



We Share... the Pursuit of Peace

Shortly after joining the Reorganization, Joseph Smith III found himself at a meeting being held to recruit men to fill Nauvoo's quota to fight for the North in the American Civil War. The recruiter did a very poor job and no one was enlisting. Someone noticed Joseph in the crowd and invited him to speak. Others soon called on him as well. Overcome with patriotism, Joseph stood and delivered a rousing speech. Seventeen men responded by signing up to fight. After the meeting, Joseph thought about what he had done and he was deeply troubled. Was it appropriate for a minister to encourage others to go to war? Was it okay for members of the priesthood to enlist?

In his memoirs, Joseph discussed the struggle faced by the church and the solution that came to them:

As ordained ministers in a church whose rules of government and doctrine did not warrant the shedding of human blood except in became necessary in defense of our families or ourselves, we felt it should be contemplated only as a last resort. In spite of this firm conviction our spirits stirred deeply to the call of patriotic duty.

We laid the matter before our fellow church members and the question was discussed . . . with much the same solemnity that doubtless characterized the Puritans, Quakers, Shakers, or other denominations whose tenets forbade the shedding of blood.

Prayers for guidance were fervently offered unto the Lord . . . When the answer came it was clear, definite, and unmistakable . . . 'Do not enlist. Enlisting makes your military service an individual and voluntary action, whereby you will be responsible for the blood you might shed while in service. Wait, if drafted, the responsibility is lifted . . . do not shirk any duty the service requires . . . for through the conscription the deed becomes a national sin instead of a personal one.

Our pursuit of peace took root in a time of violent conflict.