stands as a much-needed reassessment of pacifist ideas. To use the example of apologetics clearing the weeds of doubt so the seed of faith may grow, this book does an excellent job of clearing away our natural antipathy towards any form of violence and allows for the growth of LDS theories of just war. The development of this framework remains preliminary, but Boyce's book stands as a vital resource for any wishing to develop it further.

Morgan Deane has a B.A. from Southern Virginia University and an M.A. in History from Norwich University specializing in military history. His publications include *Offensive Warfare in The Book of Mormon* and *a Defense of the Bush Doctrine*, and *Bleached Bones and Wicked Serpents: Ancient Warfare in the Book of Mormon*. He teaches history at Brigham Young University-Idaho and has been accepted into the War Studies Program at Kings College London, where he will study the early insurgency of Mao Zedong.

