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Love at Home and Peace Abroad: A Breakfast Conversation between Frieda and Craig

Richard H. Cracroft

A review of the “Special Issue on Peace.” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*. Edited by Linda King Newell and L. Jackson Newell. Vol. 17, no. 4. Winter 1984. 159 pp. \$7.00.

(Setting: It is late spring. Frieda and Craig are seated at the breakfast table on their posh patio at the rear of a posh home somewhere near unposh Ensign Peak, in Salt Lake City.)

Craig: (Stirring Nutra Sweet into his lukewarm Pero [no hot drinks in Craig’s tummy]) . . . I’m still tired because I stayed up until 2:00 A.M. reading the peace issue of *Dialogue*, just as you told me to.

Frieda: And you always do what I tell you to. And . . . ?

Craig: And it’s just as I told you at dinner, Dovey—the Lord said in D&C 87 that after the Civil War broke out in South Carolina, war is going to be “poured out upon all nations.” And it’s happened; war is inevitable—it’s in the cards, and no amount of rhetoric by any number of people is gonna change that one jot or tittle. Pass the fiber-packed breakfast cereal, kiddo.

Frieda: Why eat that foul-tasting cereal, Schatzlein? You’ll die when your time comes—it’s in the cards. And no amount of exercise, and certainly no number of bowls of Ickki-Bits is gonna change that one iota.

Craig: Ummmpph! (grimacing—whether at the comment or the breakfast cereal is uncertain). I get your drift.

Richard H. Cracroft is a professor of English and dean of the College of Humanities, Brigham Young University.

Frieda: Is that really all you have to say about *Dialogue's* excellent war and peace issue? You're the family poet—didn't you like Michael R. Collings's "Southern Idaho Summer"?

Craig: (Calming) The one about rural life in Idaho, punctuated by passing references to . . .

Frieda: . . . the various wars and rumors of wars from Korea to Sputnik to Vietnam and the space race? Yeah. I liked that, though I was moved even more by the Kathy Evans poem about tulips, red skies, white light and sky—a poetic depiction of the destruction of children in an atomic holocaust.

Craig: “. . . the windows are red./The light of our blood falls through the walls./All of us touch the sky./The children are blooming in the window,/ and the tulips are in flames on the ledge of the world.” The poem moved me, too—and so did Emma Lou Thayne's "How Much for the Earth? A Suite of Poems: About a Time for Considering"—you remember, the several poems, or "considerations" about her life which launch her into more considerations about the impact of nuclear war on children and the elderly, on all of us. Toward the end, thinking about a visit to Dachau and its signs proclaiming "Never Again," she transforms the ovens of Dachau into mushroom clouds and cries, "More than NEVER AGAIN—/NEVER!"

Frieda: And she ends it lyrically, too. (Reads)

It's time. It's time we said together
Yes to life. To ashes, simply No.

(Closing *Dialogue*) I think the whole issue is tastefully and thoughtfully done. I liked the hymn, by Charles S. Wain and Frank Wright, "Renounce War, Proclaim Peace," but it is probably too blatant in proclaiming an idea that hasn't really been widely accepted in the Church, so I don't think we'll be singing it at stake conference. (Handing him a warm, buttered English muffin) I liked the art, too—the cover by Gary E. Smith, called "Fire Dance," is moving. Look (she holds up the issue)—he evokes the Mormon sense of eternality and family, dancing in a circle, holding hands in a setting in the desert West—but in the background, there, is the ominous mushrooming cloud burgeoning into the heavens. Powerful.

Craig: Frightening. (Pauses) I liked the other art, too. My favorite was Linda Murray Anderson's "Amazons," and I liked the work by Marilyn Miller and Royden Card and Trevor Southey, but I leave it to you to understand the geometric sketches of Allen Bishop. You're right, though—the art adds a great deal to the effectiveness of the whole issue.

Frieda: You're evading the issue, though. Did you like the articles? Did they help you to understand the Church's position on war? Do you really think that there is nothing we can do about war—that Satan has unleashed a fury and it's our destiny to suffer from the horror of war?

Craig: I don't know how to answer that. I mean, Kent E. Robson, of Utah State University, makes "The Magnitude of the Nuclear Arms Race" frighteningly clear and makes me feel that the old bugaboo Soviet Union is less culpable than I had thought and that the United States' own skirts—I'm sorry about that feminist image—own jeans—are not as clean as we would like. But Pierre Blais, in his article, "The Enduring Paradox: Mormon Attitudes toward War and Peace," not only makes a very helpful review of recent articles in which LDS authors such as Steven Hildreth, Gary Browning, Edwin B. Firmage, Eugene England, Ronald W. Walker, and Stephen L. Tanner discuss war and peace and LDS theology, but goes on to assert, and demonstrate, to my discomfort this morning at one o'clock, that our most cherished ideas as Mormons on war and peace "are misleading and even dangerous." He takes on a number of standard Mormon views, from authority and obedience to patriotism, Capitalism, Cleon Skousen, and the Republican Party and concludes that "the distortion of Mormon beliefs into attitudes supporting nationalism and the use of force are a form of self-deception and intellectual laziness"—pretty strong words—and I don't think I'll quote him in high priest group meeting—or at our study group, if you don't mind. Actually, his is a pretty standard liberal attack on traditional Mormon positions, but he handles it very well.

Frieda: (Looking at him with surprise) You've come a long way for a boy who voted for Richard Nixon both times and cried when they didn't run him again after Watergate. (Pauses) But I agree that Blais's article, while discomfiting, is a thought-provoker. But so is D. Michael Quinn's article on "The Mormon Church and the Spanish-American War: An End to Selective Pacifism."

Craig: Yeah, I think that his survey of the history of the Church's record on war is, well, surprising. He points out . . . pass the marmalade . . . that despite the frequent and very notable examples of militarism in the early Church, the "renounce war and proclaim peace" pronouncement by the Prophet Joseph provided at least as many notable examples of what he calls "selective pacifism," from Joseph Smith to Brigham Young to leaders at the turn-of-the-century. Quinn asserts that his "pacifistic tradition of Mormonism," or at least the ambivalence between pacifism and militarism, came into final focus with the Spanish–American War. The war was, Quinn insists, "a crucial event in [the Mormon] tradition of selective pacifism," and after the attempts by such Apostles as Brigham Young, Jr., to dissuade the Church from supporting the war (only to be chastened by President Wilford Woodruff, who saw the opportunity to prove Mormon loyalty), there was an instant erosion of "the political kingdom of God," in order that the Church might enjoy "greater security in a previously hostile world." After 1898, the individual Mormon might opt for pacifism or war, but the Church had recognized the supremacy of national authority and had, in effect, given up "the right to determine when and where Mormons would fight and die."

Frieda: (Assuming her *Fascinating Womanhood* look) Oh, Schatzi, I so admire how you can quote things after only one reading.

Craig: You'd be able to, Dovey, if you were a high priest.

Frieda: (Musing, over the English muffin) For me the Mormon-oriented pieces were very interesting, and I knew they would be for you, history buff that you are, but I thought the most provocative essays were the several which focused on non-Mormon (we don't say *Gentile*, anymore, do we?) interests. Somehow, the essay by Ira Chernus, "Mythology and Nuclear Strategy" . . .

Craig: . . . You mean the one that talks about "psychic numbing" and "myths" as ways we adopt of dealing with the enormity of nuclear devastation? . . .

Frieda: Yes—showing that numbing and mythologizing cause political paralysis, and calling for a breaking of the vicious cycle, while pointing out how the whole problem is so new that no one has found a new mythology to deal with it. Fascinating. But even more thought-provoking, for me at least . . .

Craig: I note the becoming and submissive—and unusual—humility, which means you're insecure about what you are about to say. . . .

Frieda: (Throwing a half-eaten muffin at him) Stop that! I was going to say, humbly, that the John F. Kane article on the Peace Pastoral of the American Catholic Bishops and Paul Bock's article, "The Ethics of Deterrence," were intriguing; they work so well together. Kane analyzes the Bishops' Pastoral and Vatican II, and the "privitization" of religion in America so that I, who have never really understood any of this, can get a hold on it, and then he shows how important this is to all of us, especially to those who believe. And then Bock took me into deeper—and very interesting—waters to show how the German and Dutch Protestant churches have been swimming through the same issues and compares their efforts with those of the American Catholic Bishops and discusses the tension between two directions—between those who say Christians can no longer work for peace and endorse possession, by any state, of nuclear weaponry and those who say that such deterrence is a continuing, though uncomfortable necessity.

Craig: (Talking through his muffin) That was a mouthful, Dovey! Those two articles were harder-going for me (the hour was late) than the very personal essays, which focused the whole argument for me in a very meaningful way.

Frieda: You mean the one by the German soldier and the other by the American Ph.D. student (and grandmother) who spent four months in Ireland?

Craig: Yes. The first is, you recall, Uwe Drews's "Thoughts of a Modern Centurion," about the LDS career soldier and his confusion (and the confusion of other German Latter-day Saints) about the Bishops' pastoral letter in West Germany and the stand, or nonstand, of the LDS church on the issue. Drews wrestles with the question of pacifism, concluding that it is "a moral and political imperative" for a nation to keep the peace, and insists that "a government threatened by armed aggression, whether just or unjust, *must* defend its people." But, he concludes, "the arms race is a dangerous act of aggression which does not provide the security it promises" and as a strategy is justifiable only in tandem with a determination "to pursue arms control and disarmament." It seems to me that nuclear warfare has added a dimension to war which takes us beyond Book of Mormon politics. (He pauses,

stirs his Pero, and continues.) The second essay you mention is “Making Sense of the Senseless: An Irish Education,” by Claudia W. Harris, an account by an Emory University Ph.D. candidate who, during her four months’ stay, manages despite the pain of a broken ankle, to interview over one hundred Irishmen and see sixty plays—but, more importantly, she comes to understand the tragedy of Ireland firsthand, in the north and the south. “What for me might have begun as an academic interest and a delight in cultural diversity, for these people is a life and death struggle,” she writes. “It could never be less than that for me now. . . . There are really no villains here,” she adds, “although the society is so polarized that people are convinced there are.”

But you failed, Dovey, to mention the other two personal essays. Don’t forget Glen Willett Clark’s fragmented but interesting essay in which he traces the changing attitudes of Americans and Mormons towards war, as reflected in the life of his father, Walter Edward Clark, born in 1889 (and still living). Clark, *fiis* (you admire my use of French, don’t you?), discusses Swarthmore College, which renounced greatness on the football field (the Fighting Quakers) and a “frenetic social life” in sororities and fraternities to find “its Inner Light as it sought merely to educate,” and urges that the Latter-day Saints follow a similar path from bellicose attitudes towards repentance and a shunning of violence.

Frieda: Did you notice throughout the issue that, despite the Quinn article’s suggesting a tradition of pacifism in the earlier Church, most of the writers agree that the middle-class American position of “might makes right” and “Manifest Destiny justifies” seems to prevail among the Latter-day Saints?

Craig: The whole thing made me feel like a Latter-day Jingoist.

Frieda: Me too. Oh, the other essay you referred to a minute ago is “Where Everyone Builds Bombs,” by Benita Brown—about how it is to live in Richland, Washington, where everyone builds nuclear weaponry—or at least makes the plutonium for the people in Los Alamos and Rocky Flats. She raises the questions which most people in town avoid—but really answers none of them.

Craig: How could she? There are no answers—we build bombs because it provides a good living, is an accepted part of the system of

deterrence, and because most of us manage to avoid confronting these matters. . . .

Frieda: Until *Dialogue*, in an excellent issue, brings its readers face-to-face with some uncomfortable facts.

Craig: Exactly—truths that strike at the very core of our complacency. Truths that urge us to do something—until we ask, “What?” and realize that our very faith, our very way of life conspire together to return us to complacency and to . . . pass the cream, will you? . . . to be content with saying, like a Calvinist, “Well, it’s in the hands of the Lord, and I can’t do anything about it.”

Frieda: Well, I think that reading the issue brought about some deep-down changes in my thinking. But whether I’ll *do* something about the issues remains to be seen. In the meantime, how about a little more orange juice, Schatzlein?

Craig: And, in the meantime, how about turning to more substantive issues—like, when are *Dialogue* and its sister journals *ever* going to get caught up to date?

Frieda: I think it’s a ploy to delay the Second Coming. The Lord wouldn’t dare come when his Church-oriented magazines were still owing subscribers. . . . (Drifting again) I just hope that being burnt as stubble isn’t a metaphorical expression for a nuclear ashheap.

Craig: Dear, dear, cease and desist. If you keep up this kind of intensive interest in such issues, even *BYU Studies* will be forced to come up with a Peace issue.

Frieda: That’ll be the day—probably the day *they* get their issues up to date. Then I’ll take out Second-Coming Insurance. With Beneficial, of course.

Craig: Another glass of juice?