Proclaim Peace: The Restoration's Answer to an Age of Conflict
By Patrick Q. Mason and J. David Pulsipher

Provo, Utah: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship;
Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2021

Reviewed by Kristine Haglund

Let's start at the end.

The achievement of *Proclaim Peace* is particularly evident in its endnotes, which comprise balanced references to Restoration scripture, the Bible, Latter-day Saint authorities, and academic Mormon studies and peace studies literature. Scholars ranging from early Americanists like Bernard Bailyn to sociologist Max Weber and even geneticists like Marc Haber provide interdisciplinary contextual richness. There are references to thinkers from Catholic, Protestant, Latter-day Saint, Community of Christ, Muslim, Jewish, and Hindu traditions. This broadly informed and carefully applied framework for reading scripture and exploring a key aspect of the restored gospel and Church history is a model of scholarship that distills important insights from academic work in a way that can benefit a broad range of readers. *Proclaim Peace* brings the theological resources available within Mormonism to bear on important questions about peace and justice, and it brings them into conversation with the abundant resources of the Christian tradition with which many Latter-day Saints are not yet familiar.

For scholars and readers from outside the Restoration tradition, the discussion that contrasts being subject to governments with "befriending" the law and the Constitution serves as an excellent introduction to the theological resources Latter-day Saints might bring to Peace Studies. The language of friendship comes from Joseph Smith's assertion that "friendship . . . is the grand fundamental principle of Mormonism," with the power "'to revolutionize [and] civilize the world' as it 'pours forth love'" (174) and from an 1833 revelation (Doctrine and Covenants section 98) that declares "I, the Lord, justify you, and your brethren of my church, in befriending that law which is the constitutional law of the land." Pulsipher and Mason use this concept of a civilizing and revolutionizing

principle of friendship to interrogate the perennial dilemma of Christians who must struggle to balance their allegiance to the Prince of Peace with the necessity of existing in the context of earthly nation-states and economies. In Mason and Pulsipher's analysis, such friendship requires a complex and thoughtful sort of citizenship, which may require being willing to lay down one's life for the befriended state but also may require conscientiously objecting to the requirement to kill for it. When we engage in this careful and deliberate friendship with the political power of our home places, "we are freed from the blind love of dumb idols and instead can love our political communities as God intended them to be loved—as their friends. In offering our nations true friendship, we might then hold them accountable and assist them in becoming communities of care that protect the vulnerable and provide for compassionate and just sharing of goods and opportunities for all" (195–96).

For Latter-day Saint readers, two other sets of complementary ideas—individual peace versus societal peace and negative peace versus positive peace—may productively unsettle some of the habitual ways Church members have thought about issues of conflict and peace.

Negative peace is defined simply as the absence of conflict. Suppressing destructive conflict is a precondition for creating positive peace, but it is not itself a sufficient mode of peacemaking. Positive peace grows out of generative or creative conflict. Latter-day Saints are especially prone to feeling the need to suppress *all* conflict, perhaps because of Restoration scripture's injunction to avoid "contention" (3 Ne. 11:28–29). Pulsipher and Mason point out that "contention" is always used to describe violent and destructive conflict, and they offer readings of several scriptural passages in which conflicts are engaged in ways that are ultimately productive of deeper and more just peace. For instance, they cite the conflict between the Apostles Paul and Peter over whether and how to fully accept gentile converts. Paul reproved Peter for "hypocrisy" but continued to respect him as a pillar of the church in Jerusalem. As Mason and Pulsipher put it, "Christianity would emerge out of this tension between law and grace, God's ancient covenant and the adoption of new Israel, as articulated by strong and diverse personalities" (73). They also carefully read the Book of Mormon account of Ammon as a missionary to examine both episodes of contention and violence and the acts of loving service that eventually allowed Ammon to persuade and convert Lamoni and his father. Showing the application of this scriptural analysis to contemporary problems, Pulsipher and Mason point out that "the moral genius and tactical success of the American civil rights movement

came when African Americans began to confront the segregationist system with loving resistance—deliberately crossing unjust boundaries but refusing to strike back against the inevitable violence, to be beaten back into submission, or to hate their oppressors. They endeavored, in King's words, to 'create such a crisis and establish such a creative tension' that it would compel the entire community, both Black and white, to confront its destructive tendencies and to repent" (92).

When the word *peace* occurs in Latter-day Saint contexts, it most often refers to the peace an individual may experience when living in harmony with gospel principles. The emphasis is on a *feeling* of tranquility and calm, even in the face of familial or societal conflict. And, like almost all feelings, this peace is individual and interior, experienced by one person alone. Pulsipher and Mason contrast this personal peace with societal peace, which Latter-day Saints often call Zion and generally consider to be an aspiration for the Millennium or later. Mason and Pulsipher insist that a "beloved community of those who collectively follow the principles taught by Jesus Christ . . . [is] an achievable aim for this world if individuals and societies embrace love, equality, justice, and peace as a way of life" (xvi–xvii). Societal peace requires vanquishing not only the direct violence of warfare but also the "structures of sin" (200)—cultural and structural violence—that perpetuate inequality. "They are insidious forms of sin that we collectively inherit, choose, create, and perpetuate; they represent deep alienation from God on both individual and societal levels" (200). While the individual experience of peace and comfort is one of the kinds of peace Christ promised, Mason and Pulsipher are at pains to show that Christ's teachings and his incarnate suffering are intended to redeem us and bring us peace *collectively,* and not just individually. The "positive peace of Zion" is revealed in scriptural accounts of Zion communities: Enoch's, Melchizedek's, Alma's, and finally, the people of Christ described in 4 Nephi. Mason and Pulsipher note that this fourth community "is characterized not only by negative peace but also by the durable and comprehensive presence of positive peace" (212), evident in the relationships of equality grounded in the understanding that each person was a precious child of God. The citizens of this polity were "truly free—free from the enslavements of caste, class, nation, race, ethnicity, neighborhood, profession, partisanship, ideology, and every other artificial divide that alienates members of the human family from one another" (213).

The authors draw powerfully on the imagery of the Atonement to characterize these two kinds of peace—individual and societal—as redemptive. They read the two sites of Christ's suffering—Gethsemane

and Golgotha—as having twinned soteriological purposes: in Gethsemane, Christ made possible each person's individual salvation and gained the empathy necessary to judge righteously; at Golgatha, his suffering on the cross worked as an act of nonviolent resistance, forcing those who witnessed it to recognize the evil being perpetrated by Jesus's oppressors and bringing them back into moral harmony with their own consciences and with their neighbors. The cross thus points the way toward the redemption of society, the possibility of turning away from oppressive and sinful social structures toward a communal life modeled on the kingdom of heaven.

One final pair of complementary ideas is not explicitly articulated but does perhaps the most important work in this volume. Latter-day Saints are accustomed to thinking of their encounters with scripture as *exegesis*—an effort to extract the "correct" meaning from the text. Of course, this is always aspirational; we all bring unexamined assumptions and different experiences to the act of reading, and texts are not self-interpreting. Mason and Pulsipher's modeling of conscious and careful *eisegesis*—reading meaning into the text as well as extracting meaning from it—offers tremendously hopeful possibilities for reengaging scriptural texts that have often been interpreted in ways that align more with imported political commitments or thoughtlessly received tradition than with the teachings of Jesus and the restored gospel's strenuous and unstinting requirement to "proclaim peace" (D&C 98:16). By engaging scriptural texts that discuss the spiritual and intellectual apparatus of peacemaking, Mason and Pulsipher gently remind readers that they have agency, that not only the act of reading scripture but also the quality of that reading has moral consequences.

The productive tensions that enliven *Proclaim Peace* resist the tidy resolution of most endings. They are, instead, an invitation to begin doing the work suggested by the book's title.

Kristine Haglund holds degrees in German studies from Harvard and the University of Michigan. She is a former editor of *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* and author of *Eugene England: A Mormon Liberal.*