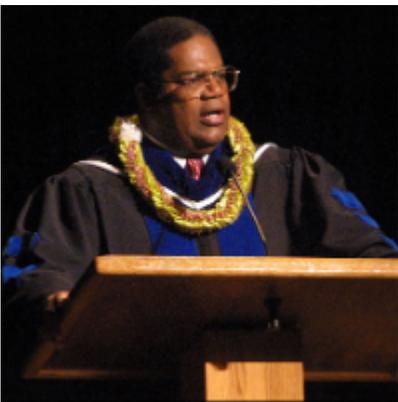


An Inevitable Paradox: Establishing a "Peaceable Habitation" in a Violent World



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September 08, 2005



In the last few years Convocation speakers have been asked to address President David O. McKay's prophecy made at the groundbreaking ceremony for the then Church College of Hawaii: "[From] this school ... will go men and women whose influence will be felt for good towards the establishment of peace internationally." (Pres. David O. McKay, Groundbreaking Address, Church College of Hawaii, 12 February 1955)

In the last four years Drs. Beth Haynes, Dale Robertson, Debbie Hippolite-Wright, Jared Ludlow, and Vernice Wineera have preceded me in addressing this topic, and I invite you to read—or reread—their talks.

This meeting is an old academic ritual, solemn and symbolic. The faculty is dressed in the robes of the academic priesthood, which I understand to be an earthly power grounded in learning and scholarship, which I suppose might in the future, after the second coming of the Savior Jesus Christ, be organized as an additional appendix or order of the Melchizedek Priesthood. The teaching profession would then be restored to the exalted status it enjoyed before the Fall of Adam and Eve, in which the Garden of Eden was the first classroom, God and his authorized messengers were the teachers, and Adam and Eve were their resplendent, intelligent students.

Now it is my privilege to address you, not as a devotional speaker, but as a scholar. I must begin by confessing

that I am not an expert in peace studies, but I will offer some observations and insights as a religion scholar, and a citizen of the world. Due to my membership in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I must also remind you that my position as a religion professor, although “para-ecclesiastical,” that is, supportive of the ecclesiastical line of authority, does not grant me any authority to speak officially or authoritatively on behalf of the Church. My job as a religion professor is that of “... supporting the ... authorities of the Church in their efforts to: maintain and safeguard doctrinal purity; foster sound comprehension, interpretation, and application of those doctrines; seek accurate historical information about the Church in any of its dispensations; and build bridges of understanding and friendship with other faiths.” I will quote or paraphrase scriptures and words of latter-day prophets, but I am solely responsible for the interpretations and insights I have developed from those sacred texts. I chose to title my remarks “An Inevitable Paradox: Establishing a ‘Peaceable Habitation’ in a Violent World.” Let me begin to explain what I mean by “inevitable paradox” with an experience I had years ago in one of my classes at Ricks College (now BYU-Idaho). Before starting class on a Monday morning, I asked my students if anyone had engaged in any great weekend activity. Among the respondents was a young man who told me that he had had his “dream” date that weekend. Given the several “oohs” and “aahs,” from the other students and out of curiosity I asked the student to elaborate.

He said that there was a young lady whom he had been wishing to invite on a date for three months, and that on that weekend he was finally able to realize his dream. Being even more curious, I asked him what they had done during their outing, and he replied rather proudly: “We had a great dinner and after that we played paintball.” There were some other “oohs” and “aahs” from the other students, but perhaps betraying an ever-expanding generational gap, I was pensive. So I asked him: “Let me see if I got this straight: You waited three months to ask the girl out, and when you finally did, you shot her?” He smiled and answered: “Oh, it was just paint ...” I insisted: “Yes, but you pointed a paint gun and her and shot her, right?” He in turn insisted: “Yeah, but it was just for fun ...!”

When Dean Jeff Burroughs extended me the invitation to be the Convocation speaker for this jubilee year, I could not stop thinking about that dialog I had years ago. For me, that experience demonstrated that violence is so deeply ingrained in our nature that throughout history some of our entertainment has been violent. Like the ancient Greeks, Romans, and other ancient cultures, at the dawn of the 21st century we also take pleasure in seeing heated arguments, dramatic expulsions, fights, and even murders. Through state-of-the-art computer technology and virtual reality one can even experience the adrenalin rush associated with killing someone without any subsequent remorse. However, it is not my intent to criticize or judge modern entertainment. I suppose all of us have heard enough about it. Instead, I want to discuss an apparent paradox related to peace.

Peace is defined in dictionaries as a state of security or order provided by law or custom, free from conflict, confusion, disturbance, or harassment. Peace may also be defined as a state of harmony, mutual concord, and esteem in human relations, and also a mental condition free from disquieting or oppressive thoughts or emotions. In other words, we can describe peace as a state of general welfare and absence of conflict experienced when there is physical wholeness, emotional maturity, spiritual nourishment, generated by harmony and order, having obedience to laws as a necessary condition for the existence of harmony and order. Observe the following Biblical promise:

“And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever. And my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.” (Old Testament, Isaiah 32:17-18)

However, it seems that never in the recorded history of this world there has ever been worldwide, lasting peace. It seems that whenever peaceful conditions existed, it was always on a regional scope and for a relatively short period of time. Sacred texts from many religious traditions— Christian or not—contain narratives of divine

accomplishments filled with imagery related to war, battle, or conflict. Almost without exception these texts acknowledge the existence of evil and the need to battle and ultimately defeat it in order to forever consolidate the supremacy of good.

Texts sacred to Latter-day Saints confirm the Biblical assertion that conflict has always been present in the history of the world. The narrative of the sacred history of the world begins and ends with wars—the War in Heaven and the Battle of Gog and Magog. If even in heaven there was “war,” on earth war may very well be unavoidable.

So here is the nature of this apparent paradox: We all cherish peace and yearn for universal, permanent peace, but we seem unable to reach it, for reasons apparently beyond our control.

Is there a solution to this apparent paradox? I’m glad to say that we have good news in that respect. Consider these statements made by the Lord:

“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” (New Testament, John 14:27)

“These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

Believing in these divine statements, let’s now explore how we can help fulfill President David O. McKay’s prophecy about each one of us being an influence towards the “... establishment of peace internationally.”

I don’t mean to establish a trivial distinction, but it so happens that I recall the words of the Prophet Joseph Smith saying that “... the things that are written are only hints of things which existed in the prophet’s mind ...” (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p.304) I have learned that the language and vocabulary of prophetic statements often contain “layers of meaning” that require careful inspection to be discovered.

So, President McKay used the expression “... establishment of peace internationally.” Notice that he did not say “international peace.” In my understanding, his inspired statement could imply the establishment of “havens of peace” in the midst of general turmoil. In fact, revelations given to the Prophet Joseph Smith suggest that this may be the condition of the world in our times (See Doctrine and Covenants 1:35-36; 45:68-69).

Elder Henry B. Eyring confirmed this idea when, speaking to BYU-Hawaii graduates 15 years ago, he stated:

“We don’t need to wait for a perfect world to be an influence for peace. Nor do you have to be a prime minister, a member of parliament ... You don’t even have to be a leader at all. You can be the lowliest worker. ... You can lift your eyes and the eyes of those around you to principles of what is true and what is right. That will lift them above self interest. ...

“It won’t bring perfect peace but conflict will become less and less and you and those around you will feel moments of peace. And those moments may cause them to say, ‘I wonder if there was a way to have peace like this all the time. I wonder if there will ever be a peace like this in all the world.’” (Elder Henry B. Eyring, “Graduates are Ambassadors of Peace to Those Around”, Commencement Address, 21 June 1990)

So, how can we establish these havens of peace? In the time I have left, I would like to propose a few insights for your consideration. I have divided these ideas into three sections: (1) The Influence of our Religion; (2) Peace in our Families; and (3) The Role of the University.

The Influence of our Religion in Establishing Peace

Some time ago I noticed the absence of the word “religion” in those revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants in which the Lord speaks to the Prophet Joseph Smith. Whenever he referred to the elements constituting his kingdom on earth the Lord used words such as: articles, covenants, doctrine, church, and law—but not religion.

The words “church” and “religion” are often used interchangeably, but for the purpose of my analysis I will establish a distinction between them. So, I will define “church” as an organization established by revelation for the salvation and exaltation of the human family. It is the earthly repository of oracles, doctrines, principles, priesthoods, laws, covenants, and ordinances, revealed from heaven. I will refer to these elements as “components of the church.” And I will define “religion” as the lifestyle developed by individuals and families as they follow or practice the components of the church.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has been on the earth for almost 200 years. As we approach its third century, it befalls on us the work of helping fulfill major expectations of those faithful members who went before us. Consider these words from the Prophet Joseph Smith—one of his last recorded teachings, expressed in Carthage Jail just a few hours before his martyrdom:

“When still a boy [Jesus] had all the intelligence necessary to enable Him to rule and govern ... and could reason with the wisest and most profound doctors of law and divinity, and make their theories and practice to appear like folly compared with the wisdom He possessed; but He was a boy only, and lacked physical strength even to defend His own person; and was subject to cold, to hunger and to death.

“So it is with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; we have the revelation of Jesus, and the knowledge within us is sufficient ... to give universal peace to all mankind, if they would receive it, but we lack the physical strength, as did our Savior when a child, to defend our principles, and we have of necessity to be afflicted, persecuted and smitten, and to bear it patiently until Jacob is of age, then he will take care of himself.” (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p.392; brackets added)

I consider that one of the ongoing challenges facing us as we approach the third century of the Church will be the full implementation of its components in our homes. In the last three decades, we have seen Jacob maturing faster than ever before and getting closer and closer to the point at which “he will take care of himself.” And I see evidence of this in the tremendous growth of the Church, both quantitative as well as qualitative.

In conversations with many members of the Church throughout the United States, Japan, Brazil, and Hong Kong, I have detected a silent cry for more knowledge and consequently power—power to better manage our lives amidst busy and challenging circumstances. It is as if people were asking whether the only good their religion has to offer in this life is immaterial or abstract in nature. My answer is “No.” I am certain that by incorporating into our lives the full program of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, one can enjoy tangible, temporal blessings. But in order for that to happen we must be on guard against any dilution of our religion.

The vitality of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints lies in its extraordinary doctrines and ordinances. Trivializing or belittling those components could compromise the power of our religious life. What I call “dilution” is the process by which the components of the church cease to shape our daily activities. Our religiosity becomes compartmentalized and relegated to just a special weekly event. When that happens even the temple experience may be looked at as a routine ceremony instead of a powerful and profound allegory of our journey in life.

Let's take the sealing ordinance as an example. As we consider our view of marriage ceremonies in our temples, do we as a people pay more attention to formal clothing and elaborate receptions than to the priesthood ordinance that initiates a new eternal kingdom?

One of the questions endowed members are asked when they renew their temple recommends is whether they keep the covenants made in the temple. Starting at about 1987, whenever I interviewed endowed individuals for recommend renewals, I asked them if they knew what those covenants were. Almost without exception people could not remember what those covenants were. Yet, they all answered the first question affirmatively, and knowing them as their Bishop, I had no reason to doubt that they were indeed living according to those covenants. Still, the question has been in my mind ever since: how can one keep those covenants—that is, how will a person allow the memory of those covenants to refine or reshape that individual's actions, desires, appetites—if the individual does not remember what the covenants were?

If we are to establish peace internationally through the practice of our religion, we need to focus more on the components of the Church. Current revelations, priesthoods, laws, covenants, and ordinances, are the components that make the Church of Jesus Christ unique and vital. Sugar-coated storytelling, fictionalized history, and pageantry, may help spread the message, but these elements alone will not lead to salvation. And as important and praiseworthy as they may be, community and humanitarian service, and other social activities in isolation will not establish this peace that we desire. We need all these important activities, but they must be refined, perfected, and energized by the power of the priesthood and the power of the Holy Ghost. Speaking metaphorically, our religion is a composite of the Sacred Grove and the handcart. If we emphasize the handcart and de-emphasize the Sacred Grove, our religion could become indistinguishable from traditional Christianity, and our efforts to establish peace would have the same results as theirs.

The problems of this age may be complex to the point of being overwhelming to us. But as we gain more knowledge and greater analytical skills we will receive the inspiration from on high, because the Lord promised the following about his servants:

“... [Their] wisdom shall be great, and their understanding reach to heaven; and before them the wisdom of the wise shall perish, and the understanding of the prudent shall come to naught. For by my Spirit will I enlighten them, and by my power will I make known unto them the secrets of my will—yea, even those things which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor yet entered into the heart of man.” (Doctrine and Covenants 76:9-10)

Science and philosophy alone cannot save us from violence, and because of the nature of contemporary threats caused by loosely-connected terrorist groups, military power will likely only beget more violence. Drug traffickers, terrorists, and other warmongers will stop at nothing to shed blood, as long as it brings them some perceived advantage. The world has had plenty of scholars, plenty of philosophers, plenty of diplomats, plenty of poets and playwrights, plenty of peace activists—many of them introduced brilliant, inspiring, and compelling arguments for peace. Yet, in the end it has always been the politicians and the generals who ended up having their ideas implemented in the streets. And why? Because in this world violence often comes through those who do not care about philosophy, diplomacy, nor peace.

What the world needs is a power more overwhelming than military prowess, more compelling than political rhetoric. A power strong enough to permanently suppress the seeds of violence and hatred that reside in the human heart. And I declare my belief that that power lies within the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.

But faith in the true gospel requires intelligence. Many of you have heard about the obsolescence of information—the idea that part of the information acquired during the college years will be obsolete at the time of one's graduation. Keep in mind that as you engage in the academic activities in and out of the classroom you

will obtain more than just facts and figures. You will learn how to obtain valid information and distinguish it from fallacies and error. You will acquire the discipline that will enable you to better think, analyze, and synthesize information, and also how to present this information effectively to a variety of audiences. These skills will never become obsolete. At BYU-Hawaii and other Church schools you will also obtain deeper knowledge of principles and doctrines of eternal significance through religious education. You have chances to become better acquainted with the “whys” and the “how comes” of your religion.

Despite the unfortunate negative connotation recently associated with the term “intellectual,” I have stated in a number of occasions that the so-called Mormonism is an intellectual religion. Joseph Smith taught the need for a correct idea of God, and we teach people to ponder before they pray. That requires an educated membership. Many of you have had the experience of attending a Sunday School lesson taught by a teacher with little formal education, and hearing the discussion of doctrines and insights that would baffle many modern theologians.

Before I move to another area of discussion, allow me to share two additional observations related to this matter.

Let’s prevent the occurrence of disparaging remarks about other countries and cultures. Although a rare event in Laie, I observed that it is quite common in other regions of the country for travelers to disparage the countries they have visited. Negative remarks about the food, the water, local customs, etc., that would be considered impolite or offensive in a foreign country should not be repeated in Salt Lake City or anywhere else. With the availability of almost instant communication, a disparaging remark made at a sacrament meeting in, for example, Nebraska, could be quoted in an e-mail message that would be read in Bolivia in a matter of hours. And the possibility for a lasting negative impact in our missionary work is ever present.

The other observation has to do with the idea that we as a Church are not ready for “greater things.” I dispute that statement. In my view, it offends the intelligence and belittles the faith of great Latter-day Saints throughout the world. I concur with the idea that the Lord has not chosen to reveal certain components of his kingdom and aspects of his doctrine. But in the absence of specific revelations, I would not blame our intellect nor our faith for the absence of these “greater things.” We are ready for greater understanding and insight, greater power in one’s priesthood, with a variety of consequences such as: steadfastness in obedience and service; further fruits from temple worship and more temples—thousands of them in our lifetime; increase in local missionary effort perhaps doubling convert baptisms—and let me add that we shouldn’t dream about going to China if we don’t go to our own neighborhoods.

So, what can we expect of our religion in the process of establishing peace internationally? Consider these words from the Prophet Joseph Smith:

“The designs of God ... have been to promote the universal good of the ... world; to establish peace and good will among men; to promote the principles of eternal truth; to bring about a state of things that shall unite man to his fellow man; ... make the nations of the earth dwell in peace, and to bring about the millennial glory ...

“It has been the design of Jehovah, from the commencement of the world, and is His purpose now, to regulate the affairs of the world in His own time, to stand as a head of the universe, and take the reins of government in His own hand. When that is done, judgment will be administered in righteousness; anarchy and confusion will be destroyed, and ‘nations will learn war no more.’ ...

“Other attempts to promote universal peace and happiness in the human family have proved abortive; every effort has failed; every plan and design has fallen to the ground; it needs the wisdom of God, the intelligence of God, and the power of God to accomplish this. The world has had a fair trial for six thousand years; the Lord will try the seventh thousand Himself.” (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, pp.248-252)

And when this finally happens after the second coming of Jesus Christ, perhaps we will see government become yet another appendix or order of the Melchizedek Priesthood, just like education.

Peace in our Families

“The family is ordained of God,” states the Proclamation on the Family. It so happens that the word “ordained” means both “appointed or decreed” and “invested with ministerial or sacerdotal functions.” Since the genesis of the family in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints takes place upon sacred altars of temples, we understand that families are an organizational structure created and governed by the eternal priesthood. And I suppose that we begin to lose peace in our homes when we set aside the priesthood and the laws of the kingdom of God. Speaking on this campus in 1974, President Spencer W. Kimball stated: “Righteousness and true peace are inseparably connected.” (Commencement Address, Church College of Hawaii, 13 April 1974)

I suppose that many of the conflicts that beset families in the modern era may be the result of lack of the discipline of obedience. We seem to have inculcated in ourselves the false notion that we have the right to do anything we want regardless of the consequences in the lives of others and in society. And when we try to manage divinely-appointed organizations and structures such as families using that same false notion, we expose ourselves to failure.

Families organized through the ordinances of the House of the Lord constitute an additional appendix or order of the Melchizedek Priesthood—the divine patriarchal order. It is only in and through this organizational structure that men and women will find the spiritual development that will enable them to receive the full blessings of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. Covenants allow us to bind ourselves to our spouse’s life insomuch that our spouse’s needs become our needs. Covenants provide a “stasis,” a static balance or equilibrium between opposing forces. The constant memory of the covenants made in the temple will lead us to seek ways to maintain a satisfactory condition of peace in our homes while we face the expected differences of opinion, tastes, and habits, common in family life.

We will not be exempted from the challenges of daily life, but peace within our families can be attained. The course of life lived by Adam and Eve shows the path to follow. The Lord will send messengers to assist us and drive away evil from among us—if we keep our covenants sacred, diligently seeking and patiently waiting for additional light and knowledge. The faithful women of the Church may rest assured that their role as wives and mothers brings them everlasting honor, privileges, and blessings in this priesthood.

We must not forget another important aspect in the establishment of peace in our families, and that is economic stability and self-reliance. Besides the obvious benefits for families and individuals, economic development and stability is of strategic importance for the Church. It will do the Church no good to have over half of its members dependent on welfare. In the United States, demographic changes and other macroeconomic variables will soon make it very difficult for American Latter-day Saints to bear alone the financial burden of the rapidly-expanding Church. However, if in the next 20 years we see a significant improvement in the temporal status of members in Brazil, Mexico, and the Philippines, and if membership increases more rapidly in stable economies with reasonably sizable populations like Japan and Korea, then the Church will have the resources to further its mission elsewhere.

The Role of the University in the Establishment of Peace

In the prayer that dedicated this campus as a sacred facility, President David O. McKay asked the following:

“Give us power and intelligence to contribute to the pressing and progressive demands of the present. Give us inspiration in all efforts that tend to establish peace among nations, goodwill toward men.” (Dedicatory Prayer, Church College of Hawaii, 17 December 1958)

I once read these words attributed to former BYU President Ernest Wilkinson: “... dreams and prophetic utterances are not self-executing. They are fulfilled usually by righteous and devoted people making the prophecies come true.” (Ernest L. Wilkinson and W. Cleon Skousen, eds., *Brigham Young University: A School of Destiny*, p.876)

President McKay prayed that we had the power and the intelligence to alleviate the problems of the world. Where are we as a university family in contributing to the fulfillment of that prayer?

I confess that I knew little about BYU-Hawaii before I moved to Laie in the Summer of 2000, even though my wife and I had visited the campus briefly in 1995. But in these last 5 years I have seen great things being accomplished, and I have considered it a privilege and a blessing to have been here witnessing these great events. And allow me to commend President Eric Shumway for his successful leadership in over a decade of inspired and dedicated service.

Now that we contemplate the next 50 years of BYU-Hawaii, should we rest on our laurels? Should we consider our current performance sufficient? Allow me to suggest one area of improvement.

We must get rid of any hint or shadow of self-depreciation or inferiority complex. We are the face of the university—ourselves, our work, our facilities, our teaching, our research, our lectures here and abroad. And we cannot establish peace internationally unless we have an excellent reputation as an international institution. But the first place in which this reputation must be acknowledged is in our own eyes. If we do not think of ourselves and treat each other as world-class, no one outside of this campus will. To establish peace we must establish ourselves as professionals and accept nothing but excellent work as our minimum level of performance. Once again, I commend the administration of the university for initiating this discussion with the recent seminar on accountability and culture of beliefs.

I also commend CITO (Center for Instructional Technology and Outreach) and Drs. Bob Hayden and Peter Chan in particular for their efforts to project the university as a center of scholarship and service. The recent Global Chinese Conference on Computers in Education, and the medical project in Mongolia are two laudable examples. I also commend my colleague Dr. Kerry Muhlestein for his tireless efforts in putting together an international Egyptology conference that will take place in February of 2006. Leading universities and research centers throughout the world have been logging on to our website to learn about this conference. And who can forget our Concert Choir’s extraordinary tour in Japan and Korea last year? These are just three examples; there are more, but time will not allow me to list them all.

Perhaps most people never thought of BYU-Hawaii as a place for such academic exchanges, but I wonder whether this is the result of BYU-Hawaii never thinking of itself as a place for such activities. I think it’s time for us to become fully conscious of our potential, rise up, put on our beautiful garments, and say like Caleb of old, “Give me this mountain” (Joshua 14:12).

I invite all of you, in particular students and fellow faculty to give wings to your imagination and dream of great

projects that can benefit thousands especially in our target area. Think big, think internationally. One of the things I hope to see in the future is teams of faculty and students traveling internationally and teaching mini-courses for eager Latter-day Saints of all ages who will never have an opportunity to set foot on this campus. Don't fear lack of funding. If one's idea is truly inspired, the time will come when the Lord will provide the funds in some way.

Some would scoff, others would say "it doesn't happen this way," there might even be some whispers of criticism at first. For these, I would just say, "Please don't stand in the way of those who have faith and vision." One of the many things I have learned in 27 years of priesthood leadership in the Church is that the bad idea of today can become the inspired idea of tomorrow. All one needs to do is to give the proper decision makers some time to ponder about it. It may take a while, but when the Lord is interested in some project, after a few weeks or months some of the decision-makers will start saying "This project may not make much sense from a purely financial or operational standpoint, but for some reason I can't get this idea out of my head." And in the end, even if the proposal is temporarily turned down, its discussion will have raised the profile of the university, by refining feelings and perceptions about it. In some circles we would begin to be considered a force to be reckoned with; not just an outpost in the middle of the ocean, but an intellectual and spiritual partner to our sister institutions.

Some of you have just arrived on this campus, and you are probably thinking: "I just got here. Jubilee ...? Future ...? What does all that have to do with me?" Let me answer by pointing out that the fact that you are here automatically makes you part of the history of this institution. Whether in a positive or negative way, your presence and your actions have been impacting others from the moment you arrived.

Let me conclude by stating that I do not fear the future. God is in command. Cultural differences, language barriers, limited resources—none of these things can prevent the Lord from achieving his purposes. The only significant obstacle is lack of preparation caused by limited vision and weak faith. And I believe that despite the fact that violence is an ever-pervasive influence everywhere, we can establish havens of peace in our homes and in our communities through our religion and through our scholarship. And we will wait patiently and attentively for the day when Jesus Christ, our Savior, will return and establish universal peace for 1,000 years.

Consider these final words from President Spencer W. Kimball, paraphrasing George Bernard Shaw: "The problems of the world cannot possibly be solved by skeptics or cynics whose horizons are limited by the obvious realities. We need men [and women] who can dream of things that never were and ask, Why not?" ("Lengthening Our Stride", Regional Representatives Seminar, 3 Oct 1974; brackets added)