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The Lord Would Deliver Them

Larry Lewis, MA¹

I enjoyed reading Dr. Dennis Nelson's deliberately challenging article in the 1994 AMCAP Journal, "Whither Thou Goest Will I Go?" Brother Nelson showed me the first draft of that article a few years ago, and then as now I agree with him that the APA, NASW, and the other national professional organizations seem to have made a leap of faith by declaring humanism to be "right thinking." I also agree that as members of such organizations, we should raise a critical voice whenever "beliefs" replace "findings" in their literature and conferences, not because I doubt the place of faith in our professional lives, but because a scientific professional organization should not be a forum for any particular faith, be it Humanism or Mormonism.

I'm not sure if Brother Nelson is correct in thinking that most LDS therapists are either too busy or too intimidated to challenge these professional organizations, but I admit that I am. I am not altogether politically correct in the therapy that I provide my clients, and I would just as soon keep out of the professional spotlight for that reason. I try to be upfront with my clients about my own agenda, especially about those areas where there is a diversity of opinion (whether sexual orientation can change, the validity of religious experience, the politics of male-female relationships, etc.), but I feel quite confident that the authoritative voice of the larger professional organizations would criticize some of what I do in therapy as "off base." Therefore,

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I keep a low profile personally, and I fatalistically allow the professional organizations to follow the larger society toward an uncertain future.

Now Brother Nelson comes along and challenges my complacency. What's more, he does so at a time when we see other "impossible" things happening: the Iron Curtain is down, the Republicans have control of both houses of Congress, etc. It seems less far-fetched these days to hope that a vocal minority in the APA or NASW can challenge the unsubstantiated assumptions that are being published (and legislated). The two questions before me, however, are (1) Does Heavenly Father want me to pick a fight right now? and (2) Do I have the guts to do so?

It would be an easy thing for me to find solace in the replies to Brother Nelson's article that were also published in the AMCAP Journal, because they seemed to require less of me personally. Perhaps I should leave the scientific haggling to scrappers like Brother Nelson, and I will just cheer from the sidelines. That may yet be what I end up doing.

On the other hand, Brother Nelson's article came out at a time when I had been studying the scriptures to answer just these sorts of questions. I have been particularly intrigued with what seems to have been a Nephite obsession with my first question: Does Heavenly Father want me to pick a fight right now?

In the Book of Mormon, this question is almost always asked at the macro political and military level, but I imagine that the question is just as valid at the micro personal and interpersonal level as well. Almost everywhere I look in the Book of Mormon, I find the prophet Mormon editorializing that "The Lord's People" can only expect God's help when they play a defensive game plan, and that they lose that help whenever they switch to an offensive game plan. There is a very compelling case presented in the Book of Mormon that the best response to persecution is to defend yourself from attack, but to make no counter-attack without express direction from the Lord.

I want to say upfront, however, that there seem to be four important caveats to this general rule:

1. Under some conditions, the Lord may direct a pacifist response to help you to develop more sincere repentance and humility.

2. It seems that almost any defense is acceptable during an attack on you, your family, or your community.

3. The Lord may direct you to retaliate to such an attack if (and only if) you first cleanse your heart of hatred and revenge by turning the other cheek after the first two or three such attacks.

4. You may be more quickly justified in such a retaliation if your enemy is a “covenant brother,” one of your own, who has transgressed that covenant with you.

I think that it is worthwhile to consider each of these propositions in turn, and then we can review where our dilemma concerning professional organizations fits in.

Faithful Waiting on the Lord

The first example of the doctrine of “faithful pacifism” that comes to mind is the patient response of Alma’s people in the land of Helam to the oppression from Amulon and the priests of Noah (see Mosiah 23 and 24). As far as the record goes, they made no effort to fight their way out of bondage, but after sufficient time had passed, the Lord simply covered their retreat, allowing them to escape to the land of Zarahemla.

At roughly the same time, the Lord similarly blessed Limhi’s people to do the same thing (see Mosiah 22), but only after he had allowed them to be slaughtered in three attempts to fight their way to freedom, and it was strongly suggested that Limhi should have waited for the Lord’s “green light” before allowing such battles.

Of course the quintessential example of this strategy is found a generation later in the story of the people of Ammon, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies (see Alma 24). These Lamanites confirmed their repentance by refusing even to defend themselves or their families from a lethal attack.

What may be the key thread through all of these examples is the fact that these groups were all “recent-repenters,” who apparently felt that they could not repent of a violent nature while taking up the sword for any reason. This is not to say, however, that the Lord would deny those with less on their conscience the right to put forth a stronger defense.

Straightforward Defense

By far, most of the military accounts in the Book of Mormon tell the story of the mustering of a local militia to defend a city or village against an approaching enemy force. As far as I can tell, they seem to be entirely justified in making any defense possible, unless of course they had previously declared themselves pacifists. In fact, Mormon extols Captain Moroni for his prior preparations for an effective defense in the opening chapters of the “Nephite Great War” (Alma 48).

The peculiar thing about these defensive battles, though, is that we repeatedly find the Nephites defeating the Lamanites in battle, and then everyone just goes home! We see this pattern clearly in the Battle of Manti (Alma 44:20), the Battle of Noah (Alma 49:25), and the Invasion of Zarahemla (Helaman 1:33). Whatever happened to “Remember the Alamo”? Whatever happened to slaughtering the prisoners, or burning a Lamanite village or two, so that they would think twice about sending another army in six or seven years, as the Lamanites always seemed to do? Why did the Nephites always push their enemies back to the border between the two countries, and then just stop there and declare the war over? Can we imagine what World War II would have been like if the Allies had followed that battle plan? But this is just what always seemed to happen.

The Nephites seemed to be very concerned about what the Lord would and would not justify in their defensive efforts, so much so that Alma 43:30 notes Captain Moroni “thought it no sin that he should defend them by stratagem.” Well, we would say, of course it was no sin to fight that big army of invaders, no matter what it takes to do it! But Captain Moroni worried that he might be stepping out of line by using strategy. We find the Nephite Law of War spelled out in this way:

Now the Nephites were taught to *defend themselves* against their enemies, even to the shedding of blood if it were necessary; yea, and they were also taught *never to give an offense*, yea, and never to raise the sword except it were against an enemy, except it were to preserve their lives.

And this was their faith, that by so doing God would prosper them in the land, or in other words, if they were faithful in keeping the commandments of God that he would prosper them in the land; yea, warn them to flee, or to prepare for war, according to their danger;

And also, that God would make it known unto them whither they should go to defend themselves against their enemies, and *by so doing, the Lord would deliver them...*" (Alma 48: 14-16; emphasis added)

Basically, this law seemed to restrict the Nephites militarily to purely defensive operations. They could fight an army that was attacking a Nephite village, but they could not retaliate against Lamanite villages as a deterrent to another war. While it would have made military sense to take the offensive once the battle had turned in their favor, the Nephites apparently feared that this might cause them to lose the Lord's protective power.

Justified Retaliation

Having reviewed the Nephite Law of War, we might be surprised to see Captain Moroni himself breaking this law, when he warned Ammoron:

I will come against you with my armies; yea, even I will arm my women and my children, and I will come against you, and *I will follow you even into your own land*, which is the land of our first inheritance; yea, and it shall be blood for blood, yea, life for life; and I will give you battle even until you are destroyed from off the face of the earth.

Behold, I am in my anger, and also my people; ye have sought to murder us, and we have only sought to defend ourselves. But behold, *if ye seek to destroy us more we will seek to destroy you*; yea, and we will seek our land, the land of our first inheritance. (Alma 54:12-13; emphasis added)

It may be that Captain Moroni had succumbed to the spirit of revenge, but I don't think so. After all, he never followed through on these threats, even after the Nephites were unmistakably in command of the field. Rather, I believe that he was appealing to an alternate version of the Nephite Law of War: "For the Lord had said unto them, and also unto their fathers, that: *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" (Alma 43:46, emphasis added). Apparently, the Lord may justify his people in making a counter-attack against aggressors, but only after they have first prepared their hearts by *forbearing to attack* after the first few times that they might feel justified in doing so.

I'm not sure that there is anything magical about how many times we forbear to counter-attack. The Nephite Law cited above seems to say that we have to forbear twice. Our modern version of this law indicates that we need to forbear three times (see D&C 98: 33-37). In any event, it seems clear that the intent of these divine directions is to protect the Lord's people from acting out of feelings of hatred or a desire for revenge.

The Book of Mormon gives us very few examples of "justified retaliation." Somehow, it seems that every time the Nephite armies would have been justified in carrying the war to the Lamanite homeland, the Lord would bless them such that they never actually had to do so. There are, however, several negative examples of this principle, with armies claiming "righteous indignation," but whose hearts were really filled with hatred and revenge, and who were destroyed in battle (note, for example, Mosiah 9:1-2 and Mormon 4:4).

With One of Our Own

The Nephites seemed to be much more decisive in dealing with internal dissent than they ever were in punishing foreign enemies. On the micro level, excommunication was their official response to individual apostasy (for example, their "names [would be] blotted out," Mosiah 26:36), while on the macro level it was a military response to political rebellion.

We recall how Captain Moroni attracted an impromptu army to his Title of Liberty, and how that army pursued the fleeing Amalackiahites *into Lamanite territory* and forced the survivors to return to Zarahemla. Apparently, he didn't think twice about invading another country to capture rebels, and he seemed to feel justified in making those rebels a deal that they couldn't refuse: "Whomsoever of the Amalickiahites that would not enter into a covenant to support the cause of freedom, that they might maintain a free government, he caused to be put to death; and there were but few who denied the covenant of freedom" (Alma 46:35).

It seemed evident that Moroni looked upon government as a "covenant relationship" between citizens, and we don't seem to find in

Book of Mormon leaders the same sense of forbearance in dealing with “covenant breakers” that we see in their dealings with “non-believers”. There seemed to be no doubt whatsoever that the Lord would actively prosper whichever side “kept the true covenant.”

For example, only a few years later, Captain Moroni had to put the “Nephite Great War” on hold while he led another impromptu army with his Title of Liberty back to Zarahemla to quell another rebellion (probably by the same folks who had before accepted the “covenant of freedom”), now led by Pachus. Once they had defeated the rebels, “those men of Pachus, and those kingmen, whosoever would not take up arms in the defence of their country, but would fight against it, were put to death” (Alma 62:9). With “one of their own,” there seemed to be no need to wait passively for them to attack a Nephite city; Moroni initiated the attack first, and as far as we can tell, the Lord blessed his efforts in doing so.

A Question of Response

There might be other principles regarding how we respond to conflict in the Book of Mormon, but these observations seem to cover most of the bases. As we have seen, the Lord will not necessarily sustain us in our battles just because we are less wrong than our enemies are. He obviously expects a lot out of us, and we would be wise to approach these decisions as cautiously as the Nephites did.

As I see it, there are several questions that must first be asked before we should decide to “do battle” with any large professional organization:

1. Is this organization “one of our own”? Do the members of this organization have a “covenant” with one another that might once have been recognized by God? As far as I can see, professional organizations do not fall under this category. Rather, they seem to be man-made inventions that would merit neither the blessings nor the wrath of God. If we fight such a professional organization, we cannot automatically expect the Lord to place this battle in the “high priority” category.

2. In our efforts to repent personally, do we need to be humbled by enduring “the shame of the world”? Many of our AMCAP mem-

bers may feel that they have “sold out” during the earlier years of their careers by buying into worldly philosophies. If so, they may have to endure a period of time where they are professionally ridiculed before the Lord will reveal things that will silence the opposition. This seems to be a personal issue that must be answered individually by each AMCAP member.

3. Has the organization mutated into a “foreign enemy,” with an agenda that runs altogether counter to the restored gospel? Do the professional organizations in any way threaten the Church? Actually, there is some indication that this may be a concern. As Brother Nelson pointed out, there are efforts being made to use licensure as a means to restrict permissible therapies to only humanistic models, and that would diminish the range of assistance that we can offer to church members (and others). If this is the case, however, we may still have to be “good sports” about it, limiting ourselves to a “defensive war,” forebearing to take every possible advantage, and leaving the professional organizations with the last say in any debate (they control the journals).

Brother Nelson’s article expressed his belief that a “culture war” is underway, and that our choices have narrowed to being either a “victim” or a “participant.” It was obviously his hope that we would care enough about the “perversion” of professional organizations that we would be willing to fight about it. The replies to his article questioned whether fighting ever solves anything, or whether the leaders of the “other side” have really drawn battle lines anyway. This article is obviously taking the question from a different slant. I’m suggesting that even if a “culture war” is underway, and *even if* professional organizations are deliberately fighting religious values, we must recognize that our first duty is to God, and *we must fight by his rules* or not fight at all. I also believe that one of the reasons that we have been given the Book of Mormon is so that we can know what those rules are. If Mormon were here today to counsel us about this “cultural war,” I believe that he would advise us to maintain our memberships in the professional organizations, and to add our different points of view to its journals and letters to the editor. When we are ridiculed or otherwise attacked for our position, we will then need to defend that posi-

tion, and we may very possibly merit the Lord's blessings in doing so. Moreover, the Lord approved of Captain Moroni's efforts to prepare for the defense in advance of the battle, and he probably expects us to do the same by conducting quality research dealing with significant issues, research that eventually will have to be taken seriously. Such an approach may yet turn the debate away from a "war of words" and toward a scientific examination of the evidence, which actually is what we want to see from these professional organizations in the first place.