

Chastisement of the Nations, 1914–45

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Between 1914 and 1945, two horrific wars and a devastating economic depression convulsed the world. Leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints at that time reflected carefully upon these cataclysmic developments. In diaries, correspondence, informal conversations, local Church meetings, editorials, magazine articles, and civic gatherings, they revealed their views of events on the world stage. However, their addresses in the Church's April and October general conferences carried particular weight, being directed toward the entire Church. As President David O. McKay later observed, general conferences enabled the Church's leaders "to give instruction" to the membership at large.¹ These conference addresses, along with formal messages of the Church's First Presidency such as their annual Christmas greeting, were not canonized as scripture, but members desiring in-

spired contemporary counsel looked particularly to these sources.

Latter-day Saints sustain the Church President, his counselors in the First Presidency, and the Twelve Apostles as prophets, seers, and revelators. Although all these authorities are sustained as prophets, the Church President's pronouncements are preeminent. Even in the case of the prophet, Mark L. McConkie indicates in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, Latter-day Saints do not have a doctrine of "prophetic infallibility." McConkie explains, "Joseph Smith taught, 'a prophet was a prophet only when . . . acting as such.' Prophets have personal and private opinions, and they are 'subject to like passions,' as all people are (see James 5:17; Mosiah 2:10–11). However, when acting under the influence of the Holy Spirit in the prophetic role, 'whatsoever they shall speak . . . shall be the will of the Lord.'"²

In some cases the General Authorities' statements regarding the World Wars and the Great Depression—the subject of this chapter—reinforced American policies and values. In 1917, for instance, many General Authorities followed the dominant trend in American thinking, depicting the First World War as a righteous, idealistic crusade, but in the 1930s they voiced the general population's disillusionment with the war, condemning it as a wasteful, wicked enterprise. Often the Church's leadership reinforced the wisdom of their era, sometimes by directly quoting journalists, theologians, engineers, and other pundits. At other times leaders expressed their own views, shaped by their background, training, reading, and temperament—what Elder John A. Widtsoe referred to in one speech as the views of “common men”—and laid no claim to inspiration.³ J. Reuben Clark Jr., First Counselor in the First Presidency, brought his background in international law and diplomacy to bear upon matters, while Elder Reed Smoot spoke from the perspective of a once-powerful conservative politician who was well schooled in government operations and finance. Elder James E. Talmage spoke from his perspective as a scientist. Attentive Latter-day Saints could benefit enormously from counsel grounded in the professional acumen of these seasoned, capable leaders.

Yet members expected more than informed opinions from their leaders, and in this they were not disappointed; in every conference speakers expounded scripture, applied gospel principles to current events, identified spiritual causes of temporal difficulties, and prophesied of future outcomes. To believing Latter-day Saints in the twenty-first century, examining the statements of speakers in the Church's general conferences and the First Presidency's messages from the 1910s to the 1940s is fruitful on two levels. First, these statements are powerful historical documents capturing the mood and sentiments of incisive observers of some of the twentieth century's most sweeping developments; second, the reflections

of inspired leaders invite us to probe the relationship between God and human disregard for His commandments with reference to some of the most profound historical developments of the twentieth century.⁴

WORLD WAR I

When war broke out in Europe in August of 1914, Christians around the world attempted to reconcile their religious beliefs with the conflict and with their nations' positions in it. During the war's early stages, Latter-day Saint authorities criticized the fray but encouraged their followers to view it through the eyes of faith, looking for divine providence or a silver lining in the maelstrom. At the October 1914 general conference, Church President Joseph F. Smith observed that although the Church had recalled its missionaries from Europe as a result of the war, the conflict might ultimately promote missionary work. Threatened with physical annihilation, many Europeans were turning to prayer, and as they discovered or rediscovered God in the process, some would “begin to feel after their spiritual as well as their temporal welfare.”⁵ Speaking at the same conference, Elder David O. McKay speculated that this “most wicked of wars” might open the way for the gospel to be preached in new lands as it impelled “the destruction of monarchies.”⁶ The First Presidency reminded members in 1915 that “the conflict of nations is one of the signs” of the Second Coming and encouraged them to look forward to “all the joys and serene blessings of a long-predicted Millennium.”⁷

In 1915 Apostle and senator Reed Smoot pointed to a more immediate and tangible benefit of the war for the majority of Church members: many in the Intermountain West were prospering thanks to the war-induced demand for products of western farms, ranches, and mines.⁸ In addition to prosperity and promulgation of the gospel, some authorities hoped that war-induced changes would lay the foundation for a permanent peace. Although Elder Hyrum M.

Smith in 1916 said he was skeptical that the war could lead to lasting peace,⁹ in that same year B. H. Roberts of the First Quorum of the Seventy, a prominent Democrat, said he felt that peace might be achieved at the end of the war. The neutral United States, by promoting a postwar league of nations, could be “an instrument in the hands of God in accomplishing great things when it comes to settling the world’s affairs.”¹⁰

While they searched for a silver lining in the carnage of war, most General Authorities emphasized that God, the source of blessings, was not responsible for it. This view of God’s relationship to conflict was consonant with a revelation announced by Joseph Smith in 1833 that advised the Saints to “renounce war and proclaim peace” (D&C 98:16). “I don’t want you to think I believe that God has designed or willed that war should come among the people of the world,” President Joseph F. Smith stated in 1914.¹¹ Following America’s entry into the war in 1917, President Charles W. Penrose of the First Presidency similarly stated, “The Lord does not tell nations to rise and make conquests”¹² and Elder McKay rejected the notion that “the hand of God” had precipitated the war, saying, “I do not believe that God has caused the misery, the famine, the pestilence, and the death that are now sweeping the war-torn countries of Europe.”¹³ In 1918 President Joseph F. Smith reiterated that God was “not responsible” for the war.¹⁴

Rather than attributing the war to God, Church leaders identified other causes. Most, while also noting general conditions, focused the blame squarely upon human passion. “Men precipitate war and destruction upon themselves because of their wickedness,” taught President Joseph F. Smith.¹⁵ Specifically, European leaders motivated by “ambition and pride” had through their policies dragged their nations into war.¹⁶ With the exception of neutral Belgium, the European nations had taken up arms because of their vanity, selfishness, unrighteousness, and commercial objectives, Elder McKay taught in 1914.¹⁷

The following year Elder Smoot attributed the war to European rulers’ desire for more territory, greater power, and domination of international commerce.¹⁸ In 1916 Elder Hyrum M. Smith charged European Christianity with failing to rein in human passion. Rather than undercutting evil by forthrightly denouncing wickedness and calling for reform, the churches had either promoted “superstition and ignorance” or dealt in “glittering generalities,” thereby permitting a climate favorable for war to flourish.¹⁹

While General Authorities counseled that mankind rather than God was responsible for the war, they also taught that God had foreseen it. The war endowed familiar prophecies and revelations with new significance. For instance, in 1914 the First Presidency indicated that “the sudden ‘outpouring’ of the spirit of war upon the European nations” had been “foretold by the Prophet Joseph Smith” in 1832 (see D&C 87).²⁰ Elders Charles H. Hart and B. H. Roberts of the Seventy referred to the same prophecy of Joseph Smith that “war [would] be poured out upon all nations” and that Great Britain would seek assistance from other nations (D&C 87:3), interpreting this as a prediction of the Great War and of Britain’s diplomatic alliances and requests for military aid.²¹ In an era of submarine warfare when it was unsafe to travel on the high seas, Elder Orson F. Whitney recalled the 1831 revelation to Joseph Smith, “Behold, there are many dangers upon the waters, and more especially hereafter. . . . The days will come that no flesh shall be safe upon the waters.” Whitney asked, “Isn’t that time almost here?”²²

In denying that God was responsible for war but saying that He had foreseen it, Church leaders raised questions of God’s relationship to evil and His control over its ultimate reach. President Smith taught in 1917 that God permitted the war because He respected the agency of nations and their leaders.²³ The First Presidency counseled further that God “has permitted the evils which have been brought about by the acts

of His creatures, but will control their ultimate results for His own glory and the progress and exaltation of His sons and daughters, when they have learned obedience by the things they suffer."²⁴ Similarly, Elder McKay in 1916 maintained that "God will overrule our acts and the acts of nations for the consummation of his divine purposes."²⁵ President Penrose in that same year prophesied that eventually God would "overturn" the "plans and devices" of the wicked in order to "accomplish his own divine purposes."²⁶ In 1918 Elder Whitney attempted to explain how God could overrule human behavior in the manner described by Elder McKay or President Penrose without abrogating mankind's agency. Recalling the New Testament parable in which the lord of the feast sent his servants out to "compel" guests to join in the festivities, Elder Whitney explained that God would not force any man but that "he has never said that he would not create compelling situations, and so shape human affairs as to induce men and women to do things of their own volition that they would not do if circumstances remained unchanged."²⁷

While the prophet and other Church leaders portrayed the First World War as a natural consequence of human wickedness rather than a reflection of God's ill will, some emphasized one way in which the war could be linked to God: in addition to being an inevitable consequence of wickedness, war was an expression of God's disapproval of that wickedness. After all, the Doctrine and Covenants indicated that through "the sword and by bloodshed," humanity would "feel the wrath, and indignation, and chastening hand of an Almighty God" (D&C 87:6). Elder Anthony W. Ivins spoke of the war as "the judgments of the Almighty."²⁸ Elder Whitney recalled a prophecy made by President Wilford Woodruff in 1894 which referred to God's "angels of destruction" who had "left the portals of heaven" and were "waiting to pour out the judgments" of God. The war seemed to him to fulfill President Woodruff's prophecy.²⁹

Identifying the war with wickedness and divine judgment of that wickedness, Church leaders naturally interpreted America's isolation from the conflict prior to 1917 as a blessing. Reflecting the prevailing sentiment in the United States at the time, in 1914 Anthon H. Lund of the First Presidency prayed that "the leaders of this nation . . . may avoid all foreign entanglements, and that peace may continue to reign in this land."³⁰ But Germany's conduct of the war, particularly in the area of unrestricted submarine warfare in early 1917, caused Congress and the president of the United States to see German militarism as inimical to American security. As America's entrance into the war became a certainty in the spring of 1917, Church leaders redefined the conflict, much as politicians like President Woodrow Wilson and many theologians of other faiths were doing; they emphasized that fighting "in the spirit of defending the liberties of mankind" was not only justifiable but also righteous and might be the means of promoting constitutional government abroad.³¹

In part, patriotism may have motivated their interpretive shift, but circumstances had also changed, and part of the prophetic calling involves discerning which principles to apply as circumstances change. Their shift appeared consonant with the Lord's instruction to the Saints, "And now, verily I say unto you concerning the laws of the land, it is my will that my people should observe to do all things whatsoever I command them. And that law of the land which is constitutional, supporting that principle of freedom in maintaining rights and privileges, belongs to all mankind, and is justifiable before me" (D&C 98:4-5). "Does the Lord permit the shedding of blood and justify it?" asked President Penrose on April 6, the day that Wilson committed American troops to the conflict by signing a declaration of war. "Yes, sometimes he does," President Penrose replied. "There are times and seasons," he pointed out, "as we can find in the history of the world, in [the] Bible and

the Book of Mormon, when it is justifiable and right and proper and the duty of men to go forth in the defense of their homes and their families and maintain their privileges and rights by force of arms." He quoted from the Doctrine and Covenants and the book of Luke to show that wars for conquest were not justified but that battling "for our own protection" was: shortly before His death Jesus had advised His Apostles to arm themselves with a sword. Modern revelation taught that God had redeemed the land through bloodshed.³² And the ninety-eighth section of the Doctrine and Covenants—the same section that instructed the Saints to "renounce war"—advised that after repeated attacks by an enemy, the Lord would justify them in going forth to battle, and He would fight their battles (see D&C 98:36–37).

The scriptures justified defensive wars, but America had not been directly attacked except in the assault on its shipping. How, then, could America legitimately declare war on Germany? In 1918 Anthon H. Lund of the First Presidency took up this question; he acknowledged that America had entered the war without being directly attacked but identified broader grounds under which war was justified. The United States had declared war in order to assist other nations that had been mercilessly attacked. From Lund's perspective, "What had Belgium done that it should be overrun and destroyed? What had France done at that time, and Russia even?" To come to the defense of other nations was not only justifiable; it was "most unselfish," he reasoned.³³

Addressing similar themes in the fall of 1917, President Penrose denounced pacifism and advised Latter-day Saints who opposed the war to repent.³⁴ What Elder Smoot had earlier called a "wicked and unjustifiable European war"³⁵ was now seen in light of subsequent developments on the world stage as a noble crusade. America's leaders had sought to win support for the war on idealistic grounds contending that

"the world must be made safe for democracy,"³⁶ and Church leaders enthusiastically promoted that reinterpretation of the conflict. Church members attending the October 1917 conference were told by President Penrose that America's role in the Great War was "righteous" for two reasons: first, the United States was extending liberty and truth to other nations, and second, the United States was fighting in self-defense.³⁷ The Church's authorities supported the war so strongly that they sought and received the approval of the conference to invest \$250,000 of Church tithing funds in war bonds.³⁸ Linking the war to the Church's mission, President Penrose supported the investment because "tyranny and oppression" must be suppressed "for the purpose of aiding in spreading light and truth and freedom to all nations."³⁹ After hearing his enthusiastic speech, those in attendance voted with apparent unanimity to support the investment. Church leaders defended this use of sacred tithing revenue, pointing out that it represented a loan rather than a donation and further indicating that the Church's mission could be facilitated by the war. In a subsequent conference, Elder Talmage endorsed Church members' support of America's war effort, reasoning that the gospel could not be extended in the absence of "freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and above all, freedom of conscience"⁴⁰—all of which were imperiled by German aggression.

As they identified America's cause with righteousness, some leaders attributed the German government's purposes to Satan. Heber J. Grant, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, implied that the German kaiser was Satan's emissary. He "is not a representative from God. You can draw your own conclusions whom he does represent," President Grant taught. Pointing downward later in his address, he reiterated that the kaiser's inspiration came from a source other than God.⁴¹ Charles Hart of the First Council of the Seventy characterized German military tactics as evil. He quoted a report by

Saturday Evening Post correspondent Will Irwin in which Irwin recounted German atrocities committed during the invasion of Belgium. The atrocities were so great that they caused most American observers “to become anti-German for life.”⁴²

Following America’s entry into the war, Church leaders not only denounced Germany but also turned to the scriptures and prophecies to show that Germany would be defeated. Pointing to the Book of Mormon’s identification of America as a land of liberty, Elder Whitney encouraged members to be convinced by these prophecies. “You need not fear that any German kaiser will ever set up his throne upon this land,” he taught.⁴³ In the fall of 1918, President Grant assured the Saints that “the Central Powers cannot win this war,” reasoning that German militarism and prophecies of the Millennium, which he believed would shortly be fulfilled, were incompatible. President Grant did not predict that the Great War would usher in the Millennium, but he did feel the conflict was “leading up to the Millennium.”⁴⁴ Reminding the Saints of God’s directing hand and benevolence, Elder Levi Edgar Young of the First Council of the Seventy predicted, “The war will end in victory” and the “consummation of human happiness.”⁴⁵

Although they spoke largely to western American members of a Utah-based Church and although they strongly supported America’s war effort, Church leaders were mindful that their stewardship extended to Saints fighting on both sides of the conflict. President Joseph F. Smith mainly had the treatment of German Church members in Utah in mind when he spoke in the spring of 1917, four days after Woodrow Wilson had delivered his war message to an enthusiastic audience on Capitol Hill, but he did not limit his statement to immigrants. President Smith advised, “In the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints there is neither Greek, nor Jew, nor Gentile; in other words, there is neither Scandinavian, nor Swiss, nor German, nor Russian, nor

British, nor any other nationality. We have become brothers in the household of faith.”⁴⁶ The concept that in an imperfect world, members should be subject to the laws of the land and “the powers that be, until he reigns whose right it is to reign” (D&C 58:21–22) found a new echo in a conference address by Hyrum Valentine, recently released president of the Swiss and German Mission. President Valentine explored the moral complexity of membership in a Church where communicants owed allegiance to nations on both sides of the conflict. Addressing the general conference in the spring of 1917, President Valentine told of Wilhelm Kessler, a missionary of German birth, who had left his mission when the war commenced to enlist in the German army and had given his life in battle. Calling Kessler’s position at the outset of the war “most difficult,” Valentine sympathized with his plight. “In the anguish of his soul, he went to serve his country, and there is no criticism,” Valentine maintained. “I want to say to you, he was just as true a servant and a soldier in his country’s army as he was a servant of God in our midst.” Indeed, Kessler had died “a faithful Latter-day Saint, a soldier of the Cross, though enlisted for the time being with his country’s army.” One could be valiant in the faith, Valentine implied, without supporting America’s position.⁴⁷

In their initial contempt for the war and America’s isolationist posture and in their subsequent promotion of America’s war effort as a crusade against evil, Church leaders’ views generally harmonized with the prevailing sentiment in the nation. Like Book of Mormon prophets who sprang to the defense of their country, Church leaders patriotically rallied to the cause. After it was all over, the wartime fervor and exuberance of some leaders seemed excessive to others of them. Nevertheless their reappraisal of the merits of American intervention in light of the altered international situation in 1917 was sensible.

THE GREAT DEPRESSION

In the 1930s another major calamity on the world stage, the Great Depression, again occasioned extensive interpretive commentary by the Brethren regarding God's relationship to major secular crises. Particularly in the early years of the Depression, when unemployment was most severe, Church leaders discussed the Depression in their conference addresses, providing guidance and perspective just as they did in wartime. Some Church leaders encouraged the Saints to see God's hand in the economic collapse. In the fall of 1930 Charles W. Nibley of the First Presidency wondered if the Depression was "a providence of the Almighty" to check the reckless speculation in stocks that had been so evident in the 1920s.⁴⁸ As the Depression deepened in 1931, David A. Smith, First Counselor in the Presiding Bishopric, depicted it as a chastisement and call to repentance. He said that God had often encouraged repentance through warfare and famine, and so it was in the present, when "the Lord has found it necessary to remind us . . . that he will not be mocked and that it is our duty to turn again to him, to meet our obligations to him, and serve him in faith."⁴⁹ Elder Melvin J. Ballard declared in 1932, "I see [God] even in this depression," pointing out that in the face of privation people were becoming more charitable, which in turn was helping to prepare the earth for Christ's second coming.⁵⁰

Some Church leaders interpreted the economic crisis as a fulfillment of prophecy, just as they had in the case of the First World War. In 1930 President Charles W. Nibley of the First Presidency quoted D&C 88:88, a prediction of "wrath and indignation" to come, and interpreted the Great Depression as an expression and a partial fulfillment of that prophecy.⁵¹ The following year, Elder Talmage asked his listeners if the prophets had not foretold the day "when all that can be shaken in the institutions of men shall be shaken."⁵²

Whereas some Church leaders linked God in one way or another to the worldwide economic collapse, several emphasized, much as they had in the case of the World War, that it was not a divine curse. The Depression was "not the design of our Father in heaven," declared Anthony W. Ivins of the First Presidency.⁵³ Elder Talmage admitted that God had foreseen the Depression and that the prophets had warned the Saints to get out of debt and avoid speculation. Some might "take that warning to be an expression of divine determination to punish and to afflict," he observed, but the warnings actually attested to God's omniscience and His loving desire to warn the faithful so that they could take economic precautions to shield themselves from the impending problems.⁵⁴

Several authorities specified transgressions which seemed particularly to have caused or exacerbated the economic catastrophe. Elder Joseph Fielding Smith believed that disrespect for the Sabbath—prime evidence for him that the nation had forgotten God—had deprived America of divine protection. He reminded his listeners of the warning in Luke 21: "And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares."⁵⁵ Elder George F. Richards in the fall of 1932 attributed much of the Saints' suffering to their disobedience to prophetic counsel regarding storing provisions for an emergency, minimizing indebtedness, and avoiding speculation.⁵⁶

The prophet and other leaders viewed the nation's disregard for and rejection of Prohibition as another reason for the Depression. The National Association of Manufacturers and the millionaire-managed Association Against the Prohibition Amendment had argued that America could boost grain markets, create jobs, and raise tax revenue while reducing corporate taxes if it legalized alcohol. But in the fall of 1933, Church President Heber J. Grant advised that

“peace, prosperity, and happiness” would spread over the earth “if there were no tea, coffee, liquor nor tobacco used in the world.”⁵⁷ Don Colton, president of the Eastern States Mission, addressed the general conference eighteen months later. Referring to a government statistician’s estimate that Americans spent four billion dollars annually on substances prohibited by the Word of Wisdom, he indicated that the same amount of money could be used to employ three and a half million men.⁵⁸ Six months later, President Grant estimated that if all the money spent in Utah on substances forbidden by the Word of Wisdom were saved, the state could care for the poor without any federal assistance.⁵⁹

More than anything else, Church leaders focused upon materialism, greed, and selfishness as causes of the Depression. Following the First World War, Americans had “gone mad with luxury, with indulgences, and bodily comfort” and had turned to riches for solace rather than to God, observed Levi Edgar Young of the Seventy.⁶⁰ President Ivins castigated the “extravagance, selfishness and money madness” of American society in that postwar era. Under these conditions, the nation’s wealth had been accumulated and hoarded by the titans of American industry.⁶¹ Elder Richard R. Lyman offered an example of such hoarding: an “automobile king” who in 1930 received dividends of \$44 million. How could this manufacturer expect to “dispose of his product if he and other leading manufacturers are going to . . . hoard and keep out of circulation such tremendous quantities of piled up wealth?” he queried. Elder Lyman believed that if the nation’s wealth holders would give unselfishly, the nation would see “unprecedented prosperity.”⁶² Elder Joseph F. Merrill pinpointed the “selfishness” of depositors who rushed to withdraw their savings, precipitating a run on the bank, as a contributor to the economic collapse.⁶³ Nations were also guilty of selfishness. In the spring of 1933, President Ivins identified the “foundation” of the Great Depression

in the selfish money grubbing of nations following World War I. The war had left much of Europe bankrupt, with each nation trying to collect their debts, searching for “a small pile of gold.”⁶⁴

In 1933 President Ivins succinctly summarized the key causes of the Depression pinpointed by his associates over the previous three years. Three factors “more than any others,” he said, had placed the nation in dire straits. The first was disrespect for the law and the indifference of leaders in administering laws—most notably Prohibition. The second was pursuit of selfish material objectives at all cost, and the third was irreligion.⁶⁵

Whereas some leaders singled out basic vices as causes of the Depression, predicating economic improvement upon individual virtues such as temperance or wealth sharing, President J. Reuben Clark expressed his view in April 1933 that “the questions involved” in solving the world’s economic problems were “so nearly infinite in their vastness, that I question whether any human mind can answer them.” Yet he advised that the same virtues his colleagues had endorsed would at least restore a measure of prosperity and happiness. “The world has been on a wild debauch, materially and spiritually,” he warned. The safest road to recovery lay in “unselfishness, industry, courage, confidence, character, heart, temperance, integrity, and righteousness.”⁶⁶

While Church leaders devoted considerable attention to the causes of the Great Depression during its worst years, economic conditions improved in the United States in the summer of 1932 as the federal government began to allocate substantial funds for unemployment relief. Following the inauguration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, a host of new federal agencies extended a safety net for Americans in myriad ways, including underwriting mortgages, propping up farm income, and creating jobs for the unemployed. For most Americans by the spring of 1933 the worst of the Depression was past. At the same time that the economy was improving,

conditions abroad were becoming increasingly precarious as a result of militarism, and Church leaders increasingly warned regarding the deteriorating international situation.⁶⁷

ATTITUDES TOWARD WORLD WAR II

By creating economic dislocation in Europe and by disrupting the political system, the First World War had fallen far short of optimistic expectations. Instead of promoting democracy, it had led to totalitarian developments, including the rise of Fascism in Italy in 1922 and, abetted by the Great Depression, the rise of Nazism in Germany in 1933. Church leaders prayerfully pondering the meaning of this turn of events repeatedly denounced the Great War during the 1930s. As historian Ronald Walker has observed, “Mormonism during the 1930s joined that generation’s crusade—the crusade for isolationism.”⁶⁸

In April 1933 President Ivins referred to World War I, despite American participation in its later stages, as “the most wicked, unjustifiable, unnecessary war the world has ever known.”⁶⁹ Elder Melvin J. Ballard recalled in 1937 how he and many others had “rejoiced” at the seeming progression of nations from monarchy to democracy after the war ended. “We thought, this is truly the beginning of the golden age for the world,” he recalled. But the new governments had been beset with “poverty and distress,” their citizens had been poorly prepared for democratic government, and would-be dictators had overthrown democracies—dictators who “will not bring this world to its peace.”⁷⁰ President Heber J. Grant criticized the war on economic grounds in 1938. He referred to a study by Nicholas Butler that concluded that the money spent on the war could have built and furnished a new home and five-acre lot for every family in eight European nations, Australia, Canada, and the United States along with building a library and university in every city with over twenty thousand inhabitants.⁷¹ President Clark, who had ardently supported America’s

role in the First World War, in 1939 disparaged “the sanctities that were used . . . to hallow the World War.” Whereas most Americans, including leaders of the Church, had felt at the time that American involvement in the war was essential in order to advance freedom in the world, President Clark now believed that the gains had been minimal. “We got nothing out of the conflict but the ill-will of everyone. . . . We did not . . . settle the issue [of militant European nationalism]. . . . We would not settle it now by joining in this conflict,” he warned.⁷²

Criticism of the First World War continued into the 1940s. Church leaders’ attitudes toward the new war mirrored their negative views of the First World War prior to American intervention, compounded by their perception of the inefficacy of American involvement in the previous conflict. In the spring of 1941, David O. McKay of the First Presidency, who had supported America’s entry into the First World War, identified only negative results of that conflict. Millions had been killed, wounded, or driven from their homes. Billions of dollars had been wasted, and German resentment and hatred had been engendered by “what to the Germans were unjust terms of peace.”⁷³

Desperately wishing to avoid the devastation of a new war, Church leaders criticized not only the First World War but also developments in Europe that were pushing nations to the brink of another ghastly struggle. Attributing European dictatorships and militarism to Satan, in 1938 Elder Melvin J. Ballard, following Germany’s annexation of Austria and the Sudetenland, cautioned Church members who had immigrated to America against glorifying military dictatorships and their conquests. Elder Ballard said he did “not know anything that has ever happened in this world that is so like the work of the devil” as the mighty war machines modern nations were rushing to develop with their bombs that slaughtered not only combatants but “helpless women and children.”⁷⁴

Following Germany's invasion of Poland and Great Britain's and France's declaration of war against Germany, the First Presidency presented a message in the October 1939 general conference. Therein the First Presidency categorically condemned the institution of war. The commandment "thou shalt not kill" was "equally binding upon men and upon nations" and it "embraces war," they proclaimed. "God is grieved by war," they taught. If national leaders would negotiate in good faith and honor, "all international controversies may be settled by pacific means." But the Presidency stopped short of advocating peace at any price. Instead of condemning all belligerents in the war in Europe, they condemned only "those who wage [war] unrighteously."⁷⁵

President Clark, the most confirmed pacifist and isolationist in the First Presidency, expressed in late 1939 that there was no righteous side with which to sympathize in the present European conflict, despite the fact that Germany had invaded Poland. The myth of an innocent victim was illusory, he advised. "There are always deceit, lying, subterfuge, treachery, and savagery in war, on both sides. . . . It is not always the other power that commits atrocities." While he did not deny that some objectives in warfare might be better than others, he reminded his listeners that Poland had taken German territory at the end of World War I, that Germany had recently violated its word in seizing Czechoslovakia, and that France and Britain had seized "hundreds of thousands of square miles" of German territory after World War I. Even the United States was guilty of wars of conquest; it had seized "the ground on which we stand" from Mexico. In light of this history of expansion, President Clark believed, the fundamental question of the current war was which nation "shall dominate Europe" — "not a righteous cause" or question. The United States must remain neutral, he advised.⁷⁶

At the same conference in which the First Presidency's statement on war was read, several speakers joined President Clark in amplifying that document's isolationist, pacifist tenor. Elder Smoot informed the conference that he had "prayed to my Heavenly Father that nothing would happen that America should become involved and take a part in this wicked war," a war that had been caused, he said, by "the greed of some men for power."⁷⁷ Elder Widtsoe likewise identified the war with greed, sin, and error. Warfare was generally caused by erroneous beliefs and disagreement regarding three issues: "the true God; man's relationship to God and his fellowmen; and the purpose of human existence." To promote a martial mentality, he noted, some European leaders had "seriously proposed the return to heathen man-made gods." Misunderstanding of the eternal relationship between human beings also facilitated warfare. During the First World War, if Europeans had truly understood the brotherhood of all men as children of God, "fewer bombs would have fallen." Finally, when people did not perceive life on earth as part of a divinely instituted plan for the salvation of all God's children, they lost concern for others and fell prey to greed — "the first-born of selfishness."⁷⁸

Six months later in the April 1940 conference, Church leaders who commented on the war abroad remained convinced that the United States should not become entangled in the conflict. A public opinion poll taken several weeks before the conference revealed that the majority of Americans harbored similar sentiments: when asked if the United States should "declare war on Germany and send our army and navy to Europe to fight" if it appeared that Germany were defeating France and England, 77 percent of the respondents said no.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, the General Authorities' statements also bespoke the premonition that the nation might eventually enter the fray. "War has not *to this point* cursed us," said President Clark, before he referred the audience

to “all that I said last October about the war, its causes and its iniquities.”⁸⁰ Elder Sylvester Q. Cannon stated, “For a period at least, the Western Hemisphere has not, to a large extent, in any way been embroiled in all the turmoil.”⁸¹

Although they did not want war for America, some leaders praised the Allies, particularly Britain, and condemned “aggressor nations” such as Germany. The British were “fighting a war which was not of their choosing” and “taking a stand in defense of democracy”; under these conditions, former British Mission president Hugh B. Brown declared in April 1940, “the attitude of the British people commands respect and admiration.”⁸² In the same conference President McKay of the First Presidency approvingly quoted a *Los Angeles Times* editorial condemning Hitler’s “absolutism.”⁸³

Notwithstanding criticism of the German government, Church leaders did not censure German Saints who served in their country’s military. In the April 1940 general conference, Wallace F. Toronto, the recently released mission president in Central Europe, sympathetically portrayed Church members fighting in Hitler’s army as unwilling combatants who did not share the Nazis’ territorial ambitions. President Toronto told the conference audience of “a young German officer, a fine, straight, clean-looking fellow” who regularly attended sacrament meetings in Prague while he was stationed there. Toronto recalled that the soldier stated, “I come here not on an appointment of my own choosing. I come here as a servant of my government. I know we have brought you considerable distress and dismay.”⁸⁴ The First Presidency observed in a message read in the October conference in 1940, “The Saints on either side have no course open to them but to support that government to which they owe allegiance.” The First Presidency acknowledged that members “on each side . . . are bound to their country by all the ties of blood, relationship, and patriotism.”⁸⁵ In a subsequent message the First Presidency offered assurances

that soldiers on either side who killed others in combat would not be “subject . . . to the penalty that God has prescribed for those who kill” because they had done so “as the innocent instrumentalities of a sovereign whom He has told them to obey.”⁸⁶

Two days after the April 1940 conference ended, German tanks rolled into Denmark. Within a matter of weeks, Norway, Holland, Belgium, and Luxembourg were overrun. In June France fell. President Roosevelt responded by transferring American planes and naval destroyers to Great Britain. That fall, commenting on America’s aid to Britain, President Clark pointed out ways in which “we are in fact now at war.” The nation had supplied “our own secret inventions for waging war, our own air armament, and now our own armed vessels of war,” all in violation of the Hague conventions of warfare and neutrality. Thus the nation could not claim that it had not provoked Germany. “We should not be misled as to the nature of our acts, if and when Britain’s enemy strikes back at us,” he advised.⁸⁷

To summarize, several features of Church leaders’ views of the war prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor stand out. First, Church leaders generally condemned the war as a vicious, evil conflict, or as the First Presidency noted in their 1940 Christmas greeting, “the direct result of failure of the children of men to keep the commandments of the Lord.”⁸⁸ Second, some admitted that their optimism regarding the First World War had been ill founded. Third, General Authorities differed in their views of the justice of the Allied cause. President Clark stridently denounced both sides. However, more authorities, including President McKay, voiced pro-British or anti-German sentiment as the war progressed, feeling that the Germans had forced Britain’s hand. Fourth, no leader in general conference advocated American intervention in the war. Finally, prior to Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor, Church leaders treated the war exclusively as a European

conflict in their conference addresses, neglecting developments in Asia and the Pacific.

Following the Japanese attack on Hawaii in December 1941, which precipitated U.S. entry into the war and Germany's subsequent declaration of war against the United States, the Church's authorities no longer called for neutrality or pacifism in their general conference addresses. The changed circumstances now warranted a new approach. Even President Clark, who had earlier warned that the United States was provoking the Axis powers, refrained from direct criticisms in general conference of American foreign policy or military action for the duration of the war.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, Church leaders, enlightened by the extreme costs and meager gains of the previous conflict, no longer expressed the idealistic zeal for righteous war that they had voiced following America's entry into the First World War. As Elder Albert E. Bowen noted, Americans entered the Second World War possessed of "a sombre, sober resignation to an ugly, unwelcome task,"⁹⁰ and this attitude suffused most General Authorities' comments. In their 1942 Christmas message, the First Presidency approved the nation's military buildup, acknowledging that "under present conditions . . . the war will be ended only by superior armed forces, by increased number of swifter and stronger planes, by more shattering bombs and other weapons of destruction." But they warned that the war would not result in lasting peace, because instead of engendering harmony, "war makes men vicious and arouses in them brutal instincts."⁹¹

To be sure, some authorities echoed in muted tones the patriotism and pro-American rhetoric characteristic of World War I, linking America's cause to that of the Church. In April of 1942 Elder Bowen stated, "We dare not lose [the] war, for its loss would mean the end of liberty. . . . It could mean loss of the right to meet and worship."⁹² The following year, Elder Stephen L. Richards reasoned that "the preservation" of

"American freedom" was "essential . . . for the growth and ultimate consummation of the kingdom of God."⁹³ Similarly, Elder George Albert Smith in 1944 stated that war was being waged so "that liberty of conscience and religion may remain in the world."⁹⁴

Such limited justification of the war by individual Apostles was balanced by an official statement of the First Presidency read at the April 1942 conference which declared that "the Church is and must be against war," adding that "it [the Church] cannot regard war as a righteous means of settling international disputes."⁹⁵ Ten months after Pearl Harbor, President Clark read a second message from the First Presidency in general conference that encouraged "the leaders of nations to abandon the fiendishly inspired slaughter" and to negotiate an end to the war that would be "honorable and just to all."⁹⁶ President Clark was the principle author of these official statements, but they reflected not only his but the entire Presidency's conviction that the Church must not justify the war. President Heber J. Grant called the April 1942 message "wonderful."⁹⁷

In a thoughtful, somber address delivered in the April 1942 conference, President McKay reflected on the reasoning behind the First Presidency's opposition to war. Carefully probing the Savior's teachings in the New Testament which had been marshaled by proponents of war, including President Penrose in 1917, as evidence that Christ had endorsed war under certain circumstances, President McKay concluded, "None of these sayings of the Savior's can be taken to prove that He justifies war." "War," he stated, "is incompatible with Christ's teachings."⁹⁸ Two years later President McKay imagined Jesus "weeping over a world weltering in an orgy of blood."⁹⁹

In that same address in 1942, though, President McKay cautioned that a war could be justifiable even if it could not be called righteous. The First Presidency in its April 1942 message had distinguished between the institutional Church's

opposition to war and the “highest civic duty” of its members who were “citizens or subjects of sovereignties over which the Church has no control” to serve in the military of their nations when called upon according to “constitutional law.”¹⁰⁰ President McKay went further than the First Presidency had gone in their statement, though, reflecting his own thinking, which put him slightly at variance with some of President Clark’s earlier statements. There were conditions, he taught, under which “a Christian nation may, without violation of principles, take up arms against an opposing force.” One was in the event of “an attempt to dominate and to deprive another of his free agency.” The other was “loyalty to . . . country.” No function of government was greater than the protection of its citizens. “We serve our country as bearers of arms, rather than to stand aloof to enjoy a freedom for which others have fought and died,” President McKay reasoned. He raised the possibility of a third circumstance under which war might be justifiable, although he did not probe the matter. It was “defense of a weak nation that is being unjustly crushed by a strong, ruthless one.” He concluded by praising American soldiers for “fighting for an eternal principle fundamental to the peace and progress of mankind.”¹⁰¹

As large numbers of Latter-day Saints were drawn into battle and as many began to lose their lives, Church leaders reiterated that human wickedness rather than divine will undergirded the war, although they also identified Satan as an instigator of armed conflict. In April 1942, Elder John A. Widtsoe expressed the relationship between human wickedness and satanic influence this way: he called the war “devil-engendered” but “man-made.”¹⁰² Similarly President Clark in 1944 pictured the devil “walking up and down throughout the earth” and “wielding a power and an influence greater than ever has been before in my generation,” but charged people of his generation as the ones “responsible for the conditions in this world.”¹⁰³ More precisely, the First

Presidency in April 1942 blamed the war upon “those rulers in the world” who were consumed by their “frenzy of hate and lust for unrighteous power and dominion,”¹⁰⁴ and Elder Bowen in 1945 identified “spiritual sickness” as “the real cause of the war.”¹⁰⁵ In October 1944, President McKay traced the roots of the war to the “selfishness, revenge and desire for conquest” of rulers along with their ideas of “racial superiority.”¹⁰⁶ On another occasion he attributed the war to “militarism, a false philosophy which believes that ‘war is a biological necessity for the purification and progress of nations.’”¹⁰⁷ On several occasions, he cited specific historical examples of how these human passions had ignited and fueled the war. In the name of conquest, “strong nations str[o]ve to dominate the weak as Mussolini did Ethiopia [and] as Japan did Manchuria.”¹⁰⁸ The Munich agreements had been violated and Poland had been invaded because of “covetousness,”¹⁰⁹ while the attack on Pearl Harbor had been prompted by “selfishness and inordinate ambition.”¹¹⁰ Hitler had “defiantly rejected Jesus of Nazareth and His teachings” in “cruelly crush[ing]” weak nations such as Czechoslovakia and Greece.¹¹¹ The Führer through his youth organizations had nurtured ancient, barbaric Germanic traditions in order to produce “a violently active, dominating, intrepid, brutal youth.”¹¹² In short, German leaders had rejected Christianity and embraced “ancient gods”¹¹³ and “the law of the jungle.”¹¹⁴ While the examples of ambition and pride all focused on the Axis powers, the First Presidency had cautioned in 1942 that “perhaps neither [side] is without wrong.”¹¹⁵

Granted that war was inspired of Satan and founded in the evil passions inherent in human nature; still, was not God, the ruler of the universe, ultimately responsible for the war and its consequences in the sense that He permitted it to occur and shaped its ends to His purposes? The same questions regarding God’s relationship to the war that had been explored during the Great

War inevitably resurfaced in the 1940s. A scripture quoted by Elder Widtsoe in 1942 seemed to imply that God was responsible for the war. "I, the Lord, am angry with the wicked. . . . I have sworn in my wrath, and decreed wars upon the face of the earth" (D&C 63:32–33). Yet in that same address he called the war "man-made," implying that perhaps the war was not so much a divinely decreed curse as a divinely foreseen, natural consequence of wickedness.¹¹⁶

Church leaders unitedly affirmed, just as they had during World War I, that God had not abandoned humans to their own devices and that He would not permit humans to thwart His purposes. Church President Heber J. Grant in the fall of 1943 told members, "I am praying with all my heart and soul for the end of this war as soon as the Lord can see fit to have it stop," implying that God permitted the war to continue in His wisdom but that He could and eventually would stop it.¹¹⁷ Elder Sylvester Q. Cannon in the spring of 1940 affirmed that "God's sovereignty is absolute." He taught that while at present "the Lord did not intervene," He was "steadfastly [seeking] to win mankind to peace and union and righteousness" although He would never "exert compulsory means to bring to pass His designs."¹¹⁸ Elder Bowen suggested that God would ultimately triumph through the natural course of events rather than through direct intervention, for those responsible for the war would one day die. There was no need to become "unduly distracted," because "those who now are turning the world upside down will also die. The mischiefs they have wrought will then, if not sooner, by degrees be undone."¹¹⁹

While they unitedly affirmed God's sovereignty, various Apostles assigned differing weight to human agency and divine sovereignty in explaining why righteous Latter-day Saints were killed in the conflict. Their differing views serve as reminders that the Lord had not fully revealed His intent in all matters. Elder Spencer W. Kimball in 1945 responded to the query of a

grieving mother who asked why God had permitted her son to be killed in battle. Elder Kimball replied, "God does not take these lives. It is permitted because men have their free agency."¹²⁰ Several years earlier, though, Elder Widtsoe had expressed his faith that Latter-day Saints who "keep themselves clean and undefiled . . . will be protected by divine power." Elder Widtsoe believed that "should they fall in action or from disease it will be with the consent of our Father in Heaven."¹²¹

The conduct of the war itself received scant attention in general conferences, but shortly before the war's end, Elder Widtsoe criticized unspecified "weaknesses" of wartime diplomatic negotiations at Yalta and Dumbarton Oaks. At those meetings, plans were laid for the United Nations; Roosevelt had caved in to Russia's plans to develop a buffer zone in eastern Europe and Britain had insisted upon retaining its Asian empire. Those present had "cover[ed] with smiling diplomacy, riotous selfishness," Widtsoe charged.¹²² More than a year after Japan had surrendered, President Clark castigated the United States for its use of atomic weapons to end the war, which he decried as "a world tragedy." His was an opinion that not all of his fellow Apostles shared, but he eloquently endeavored to persuade his audience of its correctness. With the dropping of two atomic bombs, the lives of thousands of civilians who were no "more responsible for the war than we were" were snuffed out. "We in America are now deliberately searching out and developing the most savage, murderous means of exterminating peoples that Satan can plant in our minds. We do it not only shamelessly, but with a boast. God will not forgive us for this," President Clark warned.¹²³

As the war wound down, others criticized the absence of gospel values in diplomatic and military plans for a postwar order. Americans were pinning their hopes upon "economic and technological reconstructions" but did not see the need for devotion to principle and spiritual

ideals, Elder Bowen warned in the spring of 1945. The “moods and notions” which had caused the war in the first place, such as “self seeking,” “greed for power,” and disagreement over “the spiritual basis of government,” would continue to rage unless the world united in praying to God, worshipping Him, and studying His word.¹²⁴ Six months later, Elder Thomas E. McKay, Assistant to the Twelve, predicted that “as long as hate and lust for power control the hearts of men, real peace can find no resting place in the world.”¹²⁵ The First Presidency warned Latter-day Saints that “gloating and triumph over victory” must be supplanted by “gratitude for the ending of the conflict and by a love for our fellow men and a recognition of the common brotherhood of man.”¹²⁶

Elder George F. Richards memorably expressed the central thread of Church leaders’ commentary on the Second World War—the idea that love must permeate the world in order for peace to endure—in the fall of 1946. Elder Richards related a dream he had during the war in which he met Hitler and his troops as they were preparing to execute him and his friends. In the dream, Elder Richards “walked across to where he [Hitler] was sitting, and spoke to him in a manner something like this: ‘I am your brother. You are my brother. In our heavenly home we lived together in love and peace. Why can we not so live here on the earth?’” Having said this, Elder Richards said, “I felt in myself, welling up in my soul, a love for that man, and I could feel that he was having the same experience, and presently he arose, and we embraced each other and kissed each other, a kiss of affection.” “I think the Lord gave me that dream,” he concluded. “Why should I dream of this man, one of the greatest enemies of mankind, and one of the wickedest, but that the Lord should teach me that I must love my enemies, and I must love the wicked as well as the good?”¹²⁷

CONCLUSIONS

Awful in their consequences, the two World Wars and the Great Depression were in many ways the most pivotal developments in the world’s history during the first half of the twentieth century. As we have seen, General Authorities frequently commented on these cataclysmic developments. In both wars, they encouraged the United States to avoid military intervention, but, as circumstances changed with attacks on American shipping during World War I and with the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, they tempered their isolationism and pacifism. Yet after America’s entry into the two wars, there were significant differences in their views of the righteousness of America’s involvement. Their shift to greater skepticism during World War II did not reflect national opinion, which much more fully endorsed American engagement in the Second World War than in the First. To a certain extent their pessimism bore the stamp of President Heber J. Grant’s eloquent counselor, J. Reuben Clark Jr., a determined pacifist and principal author of some key statements by the First Presidency. Yet the leading councils of the Church consisted of men of firm convictions and powerful personalities such as John A. Widtsoe, David O. McKay, and Joseph Fielding Smith—men who took issue with President J. Reuben Clark on other matters.¹²⁸

It seems likely that their pessimism regarding the regenerative potential of war owed as much to divine inspiration as to President Clark’s personal influence. Apparently divine inspiration flowed incrementally as their experiences and observations opened their hearts and minds to new perceptions. Learning line upon line by inspired observation of the unhappy outcomes of the Great War, they refused to embrace the Second World War with the same idealism and optimism with which they had greeted Congress’s declaration of war in 1917. Greatly diminished in scope, too, was any discussion of a silver lining in the Second World War, such as that which

some had suggested might be present in the First World War and the Great Depression. In a sinful world, as they taught in the 1930s and 1940s, defensive war could under certain circumstances be justified. Even so, it was an imperfect and only temporary means of suppressing greed, rapacity, and totalitarianism; moreover, the conflict between the Allies and the Axis was not a conflict between unalloyed good and evil—a perspective that is easily obscured by focusing upon the undeniably hideous German and Japanese war crimes. Consistent with their position, in the postwar world the Church's leaders sought a reconciliation of hearts and minds among former belligerents.

As spiritual watchmen, inspired Church authorities magnified their calling as they emphasized the ways in which war and depression flowed naturally from human disregard for God's commandments. The world wars and the Depression in this sense constituted a chastisement of the nations. While they recognized the roles of institutional forces—the armies of nations, diplomatic negotiations and treaties, markets and industries—in precipitating these calamities, they reminded listeners of more fundamental causes: emotions stoked by the forces of evil but inherent in human nature such as greed, selfishness, intemperance, brutality, and lust for power. They emphasized that war and depression graphically illustrated the natural consequences of wickedness and the desirability of moral alternatives embodied in gospel principles.

The appalling devastation and suffering resulting from warfare and economic collapse not only made Christ's teachings more relevant; they lent a new urgency to questions regarding God's relationship to war, to evil, and to human suffering. Church leaders blamed most of the world's woes upon human choice abetted by satanic influence. Although calamities represented divine judgment and chastisement in the sense that they inevitably flowed from sin, and although God

had foreseen war and economic collapse, He took no pleasure in calamity and was not its author. Instead, God embodied perfect love, and the calamities of war and depression were attributable to human agency.

Apostles and prophets unitedly testified that God was omnipotent, that His purposes would be achieved, and that righteousness would ultimately prevail. The mechanisms whereby God would exert His influence in the face of His scrupulous regard for agency were less clear. Some, like Elder Whitney during the First World War, felt that God would intervene by creating conditions that made continuation of wickedness unpalatable for world leaders; others during the Second World War, including Elders Bowen and Cannon, envisioned God's purposes being achieved through moral suasion, divine inspiration, or the eventual death of corrupt leaders. But all testified that worldwide calamities did not mean that God had abandoned mankind.

As they reflected publicly upon the meaning of their era's pivotal events on the world stage, the Church's leaders drew a spiritual circle large enough to encompass secular events. In so doing, they showed that crisp distinctions between the sacred and the profane or the spiritual and the secular are ill founded. Their counsel and example suggest that it is possible and profitable to reappraise major events in world history like the World Wars and the Great Depression through eyes of faith.

NOTES

1. David O. McKay, in Conference Report, October 1954, 7.

2. Mark L. McConkie, "Following the Brethren," in Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (New York: MacMillan, 1992), 2:520.

3. John A. Widtsoe, in Conference Report, April 1945, 92.

4. In its thorough evaluation of Church leaders' teachings in general conferences regarding the First

and Second World Wars and the Great Depression, this study breaks new ground. Other historians, however, have ably discussed Church leaders' attitudes toward the wars, using some general conference reports along with other sources. See, for instance, Ronald W. Walker, "Sheaves, Bucklers and the State: Mormon Leaders Respond to the Dilemmas of War," *Sunstone* 7 (July/August 1982): 49–52; Richard E. Bennett, "'And I Saw the Hosts of the Dead, Both Small and Great': Joseph F. Smith, World War I, and His Visions of the Dead," *Religious Educator* 2, no. 1 (2001): 105–26; Richard E. Bennett, "'How Long, Oh Lord, How Long?' James E. Talmage and the Great War," *Religious Educator* 3, no. 1 (2002): 87–102; Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints, 1890–1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 46–49; and D. Michael Quinn, *Elder Statesman: A Biography of J. Reuben Clark* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 277–307.

Studies examining Church leaders' attitudes toward the Great Depression have focused mainly upon their views of New Deal policy. See for instance Brian Q. Cannon, "Mormons and the New Deal: The 1936 Presidential Election in Utah," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 67 (Winter 1999): 4–22; Garth L. Mangum and Bruce D. Blumell, *The Mormons' War on Poverty: A History of LDS Welfare, 1830–1990* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1993); Leonard J. Arrington and Wayne K. Hinton, "Origin of the Welfare Plan of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," *BYU Studies* 5 (Winter 1964): 67–85; and Wayne K. Hinton, "Some Historical Perspective on Mormon Responses to the Great Depression," *Journal of the West* 24 (October 1985): 19–26.

5. Joseph F. Smith, in Conference Report, October 1914, 2.

6. McKay, in Conference Report, October 1914, 88–89. The expectations of President Smith and Elder McKay proved to be correct. Although it took time following the war for Church leaders to obtain permission for missionaries to reenter European nations, conditions for the Church particularly improved in Austria, Switzerland, and Czechoslovakia during the 1920s (see Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition*, 233–35;

2001–2002 *Church Almanac* [Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 2000], 279, 314, 401).

7. James R. Clark, ed., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1970), 4:348, 343.

8. See Reed Smoot, in Conference Report, October 1915, 132.

9. See Hyrum M. Smith, in Conference Report, October 1916, 44–45.

10. Brigham H. Roberts, in Conference Report, October 1916, 144.

11. Joseph F. Smith, in Conference Report, October 1914, 7.

12. Charles W. Penrose, in Conference Report, April 1917, 22.

13. McKay, in Conference Report, April 1917, 46.

14. Joseph F. Smith, in Conference Report, April 1918, 169.

15. Joseph F. Smith, in Conference Report, October 1914, 7–8.

16. Joseph F. Smith, in Conference Report, April 1915, 6.

17. See McKay, in Conference Report, October 1914, 89.

18. See Smoot, in Conference Report, October 1939, 46.

19. Hyrum M. Smith, in Conference Report, October 1916, 42–43.

20. Clark, *Messages of the First Presidency*, 4:319.

21. See Charles B. Hart, in Conference Report, October 1914, 123; Roberts, in Conference Report, October 1916, 141.

22. Orson F. Whitney, in Conference Report, October 1917, 53.

23. See Joseph F. Smith, in Conference Report, October 1917, 170.

24. Clark, *Messages of the First Presidency*, 4:326.

25. McKay, in Conference Report, October 1916, 47.

26. Penrose, in Conference Report, October 1916, 22.

27. Whitney, in Conference Report, April 1918, 76.

28. Anthony W. Ivins, in Conference Report, April 1915, 94.

29. Whitney, in Conference Report, October 1917, 52.
30. Anthon H. Lund, in Conference Report, April 1914, 14.
31. Joseph F. Smith, in Conference Report, April 1917, 3.
32. Penrose, in Conference Report, April 1917, 20–21.
33. Lund, in Conference Report, April 1918, 10.
34. See Penrose, in Conference Report, October 1917, 22.
35. Smoot, in Conference Report, October 1915, 131.
36. Woodrow Wilson, quoted in John Milton Cooper Jr., *The Warrior and the Priest: Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 415; see also 321–22.
37. Penrose, in Conference Report, October 1917, 21.
38. See Lund, in Conference Report, October 1917, 149.
39. Penrose, in Conference Report, October 1917, 149.
40. James E. Talmage, in Conference Report, April 1918, 162.
41. Heber J. Grant, in Conference Report, April 1918, 26.
42. Hart, in Conference Report, October 1918, 141.
43. Whitney, in Conference Report, April 1918, 76.
44. Grant, in Conference Report, October 1918, 28.
45. Levi Edgar Young, in Conference Report, October 1918, 143.
46. Joseph F. Smith, in Conference Report, April 1917, 11.
47. Hyrum W. Valentine, in Conference Report, April 1917, 147–48.
48. Charles W. Nibley, in Conference Report, October 1930, 96.
49. David A. Smith, in Conference Report, October 1931, 25.
50. Melvin J. Ballard, in Conference Report, April 1932, 60.
51. See Nibley, in Conference Report, April 1931, 53.
52. Talmage, in Conference Report, October 1932, 80.
53. Ivins, in Conference Report, October 1931, 94.
54. James E. Talmage, in Conference Report, April 1933, 109.
55. See Joseph Fielding Smith, in Conference Report, October 1932, 92.
56. See George F. Richards, in Conference Report, October 1932, 43.
57. Grant, in Conference Report, October 1933, 9.
58. See Don Colton, in Conference Report, April 1935, 68–69.
59. See Grant, in Conference Report, October 1935, 14.
60. Levi Edgar Young, in Conference Report, October 1932, 57.
61. Ivins, in Conference Report, April 1933, 100.
62. Richard R. Lyman, in Conference Report, April 1933, 53–54.
63. Joseph F. Merrill, in Conference Report, April 1932, 115.
64. Ivins, in Conference Report, April 1933, 100. In April of 1935, Reed Smoot, who had participated in the postwar negotiations regarding foreign debts, offered a different perspective. Smoot defended the settlements, which were based upon each nation's ability to repay and which allowed each nation sixty-two years to repay the debts. France's debt, for instance, was reduced to 51 percent of what had been extended. "What other nation in the world would have been so liberal? None, I assure you," Smoot maintained (in Conference Report, April 1935, 56–57).
65. Ivins, in Conference Report, October 1933, 87–88.
66. J. Reuben Clark Jr., in Conference Report, April 1933, 103.
67. One issue on the homefront that attracted significant commentary was the New Deal—a topic that is beyond the scope of this essay's focus upon major crises in world history. For a discussion of the relationship of Church leaders to the New Deal, see references cited in note number 4.

68. Ronald W. Walker, "Sheaves, Bucklers and the State: Mormon Leaders Respond to the Dilemmas of War," *Sunstone* 7 (July/August 1982): 51.
69. Ivins, in Conference Report, April 1937, 100.
70. Melvin J. Ballard, in Conference Report, April 1937, 93.
71. See Grant, in Conference Report, October 1939, 12.
72. J. Reuben Clark Jr., in Conference Report, October 1939, 11–13. Melvin J. Ballard had also ridiculed the "hatred, malice, greed, and selfishness" of the post-war settlements (in Conference Report, October 1938, 104).
73. McKay, in Conference Report, October 1941, 56.
74. Melvin J. Ballard, in Conference Report, October 1938, 106. Six months earlier, Ballard had spoken of the displacement of Jews in Europe as a result of Hitler's policies. While he clearly did not approve of Hitler's motives, Ballard believed that "even Hitler is used as an instrument, in the hands of God, of driving them [the Jews] where the Lord wants them [the Holy Land]" (in Conference Report, April 1938, 44).
75. Grant, in Conference Report, October 1939, 8.
76. Clark, in Conference Report, October 1939, 12–13.
77. Smoot, in Conference Report, October 1939, 45–46.
78. Widtsoe, in Conference Report, October 1939, 98–100.
79. John Mack Faragher, Mari Jo Buhle, Daniel Czitrom, and Susan H Armitage, *Out of Many: A History of the American People*, 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000), 2:753.
80. Clark Jr., in Conference Report, April 1940, 21; emphasis added.
81. Sylvester Q. Cannon, in Conference Report, April 1940, 23; emphasis added.
82. Hugh B. Brown, in Conference Report, April 1940, 27.
83. McKay, in Conference Report, April 1940, 117.
84. Wallace F. Toronto, in Conference Report, April 1940, 52.
85. The First Presidency, in Conference Report, October 1940, 6.
86. The First Presidency, in Conference Report, April 1942, 94.
87. Clark, in Conference Report, October 1940, 14–16.
88. Clark, *Messages of the First Presidency*, 6:118.
89. Clark did draft a First Presidency statement which he read in the October 1942 conference. Therein the First Presidency declared that "international disputes can and should be settled by peaceful means" (Conference Report, October 1942, 15).
90. Albert E. Bowen, in Conference Report, April 1945, 39.
91. Clark, *Messages of the First Presidency*, 6:189.
92. Bowen, in Conference Report, April 1942, 58.
93. Stephen L Richards, in Conference Report, April 1943, 78.
94. George Albert Smith, in Conference Report, October 1944, 95.
95. The First Presidency, in Conference Report, October 1942, 94.
96. J. Reuben Clark Jr., in Conference Report, October 1942, 15–16.
97. Heber J. Grant, in Walker, "Sheaves, Bucklers and the State," 51.
98. McKay, in Conference Report, October 1944, 78.
99. McKay, in Conference Report, April 1942, 94.
100. The First Presidency, in Conference Report, April 1942, 94.
101. McKay, in Conference Report, April 1942, 72–74.
102. Widtsoe, in Conference Report, April 1942, 32–33.
103. Clark, in Conference Report, October 1944, 14.
104. The First Presidency, in Conference Report, April 1942, 95.
105. Bowen, in Conference Report, April 1945, 40.
106. McKay, in Conference Report, October 1944, 78.
107. McKay, in Conference Report, April 1942, 71.
108. McKay, in Conference Report, October 1944, 80.

109. McKay, in Conference Report, October 1942, 68.
110. McKay, in Conference Report, October 1945, 133.
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