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Book Reviews

GORDON C. THOMASSON, ed. *War, Conscription, Conscience and Mormonism*. Santa Barbara, California: *Mormon Heritage*, 1971. (P.O. Box 15230.) 116 pp. \$1.25.

(Reviewed by Ray C. Hillam, chairman, Department of Political Science, Brigham Young University. Dr. Hillam has published several articles on Vietnam and Asia in academic journals.)

War I hate with all its mocking pageantry . . . It is a grim living testimony that Satan lives. It is the earth's greatest cause of human misery, destroyer of lives, promoter of hate and waster of treasure . . . It is man's greatest folly, his most tragic misadventure.

—Gordon B. Hinckley

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is clearly against war. The Church has been somewhat more vague on conscription and the issue of the soldier who kills in war. The position of the Church was recently restated in a Memorial Service Address by President Harold B. Lee:

When . . . law . . . calls the manhood of the Church into the armed service of any country to which they owe allegiance, their highest civic duty requires that they meet that call. If, hearkening to that call and obeying those in command over them, they shall take the lives of those who fight against them, that will not make them murderers, nor subject them to the penalty that God has prescribed for those who kill . . . for it would be a cruel God that would punish his children . . . for acts done by them as the innocent instrumentalities of a sovereign whom He had told them to obey and whose will they were powerless to resist.

The position of the Church on conscientious objection seems less clear to members of the Church. According to the secretary to the First Presidency, "membership (in the Church) does not make one a conscientious objector," but, since the existing law (in the United States) provides that men who have conscientious objection may be excused from combat

service, there "would seem to be no objection" by the Church for "a man availing himself on a personal basis of the exemptions provided by law." However, while the Church "would seem" not to object, there is little evidence that the Church has encouraged its youth to seek conscientious objection as an alternative to combat service.

The unpopular war in Vietnam has produced considerable interest in conscientious objection. Were it a popular war, there probably would be little interest in such matters. Nevertheless, an increasing number of youths, among them Latter-day Saints, have questioned the legitimacy of American involvement in Vietnam and have turned to conscientious objection as an alternative to combat service. One of Gordon Thomasson's stated objectives is to explain the position of those Latter-day Saint youths who have chosen such an alternative.

War, Conscription, Conscience and Mormonism is a compilation of statements, quotes, letters, essays, and comments on war, the draft, and conscientious objection. It includes statements by the First Presidency, quotations from scripture and Church leaders, and essays and articles by well-known Church authors such as Hugh Nibley. The editor claims its primary purpose is to appeal for understanding on the part of those within the Church who have been intolerant of conscientious objectors. He also acknowledges that the booklet is a "good cause" with a definite point of view. Brother Thomasson is candid in his admission that he and his associates "are not opposed" to the booklet's being of "help" to the sincere objector. The essays by David E. Hayes and Randy Shipley are detailed accounts of how a Latter-day Saint can obtain conscientious objection status. His booklet, however, goes a bit beyond these objectives, for it implicitly encourages Latter-day Saint youth to become conscientious objectors.

Thomasson's compilation is a useful and relevant contribution to an issue which is vaguely understood by most Latter-day Saints. He and his associates are to be commended for not becoming so involved in their "cause" to the extent that they condemn, as "war lovers" those who disagree with them.

This reviewer would not personally choose to be a conscientious objector, but such a choice is clearly within the law. Furthermore, it would seem that the Church does not object to conscientious objection as long as it is an individual matter.

In my judgment, those few Latter-day Saints whom I know to be conscientious objectors are not cowards or disloyal to their country or the Church. On the contrary, they have shown great courage and are frequently subjected to considerable personal abuse. The long and torturous process including the costs of a lawyer would seem to be a test of one's conviction. However, it also implies conscientious objection status is available mostly to the rich, educated, or wellborn.

If we are to understand Latter-day Saint youths who have become conscientious objectors, Thomasson's compilation is required reading. While at first glance this compilation of documents seems rather shocking to some members of the Church, yet hopefully his efforts could be the beginning of a more meaningful dialogue within the Church regarding military service and conscientious objection. Such dialogue will not settle the question, but it may improve understanding.