

# Notes and Comments

*Edited by Joseph Jeppson*

## THE VIETNAM WAR THROUGH THE EYES OF A MORMON SUBCULTURE

*Knud S. Larsen and Gary Schwendiman*

*Knud Larsen is a Ph.D. candidate at Brigham Young University and is completing his doctoral thesis at the International Institute for Peace in Oslo, Norway. Gary Schwendiman is also a Ph.D candidate and faculty member in the Department of Psychology at Brigham Young University. He is First Counselor in his ward bishopric.*

This study was conducted at Brigham Young University in order to assess student views toward the war in a subculture where the norms of Mormonism are overwhelmingly dominant. Brigham Young University is perhaps the only place in the world where the Church exercises such complete control over the intellectual, social, and spiritual norms of its people. Thus, in this setting, one should be able to determine as nearly as is possible the attitudes of the Mormon people in their "purest" form, and to ascertain the effect of Mormon philosophy upon attitudes toward the war.

### THE SETTING

The study was conducted in the middle part of December 1967, at a time when major American involvement in the war was continuing in its third year. With the exception of some spectacular battles at Dak To and Con Thien, the war appeared to be a slow moving but costly battle of attrition.

The year of 1967 was a year of increased dissent throughout the United States and some other parts of the world, coupled with growing curiosity and speculation about the causes and possible consequences of the war.

Although debate about the merits of the war bubbled up like a vicious mud pot in most areas of the United States, Brigham Young University in comparison appeared to be a tranquil and silent desert. Even the most mild and well ordered demonstrations, petitions, or soapbox speeches in any form either for or against the war were conspicuous in their absence.

### THE SAMPLE

Our subjects were 305 students selected randomly from the Student Directory at Brigham Young University. The sample consisted of 157 males and 148 females. With respect to political affiliation, 54 percent identified themselves as Republicans, 27 percent as Independents, and 13 percent as Democrats, with approximately 6 percent categorizing themselves as "other." The students were well distributed among the various fields of study, with 23 percent claiming the humanities and fine arts, 24 percent the social sciences, 20 percent the physical and biological sciences, 13 percent business, with the remaining students falling in "other" categories. The students generally came from an active church background with 46 percent characterizing their family as very active in the Church, 25 percent as active, 12 percent as neither active nor inactive, 12 percent as inactive, with only 5 percent coming from families antagonistic toward the Church. Individual Church activity reflected a similar pattern with 47 percent considering themselves to be very active, 43 percent active, 6 percent neither active nor inactive, and only 3 percent and 1 percent considering themselves inactive or antagonistic toward the Church, respectively. In answer to the statement, "I think I exemplify the Christian virtues of love, brotherhood and consideration for others," 27 percent answered to a great extent, 67 percent to some extent, with 5 percent answering a little, no one answering not much at all, and approximately 1 percent answering not at all. In essence, the vast majority of the students perceived themselves to be good Christians. A measure of religious authoritarianism was obtained by asking "I would support statements on political and social matters made by General Authorities of the Church as": 16 percent answered "the literal word of God spoken through prophets thus becoming scripture," 27 percent stated it was "advice which all church members should follow," 28 percent that it was "good advice," 13 percent stated it was "informed opinion," while 16 percent felt it was "personal opinion which one can take or leave." Taking into account only the male sample, there were approximately 58 percent who had served missions for the Church and 67 percent of the total sample had obtained all their higher education at Brigham Young University.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the students' responses to items of information. The results are all in percentage form.

TABLE 1  
STUDENT RESPONSES TO INFORMATION ITEMS  
(Asterisks indicate best answer)

1. During the Second World War, Vietnam was occupied by:
 

|                    |                      |                    |                     |
|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| a. China — 17%     | b. *Japan — 34.4%    | c. England — 13.6% | d. Australia — 3.0% |
| e. a and b — 23.6% | f. don't know — 8.4% |                    |                     |
2. The name of the organization which led the struggle against occupation forces during the Second World War was:
 

|   |                                      |                       |
|---|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| a. Viet Cong — 5.2%                             | b. National Liberation Front — 40.7% | c. *Viet Minh — 28.2% |
| d. United League of Workers and Peasants — 7.9% | e. Bao Dai — 6.9%                    | f. don't know — 11.0% |

3. The United States' relationship to France during the French Indo-Chinese War was one of:
  - a. absolute neutrality — 22.3%
  - b. giving moral support to the forces fighting against France — 15.7%
  - c. supporting France against the guerilla forces — 29.8%
  - d. underwriting the major financial cost of guerilla resistance to France — 2.6%
  - e. \*underwriting the major share of France's financial cost in suppressing the guerillas — 18.0%
  - f. don't know — 18.0%
4. French forces were defeated at:
  - a. Phu Bien Phu — 13.8%
  - b. Hue — 10.8%
  - c. \*Dien Bien Phu — 53.4%
  - d. Loc Nu Plisiku — 6.9%
  - e. don't know — 14.8%
5. Geneva Accords settling the French Indo-Chinese War included all but:
  - a. military truce — 3.9%
  - b. withdrawal of all foreign troops — 19.7%
  - c. \*maintain North and South Vietnam as separate nations — 21.6%
  - d. free elections supervised by an international supervisory board — 20.7%
  - e. none of the above — 22.0%
  - f. don't know — 12.5%
6. With respect to the Geneva Accords, the United States:
  - a. signed them — 19.6%
  - b. \*signed a conditional declaration of support — 35.7%
  - c. did not participate at the conference — 22.9%
  - d. refused to sign them — 8.9%
  - e. don't know — 12.5%
7. The original commitment of American aid to the Republic of South Vietnam was made under the administration of:
  - a. Truman — 13.1%
  - b. \*Eisenhower — 55.1%
  - c. Kennedy — 25.2%
  - d. Johnson — 1.3%
  - e. don't know — 5.2%
8. Diem became Chief of State in Vietnam by:
  - a. coup d'état — 35.7%
  - b. referendum supervised by International Supervisory Board — 16.1%
  - c. referendum in which candidates representing all viewpoints were represented — 6.9%
  - d. \*elections between government-approved candidates — 28.9%
  - e. don't know — 12.5%
9. The stated program of the National Liberation Front includes the following:
  - a. a termination of all western influence in Indo-China — 24.5%
  - b. a military defense alliance with the Soviet Union and China — 11.8%
  - c. \*a neutral foreign policy — 11.1%
  - d. none of the above — 33.4%
  - e. don't know — 18.0%
10. Continuous bombing of North Vietnam began in 1965 immediately after:
  - a. U.S. Navy ships were attacked in the Gulf of Tonkin — 61.9%
  - b. \*U.S. camp attacked at Pleiku — 12.8%
  - c. terrorist attack on U.S. Embassy — 15.4%
  - d. assassination attempt on Secretary McNamara — 1.6%
  - e. don't know — 8.2%
11. The size of U.S. expenditures for the war in Vietnam per month is approximately:
  - a. \$15 million — 20.9%
  - b. \$500 million — 22.6%
  - c. \$1 billion — 20.3%
  - d. \*\$2 billion — 28.5%
  - e. don't know — 7.2%
12. Total U.S. casualties including our wounded in the Vietnam War are approximately:
  - a. 25,000 — 13.8%
  - b. 75,000 — 16.4%
  - c. \*100,000 — 26.9%
  - d. 150,000 — 36.4%
  - e. don't know — 6.0%

On the surface, one might be surprised at the apparent lack of information possessed by many of the students. With regard to the individual items, only 11 percent responded correctly on the most difficult item (No. 9) while 55 percent responded correctly on what appeared to be the easiest item (No. 7). The other items fell between those percentages of correct answers, with an approximate mean of 27 percent correct responses for each item.

Table 2 reflects student opinion as to why the U.S. is involved in Vietnam. The items in this scale attempt to determine whether the conflict is seen as a holy war against an international Communist conspiracy or as a civil war with few international overtones.

TABLE 2  
PERCEPTION OF THE WAR

|  |          |            |          |                   |  |
|--|----------|------------|----------|-------------------|--|
| 1. The war in Vietnam is not really conflict between democracy and communism.  |          |            |          |                   |  |
| disagree strongly  | disagree | don't know | agree    | agree strongly    |  |
| 32.2%  | 45.7%    | 2.8%       | 16.0%    | 3.3%              |  |
| 2. There can be no peaceful solution to the war in Vietnam unless communism is crushed in the South.   |          |            |          |                   |  |
| agree strongly   | agree    | don't know | disagree | disagree strongly |  |
| 22.6%  | 45.6%    | 8.8%       | 19.0%    | 4.0%              |  |
| 3. The Viet Cong represent a substantial portion of the people and are more a popular movement than a conspiracy.  |          |            |          |                   |  |
| disagree strongly  | disagree | don't know | agree    | agree strongly    |  |
| 17.3%  | 44.7%    | 21.3%      | 14.7%    | 2.0%              |  |
| 4. The United States may have made some mistakes in its involvement in Vietnam, but we must fight on to a victorious conclusion because of our position as defender of democracy in the world today. |          |            |          |                   |  |
| agree strongly   | agree    | don't know | disagree | disagree strongly |  |
| 28.7%  | 50.7%    | 7.0%       | 10.6%    | 3.0%              |  |
| 5. The conflict in Vietnam is not part of the so-called plan for world domination by the Communists.   |          |            |          |                   |  |
| disagree strongly  | disagree | don't know | agree    | agree strongly    |  |
| 40.3%  | 42.7%    | 7.0%       | 8.0%     | 2.0%              |  |
| 6. If Vietnam falls to the Viet Cong, we will soon be defending Thailand and eventually other Southeast Asian countries.   |          |            |          |                   |  |
| agree strongly   | agree    | don't know | disagree | disagree strongly |  |
| 32.0%  | 48.0%    | 11.7%      | 7.3%     | 1.0%              |  |
| 7. The struggle in Vietnam is essentially a struggle between atheistic philosophy and religious freedom.   |          |            |          |                   |  |
| agree strongly   | agree    | don't know | disagree | disagree strongly |  |
| 2.6%   | 14.4%    | 18.0%      | 48.9%    | 16.1%             |  |
| 8. Most informed expert opinion on Asiatic affairs is that if the U.S. had not intervened in South Vietnam, the results would have been:   |          |            |          |                   |  |
| a. establishment of a democratic and neutral government.   |          |            |          |                   |  |
| disagree strongly  | disagree | don't know | agree    | agree strongly    |  |
| 35.7%  | 44.3%    | 18.8%      | 1.3%     | .1%               |  |
| b. establishment of a democratic and neutral government in which Communists would have played a dominant part.   |          |            |          |                   |  |
| disagree strongly  | disagree | don't know | agree    | agree strongly    |  |
| 20.0%  | 39.0%    | 22.7%      | 14.8%    | 3.5%              |  |
| c. Communist control would have been completed within two years' time.   |          |            |          |                   |  |
| agree strongly   | agree    | don't know | disagree | disagree strongly |  |
| 24.9%  | 49.5%    | 21.07%     | 4.5%     | .1%               |  |

The majority of students agree that the Communists must be crushed before peaceful solutions can be implemented and see the Viet Cong as representing more of a conspiracy than a popular movement. They also perceive American involvement to be the checking of an aggressive foreign ideology rather than active intervention in a civil war. The answers to these questions seem to indicate that most B.Y.U. students appear to be convinced that continued American intervention in the war is justified.



It should be pointed out, however, that a significant minority of students are opposed to the interpretation of the purpose of the war given by the majority of students. This is interesting in light of the fact that B.Y.U. students have had limited access on campus to speakers of national prominence who dispute the reasons for fighting the war as advanced by the Johnson Administration.

One of the choice doctrines integral to Mormon theology is the concept of free agency, which is presumably reflected in permitting individuals to openly express their ideas. This implies the need to insure that communications media remain unencumbered by government regulation and management so that novel and controversial ideas might be freely exchanged. Table 3 shows items which reflect relative agreement or disagreement by the students on suppression of dissent and management of news.

TABLE 3  
CONTROL OF NEWS AND DISSENT

|   |          |            |          |                   |  |
|---|----------|------------|----------|-------------------|--|
| 1. We should avoid giving aid or comfort to the enemy even if it means prohibiting public demonstrations against the war in Vietnam.                                    |          |            |          |                   |  |
| agree strongly  | agree    | don't know | disagree | disagree strongly |  |
| 14.0%   | 28.0%    | 16.0%      | 30.0%    | 12.0%             |  |
| 2. It is essential that a country in war such as ours must control the news media to some extent.   |          |            |          |                   |  |
| agree strongly  | agree    | don't know | disagree | disagree strongly |  |
| 6.0%  | 38.0%    | 16.0%      | 27.0%    | 13.0%             |  |
| 3. When the national security is at stake, it is proper for the government to omit telling the whole truth to the people.   |          |            |          |                   |  |
| agree strongly  | agree    | don't know | disagree | disagree strongly |  |
| 7.0%  | 42.0%    | 14.0%      | 23.0%    | 14.0%             |  |
| 4. In these troubled times, if we are to be strong and united against our common enemy, we must have more laws and safeguards against the spreading of dangerous ideas. |          |            |          |                   |  |
| disagree strongly   | disagree | don't know | agree    | agree strongly    |  |
| 11.0%   | 39.0%    | 21.0%      | 22.0%    | 7.0%              |  |
| 5. Even though freedom of speech for all groups is a worthwhile goal, it is unfortunately necessary to restrict the freedom of certain political groups.                |          |            |          |                   |  |
| disagree strongly   | disagree | don't know | agree    | agree strongly    |  |
| 8.0%  | 36.0%    | 15.0%      | 38.0%    | 3.0%              |  |
| 6. A group which tolerates too much difference of opinion among its own members cannot exist for long.  |          |            |          |                   |  |
| disagree strongly   | disagree | don't know | agree    | agree strongly    |  |
| 7.0%  | 28.0%    | 13.0%      | 44.0%    | 8.0%              |  |
| 7. In times like these it is often necessary to be more on guard against ideas put out by people or groups in one's own camp than by those in the opposing camp.        |          |            |          |                   |  |
| disagree strongly   | disagree | don't know | agree    | agree strongly    |  |
| 2.0%  | 19.0%    | 27.0%      | 44.0%    | 8.0%              |  |

In light of the rights guaranteed by the first amendment of the United States Constitution as supported by the doctrine of the Church, it is interesting to find that so many students are willing to prohibit free but controversial expression. The fact that the majority of students do not feel that a

group which tolerates differences of opinion can exist for long may be expressing an unwritten norm in the Church that disagreement is threatening to group survival.

Table 4 shows student attitudes toward the war as reflected by recommendations of how to handle the conflict. Our efforts were aimed at tapping a dimension which might appropriately be termed "hawkish"—"dovish"; the poles being reflected as agreement with such items as "Johnson should be censured for violating international law" and "we should employ nuclear weapons to prevent South Vietnam from falling to the Viet Cong."

TABLE 4  
ATTITUDES TOWARD THE WAR

|   |          |            |          |                   |
|---|----------|------------|----------|-------------------|
| 1. More effort should be applied toward a military victory than a political solution.   |          |            |          |                   |
| agree strongly  | agree    | don't know | disagree | disagree strongly |
| 15.7%   | 28.9%    | 17.4%      | 28.5%    | 9.5%              |
| 2. In order to destroy the food supply base of the Viet Cong, chemical defoliation agents should be used.   |          |            |          |                   |
| agree strongly  | agree    | don't know | disagree | disagree strongly |
| 6.6%  | 18.0%    | 33.4%      | 36.1%    | 5.9%              |
| 3. A justified basis for the withdrawal of American forces in Vietnam is that our involvement is immoral.   |          |            |          |                   |
| disagree strongly   | disagree | don't know | agree    | agree strongly    |
| 32.7%   | 43.3%    | 15.8%      | 5.6%     | 2.6%              |
| 4. Our government must implement the Geneva Accords which settled the French Indo-China War as a basis for settling the conflict.                   |          |            |          |                   |
| disagree strongly   | disagree | don't know | agree    | agree strongly    |
| 7.2%  | 18.0%    | 69.1%      | 5.6%     | .1%               |
| 5. Johnson and his administration should be censured for violating international law pertaining to the conduct of war in Vietnam.                   |          |            |          |                   |
| disagree strongly   | disagree | don't know | agree    | agree strongly    |
| 12.7%   | 44.6%    | 35.4%      | 4.3%     | 3.0%              |
| 6. Limited forms of torture of Viet Cong suspects are essential due to the special nature of this war which prevents normal intelligence gathering. |          |            |          |                   |
| agree strongly  | agree    | don't know | disagree | disagree strongly |
| 3.9%  | 19.6%    | 30.9%      | 33.1%    | 12.5%             |
| 7. Since the military is most familiar with the problems of the war, they should be given a free hand in its conduct.                               |          |            |          |                   |
| agree strongly  | agree    | don't know | disagree | disagree strongly |
| 12.1%   | 31.5%    | 13.8%      | 35.4%    | 7.2%              |
| 8. A justified basis for withdrawal of American forces in Vietnam is total victory by our forces.   |          |            |          |                   |
| agree strongly  | agree    | don't know | disagree | disagree strongly |
| 20.0%   | 43.3%    | 13.5%      | 20.6%    | 2.6%              |
| 9. If necessary we should employ nuclear weapons to prevent South Vietnam from falling to the Viet Cong.  |          |            |          |                   |
| agree strongly  | agree    | don't know | disagree | disagree strongly |
| 9.8%  | 17.0%    | 23.4%      | 35.7%    | 14.1%             |
| 10. Napalming of villages is justified if these communities harbor and support the Viet Cong.   |          |            |          |                   |
| agree strongly  | agree    | don't know | disagree | disagree strongly |
| 6.8%  | 32.5%    | 27.3%      | 28.2%    | 5.2%              |

11. The primary aim of the U.S. in Vietnam should be the attempt to reconcile all factors, including the Viet Cong and to guarantee all factions a political role in a future government.  

|                   |          |            |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|------------|-------|----------------|
| disagree strongly | disagree | don't know | agree | agree strongly |
| 7.5%              | 41.3%    | 21.4%      | 26.8% | 3.0%           |
12. The U.S., being the most powerful combatant in the Vietnam conflict, must take the first step toward peace by ceasing military operations for an indefinite time in a step toward negotiations.  

|                   |          |            |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|------------|-------|----------------|
| disagree strongly | disagree | don't know | agree | agree strongly |
| 32.8%             | 46.8%    | 9.6%       | 9.2%  | 1.6%           |
13. If a U.N. resolution calls for a cessation of bombing in the North, the U.S. should abide by such a resolution.  

|                   |          |            |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|------------|-------|----------------|
| disagree strongly | disagree | don't know | agree | agree strongly |
| 12.1%             | 21.3%    | 20.7%      | 41.6% | 4.3%           |
14. China's support of the rebellion in the South can best be curtailed by bombing targets within China herself.  

|                |       |            |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|------------|----------|-------------------|
| agree strongly | agree | don't know | disagree | disagree strongly |
| 2.9%           | 13.1% | 22.7%      | 46.9%    | 14.4%             |
15. As a step toward peace in Vietnam, we must stop supporting the current regime in Saigon.  

|                   |          |            |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|------------|-------|----------------|
| disagree strongly | disagree | don't know | agree | agree strongly |
| 12.5%             | 43.3%    | 39.3%      | 3.6%  | 1.3%           |
16. The harbor at Haiphong should be mined to prevent war materials from entering North Vietnam.  

|                |       |            |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|------------|----------|-------------------|
| agree strongly | agree | don't know | disagree | disagree strongly |
| 18.0%          | 42.9% | 27.2%      | 11.8%    | .1%               |
17. In order to shatter the enemy's potential, the bombing of the North must be increased.  

|                |       |            |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|------------|----------|-------------------|
| agree strongly | agree | don't know | disagree | disagree strongly |
| 19.0%          | 42.9% | 25.6%      | 10.2%    | 2.3%              |
18. Our policy in Vietnam should be aimed toward supporting national determination even if this means recognizing the National Liberation Front as the legitimate representative of the people.  

|                   |          |            |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|------------|-------|----------------|
| disagree strongly | disagree | don't know | agree | agree strongly |
| 5.9%              | 23.9%    | 53.4%      | 14.8% | 2.0%           |

Generally the results reflect some ambivalence on the part of students about the war. Few overall generalizations are possible as the respondents indicated considerable divergence of opinion on many of the issues contained in this scale. These responses, however, do support the belief that most students feel that American intervention in the war is justified, as exemplified by majority disagreement that American involvement is immoral and general disapproval of censuring the Johnson Administration. An overwhelming majority state that they don't know whether the Geneva Accords should be a basis for settling the conflict; however, this uncertainty may reflect ignorance about the implications of the Geneva Accords. It is interesting that when confronted with some of the "gut" issues of the war there is some ambivalence toward harsh and cruel measures. Thus, more people disagree than agree that chemical defoliation agents should be used to destroy the food base of the Viet Cong, that limited forms of torture should be employed against Viet Cong suspects and that nuclear weapons should be employed. However, majority

approval is registered for the mining of Haiphong harbor and increased bombing of the North.

While there is little to substantiate that the students are more "hawkish" at B.Y.U. than at other institutions, agreement with items of torture and bombing (with all the suffering that this implies) at an institution with a student body generally perceiving itself as being deeply religious brings into focus the tragic dilemmas posed by this war.

### PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS AND THE WAR

Where in the earlier section we attempted to report student attitudes and views about the war, we would like in this section to discuss the background and characteristics of individuals which induce them to support a hard-line, hawkish policy in Vietnam. The data were analyzed by various statistical techniques,<sup>2</sup> and we will report here only those relationships which are sufficiently above chance levels to justify inclusion.

Among early psychologists, Freud consistently pointed out the effect of the child rearing practices of parents on the subsequent character of the child. Several investigators have noted that severe punitiveness of parents in controlling the child's aggression results in frustration and eventually aggression directed at some safe target.<sup>3</sup> Some cross-cultural evidence<sup>4</sup> has also been found between the severity of aggression training and aggression. One study<sup>5</sup> supports the view that children prescribe for others the same sort (including intensity) of punishment which they received from their parents.

If severe aggression training by the parents produces frustration in the child, which in turn produces aggressive behavior toward "safe" targets, it is not difficult to assume that such reaction may eventually become habitual in the adult. The hypothesized relationship between aggression training and the war in Vietnam is based on the assumption that reaction to frustration is habitually directed toward outgroups. Such outgroups are considered safe because the greatest punishment as a child always occurred from the ingroup, particularly the parents. There is reason to believe that the NLF is such a psychologically safe outgroup. Not only is the war being fought thousands of miles away, but it is being fought against another race possessing an alien ideology. *Our results verify the hypothesis that students who perceive their*

---

<sup>1</sup>Using a random sample of 305, one can show using statistical techniques that the relationships between variables and percentages for the sample reflect with very little chance of error the relationships and percentages for the entire student body of 20,000.

<sup>2</sup>The data from the survey questionnaire were analyzed through various statistical procedures. All the variables were intercorrelated and a regression analysis and analysis of variance were performed. The relationships which are reported in this paper are those which are significant at *at least* the .05 level, which means that we are taking only 5 chances out of 100 that these results might have occurred by chance.

<sup>3</sup>J. Dollard, L. Doob, N. Miller, O. Mowrer, and R. Sears. *Frustration and Aggression* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939).

<sup>4</sup>J. W. M. Whiting and I. L. Child, *Child Training and Personality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953).

<sup>5</sup>Marian J. Radke, *Relation of Parental Authority to Children's Behavior and Attitudes*, *University of Minnesota Institute of Child Welfare Monograph*, No. 22, 1946.



parents as being extremely punitive in disciplining them for varying degrees of probing aggression generally tend to be more hawkish about the war. This lends support to the notion that individuals mete to others the same harshness of punishment which is meted to them. Further, it shows a need to fully evaluate the home influence in trying to understand intra- and inter-social aggression.

One possible reason for the relationship between aggression training and hawkish attitudes might be that individuals become less sensitive to the pains of others to the extent that they are exposed to pain or violence themselves. A variation of this theme has actually been employed in psychotherapy to overcome anxiety and phobias. The central hypothesis is that fear is learned, and if it can be learned it can also be unlearned. Thus, hospitalized patients who are afraid of open or closed places often overcome their fears when slowly introduced to these stimuli under pleasant or fear reducing conditions.

Today communications media have many of the features described above. As has been noted, violence has become a prominent part of the movies, new novels, and many currently popular TV programs. The interesting phenomenon is that indulging in these media usually takes place under very pleasant conditions, sitting in plush seats eating popcorn or relaxing in front of the TV with a pleasant snack. This relationship contains all the elements of desensitization therapy and could presumably reduce anxiety and fear of violence — including the violence of war. *In fact we find that students who prefer violence over other topics in the various media also tend to be more hawkish about the war.* Presumably what happens is that the individual's own fears and anxieties over violence are blunted, permitting him to more easily tolerate, condone, or actively advocate violence on the intersocial level.

Traditionally, the separation of church and state implies that churches are not political reference groups. Several studies, however, have established that differences in religion are related to differences in handling such issues as dealing with communist nations and the cold war.<sup>6</sup> Research<sup>7</sup> has shown that Jews are more oriented toward peace action than either Protestants or Catholics. Catholics in particular appeared to be highest in the expression of hard-line attitudes. In a Canadian survey<sup>8</sup> religious dogmatism is associated with the acceptance of bigger military forces, being favorable to the spread of nuclear weapons, and hostility to a co-existence policy. We wanted to observe whether church religious authorities are political reference figures for some people and whether the relationship between attitudes toward war and religiosity is also consistent for the Mormon population. The essential hypothesis is that L.D.S. religious authorities are political reference figures for some people.

---

<sup>6</sup>A. Barton. A Survey of Suburban Residence on What To Do about the Danger of War, *Council for Correspondence Newsletter*, No. 24 (1963), 3-11; M. J. Rosenberg "Images in Relation to the Policy Process," in H. C. Kelman, ed., *International Behavior* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965).

<sup>7</sup>Barton, *op. cit.*

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*

Although there is no obvious link between the L.D.S. Church and attitudes toward the war in Vietnam, consideration of our results may suggest that the Church is viewed by some members as a political reference group. In general the Church leadership is recognized as being socially and politically conservative and B.Y.U. has been characterized as the most conservative university in America. The campaign for Christmas cards for the servicemen along with an absence of recognized dissent on the campus has perhaps led many naive students to believe that a connection exists between Church commitment and fighting the battle for Christ against an atheistic enemy. Under these conditions, one might expect that the more active an individual is in Church the more he will be disposed to a hard-line policy toward the war. We may expect greater Church norm influence on a young man who has just returned from a mission for his Church than on those who have been back longer. If the L.D.S. Church then is a political reference group we may predict that those who have been back from their missions a shorter time will tend to show greater preference for hard-line attitudes in Vietnam. *The results of our survey indicate that this postulated relationship actually exists.* In summary, the more active an individual is in the Church and the more recently he has left his mission, the more hawkish are his attitudes.

Hawkish individuals tend to believe that the war is really part of an international Communist plot. This is not surprising as we may logically expect that a person's beliefs are consistent with his attitudes. Festinger<sup>9</sup> (p. 18) suggests "when dissonance is present, in addition to trying to reduce it, the person will actively avoid situations and information which would likely increase the dissonance." This may then explain why those with "hard-line" views on the war approve of the management and control of news and treating dissenters harshly. If news sources are carefully moderated and selectively filtered and internal dissent is absent, it is not likely that any dissonance will occur. In the absence of dissonance there is no discomfort which will cause the individual to reevaluate his position or change his attitude.

### CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

The overwhelming majority of Brigham Young University students (94%) perceive themselves as possessing the Christian virtues of love, brotherhood, and consideration for others, and many accept the General Authorities as political reference figures. It is apparent therefore that the possibility of individuals in authority becoming models for political behavior is very real. At the same time, there is considerable divergence about the war among L.D.S. persons of high status, and this divergence is in fact reflected among the students. The perception of self-expressed Christian virtue has some meaning at the intersocial level. This is indicated by the fact that a majority of the students disapproved of harsh and cruel measures administered on a person to person basis, while approving of more remote means of destruction, e.g., bombing, where the pain and suffering seem somehow more distant.

---

<sup>9</sup>L. Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957).

As has been stated, there is no immediate or apparent reason why the Church should be a hawkish reference group. Nevertheless a significant positive relationship was obtained between the extent of Church activity and hawkish attitudes. The statistical techniques employed in analyzing the data do not imply causal relationships, but we are left with the intriguing question: Why are highly active members and recently returned missionaries more hawkish than less active members and missionaries who have been back longer?

There is no evidence at present which indicates that Brigham Young University students have less information available about the war than students from other universities. One must however contemplate how attitudes are affected by the lack of knowledge concerning critical historical items. It is of course logical that good choices are only available to the extent that one possesses the knowledge upon which to base a choice. By this criterion, Brigham Young University students in general do not have a solid foundation on which to base their policy preferences.

There are varying opinions on why we are fighting the war in Vietnam, and these differences of opinion are at the very core of solving the issue. Involved here is the whole problem of how to obtain "good" information apart from the biases of the individual. Good information is trusted information and all have varying opinions about whom they can trust. The bias of the individual not only indicates whom he will trust but also the type of information sought in the first place. While this problem is difficult it must be clear that there is safety in diversity. *Only by exposing oneself purposely to information which is incongruent with one's own opinion is there any hope that a realistic picture will finally emerge.*

This indicates the importance of keeping the channels of information free and open while allowing all forms of constitutional dissent. One must ask the question, "How can citizens make responsible judgments in the face of censorship and misrepresentation and how will incongruent information be made available without dissent?" In this regard, it is disappointing to observe that so many students approve of the muzzling of dissent and news control. Democracy will only succeed to the extent that citizens can make choices unencumbered by the tyranny of government or majorities.

War is ugly and far from glorious. It often robs those involved of any human sentiment and pity and permits one to be "objective" about cruelty and pain. In the beatitudes the Lord says: "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the sons of God." How can we as Latter-day Saints play this fortunate role in this complex and fast-paced world? While there are no easy solutions to this question, it is clear that we must all be involved in the choices we make as a nation in waging war and peace. This study shows that harsh punishment as a child, preference for violence in TV and reading material, and activity in the Church, among other variables, are generally found in B.Y.U. students who take a hard-line or hawkish approach to the war in Vietnam, while those characteristics are generally present to a lesser degree in students who take a "dovish" stand.