



**FIG. 1.** The Great War (1914–1918) was one of the deadliest wars in history. The destruction and mounting casualties caused millions to mourn the loss of loved ones. Joseph F. Smith received a singular vision during this time. Chateau Wood, Ypres, 1917, photograph by Frank Hurley.

# “The Great World of the Spirits of the Dead”

## Death, the Great War, and the 1918 Influenza Pandemic as Context for Doctrine and Covenants 138

*George S. Tate*

At the dedication of BYU’s new Joseph F. Smith Building on September 20, 2005, President Gordon B. Hinckley said of President Joseph F. Smith, “It is my opinion that no man, save the Prophet Joseph only, has had a greater and better understanding of the origin and history of the Church and of its doctrines—not only concerning this life but also concerning the eternities.” Of the “Vision of the Redemption of the Dead,” which comprises Doctrine and Covenants 138, he said, “It is a document without parallel. . . . There is nothing quite like it in all of our sacred literature.” And in the dedicatory prayer he said of President Smith, “His mind . . . reached into the depths of the things of eternity, the great spiritual architecture of Thy divine and eternal plan.”<sup>1</sup>

This article is an effort to understand more fully the context of D&C 138—our only passage of canonized scripture from the twentieth century. The discussion is necessarily somewhat provisional. We do not know, as we do for the Word of Wisdom, for example, the immediate circumstances that led to this revelation. But it is illuminating to consider it in terms of biographical detail and contemporary events (fig. 1). It is worth asking—even if a complete answer remains elusive—why this revelation was given just when it was.

First, a word about “context.” As used here, the term is meant to suggest the attendant environment—events, conditions, widespread concerns and sentiments that bear upon the passage at hand. The term does not

---

1. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Remarks at the Dedication of the Joseph F. Smith Building at Brigham Young University,” September 20, 2005, 3, 4, 5, pdf available at <http://speeches.byu.edu/?act=viewitem&id=1497>.

## George S. Tate

How did I, a medievalist, come to be so haunted by the Great War? As a young man I was drawn to the work of soldier-poet Wilfred Owen, his musical ear and tonal innovations, and the underlying compassion of his poetry. In my civilization courses, I would touch upon the war as a backdrop to Eliot's *The Waste Land* and other modernist texts. But about a decade ago, two works especially started me on a journey I had not anticipated: Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* and Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth*.



I began seriously to study the Great War, to visit battlefields and memorials while in Europe, to hunt up homes and graves of poets and other figures I had come to admire. In the late 1990s, I developed a course on the subject for London Study Abroad. That seminar has brought me greater satisfaction than any other course I've taught. The materials have an unmatched immediacy and poignancy, and visits to battlefields and memorials in France have overwhelmed my students and me with loss and reverence.

While in the midst of my preparation, I happened to read again D&C 138, and I was struck by its date: October 3, 1918. I reread it in the context of the war, the pandemic, and then Joseph F. Smith's own abundant experience with grief. I had long admired Joseph F. Smith: My priesthood line of authority comes through him; he ordained my great-grandfather, George F. Richards, an Apostle in 1906. From my father I have a first edition of *Gospel Doctrine* (1919). While a graduate student I came across a volume of Orson F. Whitney's poetry, handsomely bound in green leather and hand inscribed as a gift from President Smith to Cornell University Library. It pleases me to see his name commemorated in BYU's new Joseph F. Smith Building, with its architectural evocation of light and learning. I remember my excitement when the Vision of the Redemption of the Dead was added to the canon in the 1970s, and as I continue to see how it resonates within its various interrelated contexts, my gratitude for its timeliness and timelessness has grown.

necessarily imply causality. Indeed, as historian of ideas Quentin Skinner reminds us, it is problematic when “context’ mistakenly gets treated as the determinant of what it said” rather than as a framework.<sup>2</sup> This article considers several events and conditions, large and small—some that precede the vision, some that are concurrent with it, and some that follow it. Some conditions, such as Joseph F. Smith’s own grief, may have influenced him to meditate on the realm of the dead; others, such as the flu pandemic, which reached its height shortly after the vision, are unlikely to have directly caused his meditation. The prophet was aware of most of these contexts—some acutely so; of others (especially of subsidiary matters which I discuss, like Prince Max’s telegram or C. S. Lewis’s musing on 1 Peter) he was not. We should, however, consider not only *to whom* but *by whom* the revelation was given.<sup>3</sup> And while it would be presumptuous to make assertions about the workings of God’s mind or will—except to acknowledge that he sees all that was, is, and will be, and that he loves his children—we can at least recognize and be grateful for the timeliness of the vision in addressing profound, worldwide needs. For when this vision is read against the backdrop of the contexts discussed here—and perhaps others not dealt with—it resonates in ways it may not otherwise.

The vision that became D&C 138 was received on October 3, 1918, the day before the Church’s general conference. President Smith (fig. 2) had been in poor health for



FIG. 2. Joseph F. Smith. Courtesy LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City. © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

2. Quentin Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas,” in *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics*, ed. James Tully (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 64; see also 58: “If it is true that the relations between the context of any given statement . . . and the statement itself do take the form . . . of a relation between antecedent causal conditions and their results, then it is clear that the independent life of ideas in history must be correspondingly in danger.”

3. Even while responding to the whisperings of the Spirit, a prophet’s understanding, as Mormon recognizes, is necessarily limited in relation to the Lord’s: “And I do this for a wise purpose; for thus it whispereth me, according to the workings of the Spirit of the Lord which is in me. And now, I do not know all things; but the Lord knoweth all things which are to come; wherefore, he worketh in me to do according to his will” (W of M 1:7).

some time, and it came as “a complete surprise to the large congregation” when he entered the Salt Lake Tabernacle for the first session.<sup>4</sup> In his weakened condition he spoke only briefly. The front page of the *Deseret Evening News* for October 4 summarizes his comments. He referred to his illness and said: “I have not lived alone these five months. I have dwelt in the spirit of prayer, of supplication, of faith and of determination; and I have had my communications with the Spirit of the Lord continuously.”<sup>5</sup>

The prophet shared the vision of October 3 with his son Joseph Fielding, who took it in dictation immediately following the close of conference.<sup>6</sup> As the headnote to section 138 indicates, the text was presented on October 31 to President Smith’s counselors, to the Quorum of the Twelve, and to the Patriarch of the Church and unanimously accepted by them. President Smith died on November 19, and the text was first published in the *Deseret Evening News* on November 30 under the title “Vision of the Redemption of the Dead” (fig. 3). It appeared thereafter in the December 1918 issue of *The Improvement Era*.<sup>7</sup> Though it was accepted as authoritative

---

4. “I Have Dwelt in the Spirit of Prayer,” *Improvement Era* 22 (November 1918): 80. Both James E. Talmage and Emmeline B. Wells noted this surprise in their journals. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and R. Q. Shupe, *Joseph F. Smith: Portrait of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 225.

5. Joseph F. Smith, *89th Semi-Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1918), 2; Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Life of Joseph F. Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1938), 466. Despite his ill health, President Smith did, in fact, continue to attend the conference, coming briefly to the pulpit four times: on the first day to endorse a talk by President Penrose (Charles W. Penrose, *89th Semi-Annual Conference*, 21); on the second to renounce as spurious the report of a revelation he was supposed to have received in French some years earlier (adding, interestingly for what was to follow, “When the Lord reveals something to me, I will consider the matter with my brethren, and when it becomes proper, I will let it be known to the people, and not otherwise,” Joseph F. Smith, *89th Semi-Annual Conference*, 57); on the third to ask for a vote on the purchase of liberty bonds with Church funds (Joseph F. Smith, *89th Semi-Annual Conference*, 79); and finally to express regret that the conference needed to be adjourned (Joseph F. Smith, *89th Semi-Annual Conference*, 139).

6. Smith, *Life of Joseph F. Smith*, 466.

7. “Vision of the Redemption of the Dead,” *Deseret Evening News*, November 30, 1918, section 4, 6; Joseph F. Smith, “Vision of the Redemption of the Dead,” *Improvement Era* 22 (December 1918): 166–70. The vision was also printed in the January 1919 editions of the *Relief Society Magazine*, *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine*, *Young Women’s Journal*, and *Millennial Star*. In the intervening years before it was canonized in 1976, the vision was perhaps most accessible in Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine: Selections from the Sermons and Writings of Joseph F. Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1919), 472–76. On the publication



# Vision of the Redemption of the Dead

This "Vision of the Redemption of the Dead" was submitted, October 31, 1918, to the Counselors in the First Presidency, the Council of the Twelve and the Patriarch, and by them unanimously accepted. It is published in *The Improvement Era* for December, to which magazine *The News* makes acknowledgment for the privilege of here reproducing it.

Its publication at this time will emphasize and make clear to those who attended the conference or have since read its proceedings, the significance of President Smith's opening remarks, October 4, when he said:

"I have not lived alone these five months. I have dealt in the spirit of prayer, of supplication, of faith, and of determination; and I have had my communication with the Spirit of the Lord continuously."

ON the third of October, in the year nineteen hundred and eighteen, I sat in my room pondering over the Scriptures and reflecting upon the great atoning sacrifice that was made by the Son of God for the redemption of the world, and the great and wonderful love made manifest by the Father and the Son in the coming of the Redeemer into the world, that through his Atonement and by obedience to the principles of the gospel, mankind might be saved.

While I was thus engaged, my mind reverted to the writings of the Apostle Peter to the primitive saints scattered abroad throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, and other parts of Asia where the gospel had been preached after the crucifixion of the Lord. I opened the Bible and read the third and fourth chapters of the first epistle of Peter, and as I read I was greatly impressed, more than I had ever been before, with the following passages:

For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit.

By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; which sometime were disobedient, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. (1 Peter 3:18-20.)

For far this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit. (1 Peter 4:6.)

As I pondered over these things which are written, the eyes of my understanding were opened, and the Spirit of the Lord rested upon me, and I saw the hosts of the dead, both small and great. And there were gathered together in one place an innumerable company of the spirits of the just, who had been faithful in the testimony of Jesus while they lived in mortality, and who had offered sacrifice in the similitude of the great sacrifice of the Son of God, and had suffered tribulation in their Redeemer's name. All these had departed the mortal life, firm in the hope of a glorious resurrection, through the grace of God the Father and his Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

I beheld that they were filled with joy and gladness, and were rejoicing together because the day of their deliverance was at hand. They were assembled awaiting the advent of the Son of God into the spirit world, to declare their redemption from the hands of death. Their sleeping dust was to be raised unto its perfect frame, bone to his bone, and the sinews and the flesh upon them, the spirit and the body to be united ever again to be divided, that they might receive a fulness of joy.

While this vast multitude waited and conversed, rejoicing in the hour of their deliverance from the chains of death, the Son of God appeared, declaring liberty to the captives who had been faithful, and there he preached to them the everlasting

truth, to teach them; but behold, from among the righteous he organized his forces and appointed messengers, clothed with power and authority, and commissioned them to go forth and carry the light of the gospel to them that were in darkness, even to all the spirits of men. And thus was the gospel preached to the dead. And the chosen messengers went forth to declare the acceptable day of the Lord, and proclaim liberty to the captives who were bound; even unto all who would repent of their sins and receive the gospel. Thus was the gospel preached to those who had died in their sins, without a knowledge of the truth, or in transgression, having rejected the prophets. These were taught faith in God, repentance from sin, vicarious baptism for the remission of sins, the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands, and all other principles of the gospel that were necessary for them to know in order to qualify themselves that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.

And so it was made known among the dead, both small and great, the unrighteous as well as the faithful, that redemption had been wrought through the sacrifice of the Son of God upon the cross. Thus was it made known that our Redeemer spent his time during his sojourn in the world of spirits, instructing and preparing the faithful spirits of the prophets who had testified of him in the flesh, that they might carry the message of redemption unto all the dead unto whom he could not go personally because of their rebellion and transgression, that they through the ministrations of his servants might also hear his words.

Among the great and mighty ones who were assembled in this vast congregation of the righteous, were Father Adam, the Ancient of Days and father of all, and our glorious Mother Eve, with many of her faithful daughters who had lived through the ages and worshiped the true and living God. Abel, the first martyr, was there, and his brother Seth, one of the mighty ones, who was in the express image of his father Adam. Noah, who gave warning of the flood; Shem, the great High Priest; Abraham, the father of the faithful; Isaac, Jacob, and Moses, the great law-giver of Israel; Isaiah, who declared by prophecy that the Redeemer was anointed to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that were bound, were also there.

Moreover, Esau, who was shown in vision the great valley of dry bones which were to be clothed upon with flesh to come forth again in the resurrection of the dead, living souls; Daniel, who foresaw and foretold the establishment of the kingdom of God in the latter days, never again to be destroyed nor given to other people; Elias, who was with Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration; and Malachi, the prophet who testified of the coming of Elijah—of whom also Moroni spake to the Prophet Joseph Smith—declaring that he should come before the ushering in of the great and dreadful day of the Lord, were also there. The prophet Elijah was to plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to their fathers, foreshadowing the great work to be done in the temples of the Lord in the Dispensation of the Fulness of Times, for the redemption of the dead and the sealing of the children to their parents, lest the whole earth be smitten with a curse and utterly wasted at his coming.

All these and many more, even the prophets who dwelt among the Nephites and testified of the coming of the Son of God, mingled in the vast assembly and waited for their deliverance, for the dead had looked upon the long absence of their

FIG. 3. The Vision of the Redemption of the Dead was first published in the *Deseret Evening News* on November 30, 1918. Courtesy Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.



FIG. 4. Left to right: Hyrum Mack Smith, his son Joseph, and Joseph F. Smith. Hyrum died the same year his father received the Vision of the Redemption of the Dead. Courtesy LDS Church Archives. © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

life! O my sweet son, my joy, my hope! . . . O God, help me!”<sup>8</sup> After his sons Joseph Fielding and David Asael took him to view Hyrum’s body, President Smith confided again in his journal:

At the noon hour David and Joseph took me to Hyrum’s where I once more kissed the lips of my boy—whose lips I have never failed to kiss since his birth whenever we have met, or parted until now—they did not, for the first time in all his life, kiss me back again! O how bitter is this

and occasionally cited, the vision did not make its way into the scriptural canon until 1976, when it was added (along with the present D&C section 137) as a supplement to the Pearl of Great Price. Three years later, on June 6, 1979, the First Presidency announced that it would become section 138 of the Doctrine and Covenants; it first appeared as we have it in the 1981 edition.

### Biographical Context

Let us first consider a biographical context for section 138. Early in 1918, Joseph F. Smith suffered a staggering blow. His eldest son Hyrum Mack (fig. 4), an Apostle then forty-five years old, died on January 23 of complications from a ruptured appendix. President Smith wrote in his journal: “My soul is rent asunder. My heart is broken, and flutters for

---

history, see Robert L. Millet, “The Vision of the Redemption of the Dead,” in *Hearken, O Ye People: Discourses on the Doctrine and Covenants*, Twelfth Sperry Symposium (Sandy, Utah: Randall Books, 1984), 259, 263–64. It was Elder Bruce R. McConkie who divided the text into verses and wrote the headnote.

8. Smith, *Life of Joseph F. Smith*, 474 (only a portion of the lament is quoted here); this passage is also quoted in the Priesthood and Relief Society manual *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1998), 407.

unwelcome fate! I am actually thankful that I can find some relief from my overwhelming burden of grief in tears.<sup>9</sup>

The death of his firstborn son, in whom he took such pride and placed such hope, was devastating to the prophet. Suffering from ill health since 1916, President Smith declined markedly in the months following Hyrum's death.

As heartbreaking as his son's death was, it is only part of the long legacy of death in Joseph F. Smith's experience. He was just five when his father, the Patriarch Hyrum, was slain with the Prophet Joseph Smith at Carthage Jail. His mother died when he was thirteen. In 1915 his wife Sarah Richards died, followed later that year by his twenty-five-year-old daughter Zina Greenwell, who left behind a three-year-old child. By 1918, only one of his four adult sisters survived; his brother John had died in 1911.<sup>10</sup> Of his forty-four children from five wives, thirteen had died, many in their childhood.<sup>11</sup> Joseph F.'s expressions of grief over the death of each child in his journal and letters are heartbreaking from first to last. When his first child, Mercy Josephine, died before her third birthday, he wrote:

My heart is bruised and wrenched almost asunder. I am desolate, my home seems desolate. . . . I look in vain, I listen, no sound, I wander through the rooms, all are vacant, lonely, desolate, deserted. . . . No

---

9. Smith, *Life of Joseph F. Smith*, 476.

10. Though he referred to all of his siblings as brother or sister, only Martha Ann (Harris), daughter of Mary Fielding Smith, was Joseph F.'s full sister. By his first wife, Jerusha Barden, Hyrum Smith had six children, two of whom, Mary and Hyrum, died in childhood; Joseph F.'s half-siblings who lived to maturity were Lovina (Walker), John, Jerusha (Pierce), and Sarah (Griffin). Of all these only Martha Ann Harris was still alive in 1918.

11. In a temple fast meeting in February 1918, a few weeks after his son's death, President Smith said:

I ought certainly to have charity for others who suffer and who are tried; for I lost my father when I was but a child; I lost my mother, the sweetest soul that ever lived, when I was only a boy; I have buried one of the loveliest wives that ever blessed the lot of man, and I have buried thirteen of my more than forty children that the Lord gave me. And it has seemed to me that the most promising, the most hopeful, and, if possible, the sweetest and purest and the best have been the earliest called to rest. Surely I have been touched and humbled with all these things and others—the death of my kindred, brothers and sisters, the passing away of men that I loved with all my soul, . . . whom I learned to love as I loved my father. (“Status of Children in the Resurrection” in *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1833–1964*, comp. James R. Clark, 6 vols. [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965–75], 5:92 [February 1918])



beaming little black eyes sparkling with love for papa; . . . but a vacant little chair . . . and only the one desolate thought forcing its crushing leaden weight upon my heart—**she is not here, she is gone!**<sup>12</sup>

Joseph F. Smith composed commemorative poems for his deceased children and grieved deeply over their loss. His memory of each remained vivid and affectionate. He continued to mark important anniversaries long after their deaths, noting in 1916, for example, that forty-nine years had passed since Mercy's birth.<sup>13</sup> Finally, just days before the vision of October 3, Hyrum Mack's widow, Ida Bowman Smith, died of heart failure on September 24, six days after giving birth to a son, whom she had named after his deceased father.<sup>14</sup>

In the abundant literature of mourning, there are few expressions more poignant than those of Joseph F. Smith. Death had surrounded him throughout his life, and the longings these deaths awakened could not be fully soothed in mortality.

The death of his daughter-in-law just before conference could not but renew his grief for his son. The prophet, asking himself what purpose the death of the young Apostle might serve, must have found consolation in the words of the vision that now comprise verse 57: "I beheld that the faithful elders of this dispensation, when they depart from mortal life, continue their labors in the preaching of the gospel of repentance . . . in the great world of the spirits of the dead." It must also have brought him comfort to see among the noble and great ones his father Hyrum (D&C 138:53), after whom he had named his son and after whom in turn his new orphaned grandson was also named. (Some four months earlier, on June 27, 1918, the anniversary of the Martyrdom, President Smith, surrounded by his family, had dedicated a monument to the Patriarch Hyrum Smith in the Salt Lake Cemetery.) On a personal level, the spirit of Elijah, referred to in verse 47, by which the hearts of fathers are bound to children and those of children to fathers, is thus immediate and direct in President Smith's life.

## The Great War

The second, multifaceted context dominates most of the front page of the *Deseret Evening News* from October 4, 1918 (fig. 5). It is the Great War

12. Smith, *Life of Joseph F. Smith*, 455–56, emphasis in original.

13. Smith, *Life of Joseph F. Smith*, 455.

14. "Beloved Woman Hears Call of Death," *Deseret Evening News*, September 25, 1918, 5. Referring to the "great blow" the death of her husband had been to her, the article continues: "With the advent of her little son, named for his father Hyrum Mack, her friends hoped that the keenness of her grief might be assuaged."



(or World War I).<sup>15</sup> From the page's various headlines one might form the impression that the Germans and Austrians were retreating as fast as they could. The Macedonian front had indeed collapsed, but resistance elsewhere was fierce and desperate, and some costly battles lay just ahead. The great American battle, the Meuse-Argonne offensive, was just beginning, and what came to be known as the Lost Battalion was right in the midst of its devastating week-long ordeal. Still, we are just thirty-eight days from the end of the war.<sup>16</sup>

From its inception in late summer 1914, President Smith had watched the war from afar with concern and sadness. At the outset he had personal cause to be anxious as well: his son Hyrum Mack—the same who died in 1918—was serving as the European Mission president at the time and, while traveling in Germany when the war broke out, was arrested briefly on suspicion of spying for the British.<sup>17</sup> In a Christmas message that December, the First Presidency wrote:

---

15. The relationship of D&C 138 to the Great War has been discussed in 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): 104–25. I learned of Bennett's study only after having twice taught D&C 138 in seminars on the Great War and modernism. While our topics share much in common, our approaches differ. Bennett reviews Joseph F. Smith's statements on the war and provides a helpful survey of reflections on the meaning of the war at its end from religious leaders of many faiths: Anglican, Catholic, American Protestant, and Jewish; he also considers President Smith's earlier discourses on death and the spirit world during the war years (April 1916, February and April 1918). A related study is his "'How Long, Oh Lord, How Long?' James E. Talmage and the Great War," *Religious Educator* 3, no. 1 (2002): 86–101.

16. A good general history of the war is John Keegan, *The First World War* (New York: Knopf, 1999). On the American involvement, see David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); and John S. D. Eisenhower, *Yanks: The Epic Story of the American Army in World War I* (New York: Free Press, 2001).

17. Hyrum Mack Smith served as president of the European Mission, headquartered in Liverpool, from 1913 to 1916. At the time the war broke out in late July 1914, he was traveling in Germany with Hyrum W. Valentine, president of the Swiss-German Mission (Basel). Suspected of spying for the British, they were arrested briefly and were only able to return to Switzerland on August 9, and Elder Smith not to Liverpool until August 21. Hyrum Mack Smith to the First Presidency, in *Deseret Evening News*, September 8, 1914, 1 and 3, describing the outbreak of war, his difficulty getting out of Germany and back to England, and what was being done for the missionaries' safety; compare Jeffrey L. Anderson, "Mormons and Germany, 1914–1933: A History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Germany and Its Relationship with the German Governments from World War I to the Rise of Hitler" (master's thesis, Brigham Young

While rejoicing over the birth of the Incomparable One, the light of our gladness is overshadowed with the warclouds that have darkened the skies of Europe, and our songs and salutations of joy and good will are rendered sadly discordant by the thunders of artillery and the groans of the wounded and dying, echoing from afar, but harrowing to our souls as the awful tidings come sounding o'er the sea.<sup>18</sup>

Abandoning its earlier hope of avoiding the conflict “over there,” the United States declared war on April 6, 1917, during general conference as it happened, but it would be almost a year before American troops saw action in France. Several of President Smith’s sons were drawn into service; one of them, Calvin S., was wounded at the Front.<sup>19</sup>

What many thought would be a short war, “over by Christmas,” soon settled into a long slaughter, facilitated by new technology: the improved machine gun, long-range high-explosive artillery, airplanes, tanks, submarines, and mustard gas. The loss of life was unparalleled. At Verdun, for example, an offensive consciously undertaken as a “battle of attrition” to bleed the French army dry, there would be over one million casualties between February and December 1916. The ossuary at Douaumont, which overlooks a vast cemetery, contains the bones of one hundred thirty thousand unidentified soldiers. To take pressure off Verdun, the French appealed to the British to launch an offensive on the Somme. By the time that battle ended in November 1916, the Somme, too, claimed over one million casualties.

The war laid the land waste. Wilfred Owen describes it as “Gray, cratered like the moon with hollow woe, / And pitted with great pocks and scabs of plagues.”<sup>20</sup> When the rains came, as they so often did, the land,

---

University, 1991), 42–43; and Jeffrey L. Anderson, “Brothers across Enemy Lines: A Mission President and a German Soldier Correspond during World War I,” *BYU Studies* 41, no. 1 (2002): 130. A further letter from Hyrum Mack Smith to the First Presidency describing the situation on the Continent was printed in the *Deseret Evening News*, September 23, 1914, 4. Hyrum Mack’s wife Ida Bowman Smith rallied the Relief Society in Britain (“Remember the Soldiers,” *Millennial Star* 76 [October 8, 1914]: 654; compare October 1, 637–38) and offered its services for Red Cross work, with the result that “hundreds of thousands of articles were made under her supervision” (“Beloved Woman Hears Call of Death,” *Deseret Evening News*, September 25, 1918, 5).

18. “A Christmas Greeting from the First Presidency,” in Clark, *Messages of the First Presidency*, 4:319 (December 19, 1914); compare *Teachings of the Presidents*, 399. Further comments on the war by President Smith are discussed in Bennett, “And I Saw the Hosts of the Dead,” 107–11.

19. Smith, *Life of Joseph F. Smith*, 419.

20. Wilfred Owen, “The Show,” lines 4–5, in *The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen*, ed. C. Day Lewis (New York: New Directions, 1964), 50.

churned up by artillery, was transformed into what Mary Borden called “The vast liquid grave of our armies.”<sup>21</sup> Thousands simply sank to oblivion. Tolkien’s horrible Dead Marshes in *The Two Towers*, in which Sam, falling, sees “dead things, dead faces in the water,” come directly from his experience at the Front.<sup>22</sup>

In many places the devastation can still be seen on the landscape: craters from mines (the one at La Boisselle is three hundred feet wide and ninety feet deep), a land pocked by artillery, abandoned trenches. Not even the grass Carl Sandberg writes of can hide the destruction<sup>23</sup> (fig 6).

Like the valley of bones Ezekiel saw (to which D&C 138:43 refers), the land is a boneyard still. Often farmers turn up bones of the dead as they plow. In 2001 a shallow grave containing twenty British soldiers, their arms linked together, was uncovered near Arras.<sup>24</sup> Munitions from the war continue to kill: in 1991, for example, thirty-six people died and another fifty-one were injured from happening upon hitherto unexploded shells.<sup>25</sup>

---

21. Mary Borden, “The Song of the Mud,” line 34, in *Lines of Fire: Women Writers of World War I*, ed. Margaret R. Higonnet (New York: Plume, 1999), 507.

22. Barton Friedman cites analogs to Sam’s seeing “dead things, dead faces in the water” (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers*, [New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1988], 235) from Siegfried Sassoon, Max Plowman, and John Masefield in “Tolkien and David Jones: The Great War and the War of the Ring,” *CLIO* 11, no. 2 (1982): 115–16. More generally, see John Garth, *Tolkien and the Great War: The Threshold of Middle-earth* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003). In a rare indication of influence, Tolkien did acknowledge that “the Dead Marshes and the approaches to the Morannon owe something to Northern France after the Battle of the Somme.” *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter with Christopher Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 303.

23. Carl Sandberg, “Grass,” in *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry*, 2d rev. ed., ed. Jon Silkin (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin Books, 1996), 235.

Pile the bodies high at Austerlitz and Waterloo.

Shovel them under and let me work—

I am the grass; I cover all.

And pile them high at Gettysburg

And pile them high at Ypres and Verdun.

Shovel them under and let me work.

Two years, ten years, and passengers ask the conductor:

What place is this?

Where are we now?

I am the grass.

Let me work.

24. Andrew Loudon, “Rest in Peace, Chums,” *Daily Mirror*, March 22, 2002, 21.

25. Donovan Webster, *Aftermath: The Remnants of War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 19. Since France’s Département du Déminage (munitions disposal





FIG. 6. Preserved battlefield and trenches from the Battle of the Somme in the Newfoundland Memorial Park, Beaumont-Hamel, Northern France. Courtesy George S. Tate.

The pervasiveness and ubiquity of death were overwhelming. Isaac Rosenberg describes the Front as “Dead Man’s Dump,” with “wheels lurch[ing] over the sprawled dead.”<sup>26</sup> Wilfred Owen writes to his mother of “the distortion of the dead” and of their “unburiable bodies.”<sup>27</sup> No Man’s Land, the space between the opposing trenches, was dotted with

---

unit) was established in 1946, more than 630 bomb disposal experts have been killed while trying to clear the land of explosives from World Wars I and II. The largest single item is unexploded artillery shells from World War I, which comprise eighty percent of the ordnance encountered. Webster, *Aftermath*, 19, 35.

26. Isaac Rosenberg, “Dead Man’s Dump,” line 7, in Silkin, *Penguin Book of First World War Poetry*, 221.

27. “I suppose I can endure cold, and fatigue, and the face-to-face death, as well as another; but extra for me there is the universal pervasion of Ugliness. Hideous landscapes . . . everything unnatural, broken, blasted; the distortion of the dead, whose unburiable bodies sit outside the dug-outs all day, all night, the most execrable sights on earth. In poetry we call them the most glorious. But to sit with them all day, all night . . . [Owen’s ellipsis] and a week later to come back and find them still sitting there, in motionless groups, THAT is what saps the ‘soldierly spirit.’” Wilfred Owen to Susan Owen, February 4, 1917, letter 482 in

unrecoverable corpses, some perpetually suspended in the barbed wire. As the war went on, one could hardly dig anywhere without uncovering decay. As a defense mechanism, some became numb to death, or assumed a kind of bravado, joking about body parts projecting from trench walls or a corpse's macabre grin, but most could not, however much they may have wished to.<sup>28</sup> It is no wonder that Charles Sorley begins a sonnet: "When you see millions of the mouthless dead / Across your dreams in pale battalions go."<sup>29</sup> Such dreams often haunted the soldiers, even in daylight. In London on leave, for example, Siegfried Sassoon thought he saw corpses on Piccadilly.<sup>30</sup>

Seeing what lay about them, and imagining their own fate, poets (imitating A. E. Housman and Thomas Hardy) sometimes adopted the perspective of the dead, speaking from graves. Perhaps the most famous example is John McCrae's "In Flanders Fields," the second stanza of which reads:

We are the Dead. Short days ago  
 We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
                   Loved and were loved, and now we lie  
                   In Flanders fields.<sup>31</sup>

It is the perspective T. S. Eliot later adopts at the beginning of *The Waste Land* (1922), for it is only from under ground that the speaker can say paradoxically "Winter kept us warm, covering / Earth in forgetful snow."<sup>32</sup>

---

*Wilfred Owen: Collected Letters*, ed. Harold Owen and John Bell (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 431–32.

28. On the psychological impact of trench warfare, see Eric J. Leed, *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979); see also Denis Winter, *Death's Men: Soldiers of the Great War* (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin Books, 1979), chapters 8, 11, and 12 especially.

29. Charles Hamilton Sorley, "When You See Millions of the Mouthless Dead," in Silkin, *Penguin Book of First World War Poetry*, 89.

30. Robert Graves, *Good-bye to All That*, 2d rev. ed. (New York: Anchor, 1957), 256.

31. John McCrae, "In Flanders Fields," in Silkin, *Penguin Book of First World War Poetry*, 85. Housman uses the perspective of the grave in "Is My Team Plowing" (*A Shropshire Lad*, poem 27), Hardy in "Channel Firing" and "Ah, Are You Digging on My Grave?"

32. T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, lines 5–6, in T. S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1952), 37; see Michael H. Levenson, *A Genealogy of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 172: "The eye here sees from the point of view of someone (or some thing) that is buried. . . . The opening of *The Waste Land* looks at spring from the point of view of a corpse."

In the end, seventy million men took up arms. There were over thirty million military casualties, including over nine million dead. Nine million! Such numbers roll easily off the tongue, and we can become inured to them in the way Kubrick parodies in the 1964 film *Dr. Strangelove*: “Ten, twenty million tops, depending on the breaks.” On only the first day of the battle of the Somme, on a fourteen-mile segment of the overall five hundred-mile Western Front, the British suffered nearly sixty thousand casualties on a single day: July 1, 1916.<sup>33</sup> That is more than one casualty for every second of daylight. It remains the deadliest day in British military history.<sup>34</sup>

The Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme (fig. 7) bears, inscribed on its sixteen great piers, the names of 73,412 British soldiers who died in the battle of the Somme and have no known graves. Its counterpart in Flanders is the Menin Gate at Ypres. On its inner walls, recesses, and outer porticos are inscribed the names of 54,896 British soldiers of the Ypres salient whose graves are unknown. Every evening at eight, buglers still play the Last Post in honor of the dead. But the memorial turned out to be too small, and another 34,984 names of the missing from the same salient are inscribed on the semicircular wall and alcoves of Tyne Cot Cemetery near Passchendaele. On the night the Menin Gate was dedicated, Australian war artist Will Longstaff had a reverie in which he imagined the fallen soldiers of the Ypres salient rising from the ground and passing into eternity—a reverie he then painted.

Such memorials are related to a theme of the period—that of absence. Thucydides describes the Greek practice of carrying “one empty bier decked for the missing, that is, for those whose bodies could not be recovered” (2.34). With respect to the Great War, this idea manifests itself in various ways: for example in sculpted representations of soldiers carrying an empty bier, at times accompanied by a quotation from chapter 44 of

---

33. In order to give my students a sense of the British losses on the first day of the Battle of the Somme, I once took them over to the Lavell Edwards Stadium at BYU and read them an eyewitness account of the attack. As we looked at row upon row of the stadium, the sixty thousand-plus empty seats stared back at us. It takes some time just to walk by and count off one thousand; the prospect of going further was daunting.

34. That same day, an LDS soldier was killed on the German side of the line at Mametz at the southern end of the Somme sector. Wilhelm Kessler, who had been serving in the Swiss-German Mission as editor of *Der Stern* when war broke out, had enlisted in the German army and, previously twice wounded, had received the Iron Cross. His mission president, Hyrum W. Valentine, spoke of his death at April general conference 1917, referring to him as “a faithful Latter-day Saint, a soldier of the Cross though enlisted for the time being with his country’s army.” Anderson, “Brothers across Enemy Lines,” 128, 130–31.



FIG. 7. Piers with inscribed names and the altar-like Great War Stone, Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme, Northern France. Courtesy George S. Tate.

Ecclesiasticus (or Sirach): “And some there be, which have no memorial; who are perished, as though they had never been” (verse 9);<sup>35</sup> or again in the most important British memorial of all: the Cenotaph, or empty tomb, in Whitehall, which has been the focal point of mourning and remembrance since it was first erected. Here the dead are honored by silence, itself an absence. When the Unknown Warrior was brought with great ceremony to be buried in Westminster Abbey in November 1920, over one million mourners flooded past the Cenotaph and the warrior’s tomb (fig. 8).

Virginia Woolf also evokes the war and its devastation through absence: the empty room at the end of *Jacob’s Room*, where we learn through his absence that Jacob Flanders has died in the war; the bracketed

---

35. It is from later in the same chapter (verse 14) that Rudyard Kipling, at the invitation of architect Sir Edwin Lutyens, chose the phrase inscribed on the altar-like Great War Stone at each of the larger British military cemeteries and at memorials like Thiepval: “Their Name Liveth for Evermore.” Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (New York: Atheneum, 1991), 271. Kipling, whose only son, John, was among the missing at Loos in September 1915 and who searched in vain for his son’s grave, became a strong advocate of memorials to the missing. *75 Years of the Menin Gate & 25,000th Last Post: English Guide to the Temporary Exhibition* (Ypres: In Flanders Fields Museum, 2001), 4.

reference to Andrew Ramsey's death from shell fire, narrated in an empty house in the middle "Time Passes" section of *To the Lighthouse*.<sup>36</sup>

Death itself was an absence. (Remember the "vacant little chair" in Joseph F. Smith's lament for his daughter.) For the bereaved whose kinsmen were among the missing or had distant graves in foreign fields, even the rituals of closure that revolve around a body were not available.<sup>37</sup> And the sheer, overwhelming quantity of death awakened individual and communal grief on an unprecedented scale.<sup>38</sup> With loss came questions: What is the fate of the dead? Do they continue to exist? Is there life after death? Will I see my loved ones again? The world was dense with loss and, as soldier journalist Stephen Graham wrote upon revisiting the battlefields in 1920, "There is a pull from the other world, a drag on the heart and spirit."<sup>39</sup>

One form the quest for consolation and answers took was spiritualism, the people involved often believing themselves to be responding to efforts of their dead to contact and to comfort them. As Sir Arthur Conan Doyle wrote:

In the presence of an agonized world, hearing every day of the deaths of the flower of our race in the first promise of their unfulfilled youth, seeing around one the wives and mothers who had no clear conception whither their loved ones had gone to, I seemed suddenly to see . . . that it was really something tremendous, a breaking down of the walls between two worlds, a direct undeniable message from beyond, a call of hope and of guidance to the human race at the time of its deepest affliction.<sup>40</sup>

---

36. See Allyson Booth, *Postcards from the Trenches: Negotiating the Space between Modernism and the First World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 3, 44–49; and Allyson Booth, "The Architecture of Loss: Teaching *Jacob's Room* as a War Novel," in *Re:Reading, Re:Writing, Re:Teaching Virginia Woolf: Selected Papers from the Fourth Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf*, ed. Eileen Barrett and Patricia Cramer (New York: Pace University Press, 1995), 65–72.

37. The British ban, beginning in 1915, on repatriation of the war dead increased the sense of death as absence. On the relationship of absence to commemoration, especially in figurative sculpture, in which the sculpted body is surrogate for the absent corpse, see Catherine Moriarty, "The Absent Dead and Figurative First World War Memorials," *Transactions of the Ancient Monuments Society* 39 (1995): 7–40.

38. On the pervasiveness of grief and communities of mourning, see Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

39. Stephen Graham, *The Challenge of the Dead* (London: Cassell, 1921), 36.

40. Arthur Conan Doyle, *The New Revelation* (New York: Doran, 1918), 39. Though he had been interested in psychic phenomena for several decades, Conan Doyle did not declare his own belief in spiritualism until late 1916, in the



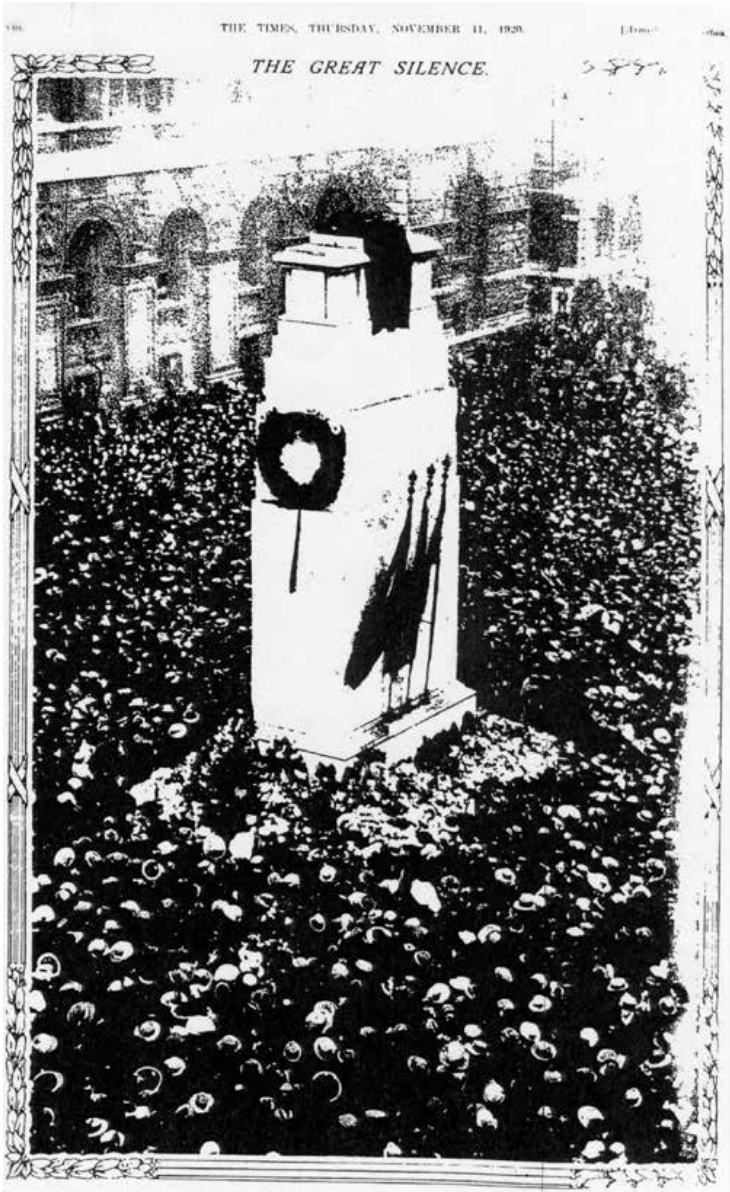


FIG. 8. The Cenotaph, or empty tomb, in London. Over one million mourners flooded past the Cenotaph when the Unknown Warrior was buried at Westminster Abbey. Courtesy Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.

Late in the war, Conan Doyle, who had lost several loved ones during its course, including his son Kingsley,<sup>41</sup> became one of the leaders of

---

November 4 issue of *Light* (the journal of the London Spiritualist Alliance); he began lecturing on spiritualism in October 1917. Martin Booth, *The Doctor, the Detective, and Arthur Conan Doyle: A Biography of Arthur Conan Doyle* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1997), 313. His most important writings on spiritualism are *The New Revelation* (1918), *The Vital Message* (1919), and *The History of Spiritualism* (1926). Conan Doyle felt that the cataclysm of the war must serve some purpose for the suffering to have any meaning. Near the end of his six-volume history of the war, the work he judged to be his most significant, he writes: "He [the historian] lays down his pen at last with the deep conviction that the final results of this great convulsion are meant to be spiritual rather than material. . . . Not to change rival frontiers, but to mould the hearts and spirits of men—there lie the explanation and the justification of all that we have endured." Arthur Conan Doyle, *The British Campaign in France and Flanders*, 6 vols. (New York: Doran, 1916–20), 6:307. In *The Vital Message* he is even more direct:

It has been our fate, among all the innumerable generations of mankind, to face the most frightful calamity that has ever befallen the world. . . . If our souls, wearied and tortured during these dreadful five years of self-sacrifice and suspense, can show no radical changes, then what souls will ever respond to a fresh influx of heavenly inspiration? . . .

Why was this tremendous experience forced upon mankind? . . . [The causes] are essentially religious, not political. They lie far deeper than the national squabbles of the day. A thousand years hence those national results may matter little, but the religious result will rule the world. That religious result is the reform of the decadent Christianity of to-day, its simplification, its purification, and its reinforcement by the facts of spirit communion and the clear knowledge of what lies beyond the exit-door of death. The shock of the war was meant to rouse us to mental and moral earnestness, to give us the courage to tear away venerable shams, and to force the human race to realise and use the vast new revelation which has been so clearly stated and so abundantly proved, for all who will examine the statements and proofs with an open mind." (Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Vital Message* [New York: Doran, 1919], 11–13)

41. Kingsley was badly wounded on the Somme in 1916 and invalided back to England. Though weakened, he resumed his medical studies at St Mary's Hospital and died October 28, 1918, not of his wounds, but in the influenza epidemic, which also claimed Conan Doyle's brother Innes in Belgium four months later. Conan Doyle's brother-in-law, Malcolm Leckie was killed in the first weeks of the war, his nephew Oscar Horning and another brother-in-law Leslie Oldham were killed in 1915. Booth, *The Doctor, The Detective, and Arthur Conan Doyle*, 311. Conan Doyle always insisted that his conversion to spiritualism was not based upon his own loss of kinsmen (see Arthur Conan Doyle, *The History of Spiritualism*, 2 vols. [New York: Doran, 1926], 2:225), but it was different for his wife, Jean:

spiritualism. Although the movement was widely denounced as misguided and even heretical by many clergymen, hundreds of thousands were drawn to the possibility of communicating with their dead. As Jay Winter observes: “Spiritualism gave people a chance to have a ritual interment of members of their family whose graves were not known or who had literally been blown to pieces. Maybe half of the men who were killed in the First World War had no known graves. The families had no place to go through the rituals of separation. A séance was one of them.”<sup>42</sup>

Sir Oliver Lodge’s *Raymond*, which went through a dozen printings between 1916 and 1919, is a further influential example showing the relationship of spiritualism to grief. Lodge was a prominent man of science, whose work as a physicist had brought him a knighthood. His early interest in psychic research proceeded from a scientific perspective (wireless telegraphy, etc.). When their twenty-six-year-old son, Raymond, was killed near Ypres in September 1915, the Lodges eventually sought solace through a spiritualist medium. Over time, convinced that he could base his conclusions on his own experience, Lodge set about to share his findings, trusting that his experience might bring comfort to others:

I have thought it my duty to speak out, though it may well be believed that it is not without hesitation that I have ventured thus to obtrude family affairs. I should not have done so were it not that the amount of premature and unnatural bereavement at the present time is so appalling that the pain caused by exposing one’s own sorrow and its alleviation, to possible scoffers, becomes almost negligible in view of the service which it is legitimate to hope may thus be rendered to mourners, if they can derive comfort by learning that communication across the gulf is possible.<sup>43</sup>

The book is divided into three parts: The first part consists of letters from the Front that Raymond sent while he was alive. The second, “supernormal”

---

“It was the death of my brother at Mons that brought me to believe in Spiritualism. . . . I frankly confess that, before that, I was sceptical. . . . But in this very room [Conan Doyle’s study at Crowborough] . . . the spirit came to us of my brother, and I knew that I had got into touch with him.” Arthur Conan Doyle and Jean Conan Doyle, “The Challenge of Spiritualism, Does It Confirm the Christian Doctrine of Immortality? An Interview with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle,” interview by Charles Dawbarn, *Daily Chronicle*, August 13, 1919, 4, reprinted in Harold Orel, *Sir Arthur Conan Doyle: Interviews and Recollections* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1991), 241.

42. *The Great War and the Shaping of the 20th Century* (KCET/BBC Video, 1996), episode 8 “War without End” (see <http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/>).

43. Sir Oliver J. Lodge, *Raymond, or Life and Death, with Examples of the Evidence for Survival of Memory and Affection after Death* (New York: Doran, 1916), vii–viii.

part is made up of psychic communications from Raymond. The third part is a philosophical section that concludes with an effort to reconcile spiritualism with belief in Christ. Toward the end Lodge writes, for example: “Whatever the Churches may do, I believe that the call of Christ himself will be heard and attended to by a large part of humanity in the near future . . . as never yet it has been heard or attended to on earth.”<sup>44</sup> However much we may reject spiritualism—its trappings of mediums, séances, automatic writing, and the like—, we can only feel sympathy for the grief that propelled it during this period of such great loss.<sup>45</sup>

The realm of the dead is also obliquely evoked by C. S. Lewis, a convalescing young soldier, wounded in Flanders in April 1918 during the German spring offensive and invalided back to England. Around the same time that Joseph F. Smith began to meditate on the First Epistle of Peter (see D&C 138:5), Lewis chose the title for a book of poetry from 1 Peter 3:19. In the summer and early fall of 1918, he gathered together poems he had written before being posted to France and some while at the Front and arranged them into a collection he proposed to title *Spirits in Prison*. The volume was accepted in the fall and published under the pseudonym Clive Hamilton early in 1919, by which time the title was changed to *Spirits in Bondage*.<sup>46</sup> Although the original title comes from the New Testament, Lewis wrote the poems during his agnostic period. There is little here of the later Christian apologist or, directly, of Christ’s visit to the spirits in prison.<sup>47</sup> Indeed the realms seem reversed; this life has become the

---

44. Lodge, *Raymond*, 376; on Lodge and spiritualism more generally, see Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, chapter 3, especially 61–62.

45. A not infrequent aspect of grief was a longing for a suitable portrait of the dead. In 1916 artist Florence Upton began painting from photographs portraits for the families of dead soldiers. The families would bring her various mementos of the dead—a canteen, a pocket Bible, letters, etc.—and try to convey a sense of the loved one’s character and personality. Upton then tried “to make the person live again—at least on canvas. . . . A simple likeness would not do.” As she continued in this work, she was herself drawn to spiritualism, until “the kind of portrait work Florence was doing at the time was so closely allied to spiritualism that it becomes difficult to separate the two activities.” Norma S. Davis, *A Lark Ascends: Florence Kate Upton, Artist and Illustrator* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1992), 134, 157.

46. A. N. Wilson, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography* (London: Williams Collins Sons, 1990), 56, 59–60. See Clive Hamilton [C. S. Lewis], *Spirits in Bondage* (London: Heinemann, 1919); and (more recently) C. S. Lewis, *Spirits in Bondage: A Cycle of Lyrics*, ed. Walter Hooper (San Diego: Harcourt, 1984). Hamilton is Lewis’s mother’s maiden name.

47. The closest Lewis comes to Christ’s visit to the spirits in prison is in “De Profundis,” in which, if it be not a dream or vain hope, the distant voice of “a just

hopeless realm of the dead. The last poem, “Death in Battle,” pleads for escape to a different world, “Beyond the tide of the ocean, hidden and sunk away, / Out of the sound of battles, near to the end of day.”<sup>48</sup>

Finally, while we are still considering the war, it may be worth noting a further article on the front page of the *Deseret News* for October 4, column 5: “Prince Maximilian of Baden Appointed German Chancellor” (see fig. 5). Prince Max, a political moderate who opposed unrestricted submarine warfare and who had worked to ensure humane treatment of prisoners of war, was appointed chancellor on October 1, 1918, and installed on October 3. What the article does not say, since it was not then generally known, is that late on the night of October 3—the date of Joseph F. Smith’s vision—the new chancellor, urged by the German High Command, cabled President Woodrow Wilson asking him to intervene with the Allies to arrange an armistice and to begin negotiations for peace.<sup>49</sup> This was the beginning of the formal process leading to the war’s end some five weeks later.

---

God that cares for earthly pain” may still be heard again:

Yet far away beyond our labouring night,  
He wanders in the depths of endless light,  
Singing alone his musics of delight;  
Only the far, spent echo of his song  
Our dungeons and deep cells can smite along.  
(Lewis, *Spirits in Bondage*, 20)

48. Lewis, *Spirits in Bondage*, 75.

49. Prince Max struggled with this decision, wanting more time to deliberate and hesitant to have a desperate suit for peace be his first act as chancellor, but, as he writes in his memoirs, “Towards evening [of October 3] the final form of the note was decided upon. I signed it and was appointed Chancellor the same day.” *The Memoirs of Prince Max of Baden*, trans. W. M. Calder and C. W. H. Sutton, 2 vols. (London: Constable and Co., 1928), 2:22. The text of the message to Wilson is:

The German Government requests the President of the United States of America to take in hand the restoration of peace, to bring this request to the notice of all belligerent states and to invite them to send plenipotentiaries for the initiation of negotiations. They accept as a basis for the peace negotiations the programme [the Fourteen Points] laid down by the President of the United States of America, in his message to Congress of 8th January, 1918 and in his subsequent announcements, particularly in his speech of 27th September, 1918. [¶] To avoid further bloodshed, the German Government requests the President to arrange the immediate conclusion of an armistice on land, by sea and in the air. (Signed) Max, Prince of Baden, *Imperial Chancellor*. (*Memoirs of Prince Max*, 2:23)



## The Flu Pandemic

Many more deaths were soon to follow—so many, in fact, that the horrific losses of the last four years of war would more than double within a short period of time. This brings us to our last major context, one which is partly intertwined with the last weeks of the war—the influenza pandemic of 1918. The new killer was the genetically reassorted flu virus, more virulent than any ever known, and even today little understood.<sup>50</sup> In the United States alone, in the month of October 1918—that is, the period between the vision of October 3 and its formal acceptance on October 31—there would be more deaths than in any other month in the nation’s history. Three short excerpts from the American Experience documentary, *Influenza 1918*, will give some sense of the disease’s scope:

In thirty-one shocking days, the flu would kill over 195,000 Americans. It was the deadliest month in this nation’s history. Coffins were in such demand that they were often stolen. Undertakers had to place armed guards around their prized boxes. The orderly life of America began to break down. All over the country, farms and factories shut down—schools and churches closed. Homeless children wandered the streets, their parents vanished. The vibrant and optimistic nation seemed to be falling apart. . . .

In Washington, Victor Vaughn [the government’s chief epidemiologist] came to a frightening conclusion: “If the epidemic continues its mathematical rate of acceleration, civilization could easily disappear from the face of the earth. . . .”

---

For the German texts, see Prinz Max von Baden, *Erinnerungen und Dokumente*, ed. Golo Mann and Andreas Burckhardt (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1968), 336–37.

50. Recent efforts to understand it more fully are not without controversy. Researchers have recovered tissue from 1918 flu victims and have reconstructed the virus using reverse genetics, publishing its sequence in 2005, and have now tested its effect on primates, using macaque monkeys, with dramatic results. In addition to producing acute respiratory distress, the virus caused the monkeys’ immune systems to erupt in a “cytokine storm”; all died within days, the last ones euthanized early because of the severity of their symptoms. See Darwyn Kobasa and others, “Aberrant Innate Immune Response in Lethal Infection of Macaques with the 1918 Influenza Virus,” *Nature* 445 (January 18, 2007): 319–23 and the earlier studies by J. K. Taubenberger and T. M. Tumpey therein cited. World health authorities take seriously the possibility that the pandemic could recur. See, for example, the U.S. Homeland Security Council’s *National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza* (November 2005), with cover letter by President Bush, available online at [www.whitehouse.gov/homeland/pandemic-influenza.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/homeland/pandemic-influenza.html), and the various materials and links at [www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov).

On November 11, the Armistice ended the Great War. In San Francisco the scene was surreal. Thirty thousand people paraded through the streets—all dancing, all singing, all wearing masks.<sup>51</sup>

To return to the *Deseret Evening News* of October 4 (see fig. 5), consider column 3: “Spanish Influenza Still Spreads over Land”—the surgeon general said that the only way to stop it was to close churches, schools, theatres, and the like. In retrospect, the subheadings adumbrate more than could be known at the time. For example, “Influenza spreads in Philadelphia” refers to 738 new cases in the last twenty-four hours. In the month of October alone, however, eleven thousand people in Philadelphia would die of the flu, 759 on a single day (October 10). Bulldozers and steam shovels dug mass graves. The next subheading, “Influenza Making Headway in New York,” foreshadows a grim harvest: about 1 percent of the city’s population (33,387 people) died of the epidemic between September 1918 and March 1919, over half of them in October and early November.<sup>52</sup>

Notice, too, the references to army camps lower in the column. It was in these that the flu first emerged in a milder form, and it was to these that the deadly reassorted strain of the virus first returned in September. At Camp Devens, near Boston, a doctor described how soldiers arriving at the infirmary with what appeared as ordinary influenza

rapidly develop the most viscous type of Pneumonia that has ever been seen. . . . It is only a matter of a few hours then until death comes and it is simply a struggle for air until they suffocate. It is horrible. One can stand to see one, two, or twenty men die, but to see these poor devils dropping like flies gets on your nerves. We have been averaging about 100 deaths a day, and still keeping it up.<sup>53</sup>

An alarming and still puzzling aspect of the flu was that the most vulnerable age group was twenty-five to thirty-four—people in the prime of their lives.

---

51. *Influenza 1918* (WGBH/PBS Video, 1998); a transcript can be found at [www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/influenza/filmmore/index.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/influenza/filmmore/index.html).

52. Gina Kolata, *Flu: The Story of the Great Influenza Pandemic of 1918 and the Search for the Virus That Caused It* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1999), 20; Alfred W. Crosby, *America’s Forgotten Pandemic: The Influenza of 1918* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 60–61.

53. Letter from “Roy,” an otherwise unidentified doctor, September 29, 1918, quoted in Kolata, *Flu*, 13–14. Epidemiologist Victor C. Vaughn later looked back with horror on what he witnessed while visiting the camp: “In the morning the dead bodies are stacked about the morgue like cord wood. This picture was painted on my memory cells at the division hospital, Camp Devens, in the fall of 1918, when the deadly influenza virus demonstrated the inferiority of human inventions in the destruction of human life.” Quoted in Kolata, *Flu*, 16.

In the military camps and on the troop ships, people were perishing at an astonishing rate, their bodies stacked like cordwood in the morgues.

In France, of the 116,000 American soldiers who died in the war, more than half died of the flu or attendant pneumonia.<sup>54</sup> A physician at an American Expeditionary Force (AEF) field hospital describes what it was like to try to deal simultaneously with wounds and flu:

Everything is overflowing with patients. Our divisions are being shot up; the wards are full of machine-gun wounds. There is rain, mud, "flu" and pneumonia. Some hospitals are overcrowded, some are not even working. Evacuation 114 had no medical officer but hundreds of pneumonias and no one to look after them. . . . Every sort of infectious case was there, packed in as close as sardines with no protection. . . . Hundreds of cases of desperate pneumonia that are dying by the score. . . . Rain, rain; mud, blood; blood, death!<sup>55</sup>

One such flu casualty was Stanford Hinckley, Gordon B. Hinckley's older brother, who died on October 19 at a training camp near Bordeaux, attended by B. H. Roberts, chaplain of the 145th Field Artillery.<sup>56</sup> He left

---

54. The proportion in the LDS "Died in Service" list published in the *Improvement Era* 22 (December 1918): 148–52 is representative. Of the sixty servicemen listed, thirty-nine (and possibly nine others, who died at camps of unspecified causes) died of the flu or attendant pneumonia, either abroad or in military camps in the U.S.

55. Dr. George Washington Crile, Diary, October 17, 1918, quoted in Crosby, *America's Forgotten Pandemic*, 165–66. Learning of the flu's devastation among the Allied troops, the Kaiser hoped on October 1 that influenza would cripple the opposing armies while leaving his own relatively untouched, but the flu soon spread to German troops and civilians alike. Crosby, *America's Forgotten Pandemic*, 158–60. Prince Max, the new chancellor, noted the desperate circumstances in his memoirs: "The misery in the towns about the middle of October was indescribable. No coal, no adequate clothing, a ceaseless hunger. The influenza epidemic was striding over Europe. In Berlin alone on the 15th October its victims numbered 1722. The disease made terrible ravages among our people, who had no powers of resistance left." *Memoirs of Prince Max*, 2:92; *Erinnerungen und Dokumente*, 391. Prince Max himself was stricken and bedridden for two weeks. Having been given a sleeping draft, he slept for thirty-six hours during the time final negotiations for the Kaiser's abdication were underway. Crosby, *America's Forgotten Pandemic*, 160; Giles MacDonogh, *The Last Kaiser: The Life of Wilhelm II* (New York: St. Martin's, 2000), 407.

56. Roberts, past sixty when the 145th was called up, was initially rejected for active service. In desperation he appealed to Senator Reed Smoot, with whom he had engaged in political quarrels over the years, and, after agreeing to be "broken" from major to lieutenant and to undergo rigorous training at Camp Zachary Taylor in Kentucky, was finally able to rejoin the unit and accompany it to France. Earlier he had been engaged in recruiting, promising parents, "You send your

behind a widow and a six-month-old child and now lies buried at Suresnes overlooking Paris. An account of his death, in the form of a letter from the unit commander Richard W. Young to his friend Bryant S. Hinckley, Stanford's father, appears in the same issue of the *Deseret Evening News* as the Armistice—a melancholy counterpoint to the jubilation.<sup>57</sup> In her biography of President Hinckley, Sheri L. Dew writes that when news of Stanford's death arrived, it was the first time that Gordon, who was eight and was himself just recovering from the flu, had seen his father cry.<sup>58</sup>

Utah was less devastated by the flu than were large urban areas, but it is worth considering the development of the epidemic in the state. In the same October 4 issue of the *Deseret Evening News*, there is a report of Utah's "first authenticated case" of Spanish influenza (as it was then called), contracted from ailing soldiers taken off a troop train in Ogden. By October 9, the number of flu cases had grown so alarmingly that an order was given to close all public gatherings. On October 10, the heading reads: "Many Towns are Closed by Order of Health Board." On the same page we

---

sons and I will be a father to them"; it was a promise he kept. Arriving at Camp DeSouge near Bordeaux in late September 1918, the unit, like others, was soon hit by influenza, and Roberts was tireless and fearless in attending his stricken men, fourteen of whom died of the flu. While individuals from the 145th were sent as replacements to the Front (Roberts's own grandnephew, George Day, was killed), the unit itself was not ordered to action until November 9, but a delay meant that the Armistice intervened and the unit did not get to the Front. Truman G. Madsen, *Defender of the Faith: The B. H. Roberts Story* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), 301–14.

57. "Brig. Gen. Young Tells of Stanford Hinckley's Death," *Deseret Evening News*, November 11, 1918, section 1, 3.

58. Sheri L. Dew, *Go Forward in Faith: The Biography of Gordon B. Hinckley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1996), 39. Stanford Hinckley's grave is, in a way, associated with Gordon B.'s mother's death as well. Having had a mastectomy in 1928, Ada Hinckley learned in March 1930 that her cancer had returned, and she underwent radium treatments. Despite her ill health, she insisted on accompanying Stanford's widow, Beulah, on a Gold Star Pilgrimage (at government expense) to visit Stanford's grave at Suresnes. By the time she returned, her condition had deteriorated further, and she died on November 9, 1930, in Los Angeles, where her husband had taken her for further treatments. She was buried on November 13, 1930, two days after Armistice/Remembrance Day. President Hinckley recalled: "My brokenhearted father . . . stepped off the train and greeted his grief-stricken children. We walked solemnly down the station platform to the baggage car, where the casket was unloaded and taken by the mortician. We came to know even more about the tenderness of our father's heart. . . . I also came to know something of death—the absolute devastation of children losing their mother—but also of . . . the certainty that death cannot be the end of the soul." Dew, *Go Forward in Faith*, 48–51.

read: "All collegiate study at the University of Utah suspended by order of President John A. Widstoe."<sup>59</sup>

At BYU, a Student Army Training Corps unit had been established with great fanfare at the Maeser Building on October 1 (fig. 9). Two weeks later, the university suspended classes. The *White and Blue* speculated that the closure might last only a week; in fact, the university did not resume until January 1919.<sup>60</sup> When it did so, students and faculty still wore masks well into winter semester (fig. 10). As the threat seemed to diminish, wags writing for the *White and Blue* began to see amusing sides to this practice with articles on a "masked ball" and "love with a mask on" as well as fanciful mask designs.<sup>61</sup>

Perhaps the most poignant Utah flu story concerns the Goates family. Within three days, in the third week of October, four members of this young family died in Ogden: first Kenneth (age ten), then Elaine (six), then their father Charles Hyrum (thirty-five), and finally Vesta (eight). With each death, Charles's father, two of whose sons were serving in France at the time, drove to Ogden to bring the body to Lehi. He made caskets for the children and buried them in the family plot while, without his knowing it, his elders quorum harvested his sugar beets from his freezing fields on the Saratoga road:

Then father sat down on a pile of beet tops—this man who brought four of his loved ones home for burial in the course of only six days [sic]; made caskets, dug graves, and even helped with the burial clothing—this amazing man who never faltered, nor flinched, nor wavered throughout this agonizing ordeal—sat down on a pile of beet tops and

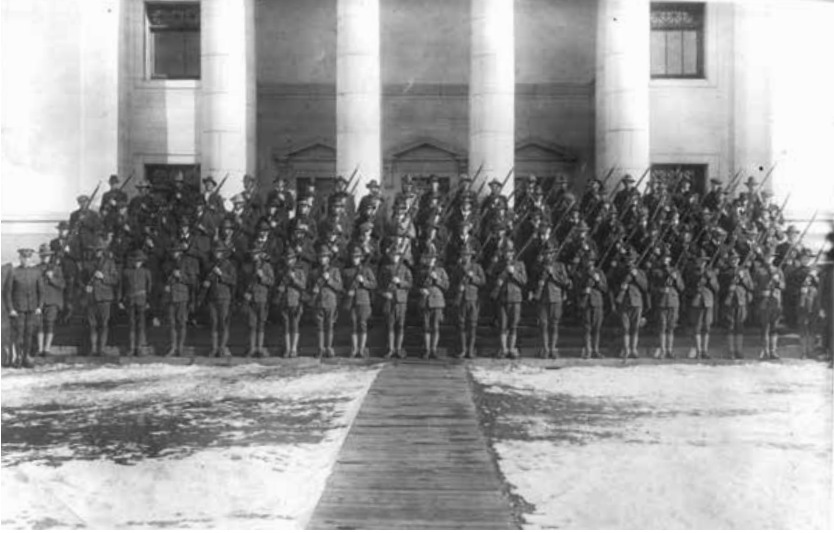
---

59. "First Authenticated Case of Spanish Influenza," *Deseret Evening News*, October 4, 1918, section 2, 1; "Order Closes All Public Gatherings in Utah," *Deseret Evening News*, October 9, 1918; "Many Towns are Closed by Order of the Health Board," *Deseret Evening News*, October 10, 1918, front page.

60. Ernest L. Wilkinson, initially rejected by the SATC was formally inducted on October 25, 1918, and billeted in the Maeser Building. Soon stricken with the flu, he sought a priesthood blessing and "promised God that if He would spare his life, [he] would serve BYU . . . in any way he could if ever the opportunity presented itself." When he later became president of BYU his office in the Maeser Building encompassed the room where he had been nursed back to health during the epidemic. Woodruff J. Deem and Glenn V. Bird, *Ernest L. Wilkinson: Indian Advocate and University President* (Provo, Utah: Mrs. Ernest L. Wilkinson [privately published], 1982): 35–36.

61. "Patriotic Program at Maeser Memorial," *The White and Blue* 22 (October 1, 1918): 8; "Spanish Influenza Epidemic—School Closed," *The White and Blue* 22 (October 16, 1918): 21; "Love With a Mask On," "Advanced Styles in Masks (Paris)," "Dying Doings of the S. A. T. C.," *The White and Blue* 22 (January 15, 1919): 43, 45, 50.





**FIG. 9.** Student Army Training Corps standing in front of the BYU Karl G. Maeser Building, October 1, 1918. Courtesy University Archives, BYU.



**FIG. 10.** The 1918–1919 influenza pandemic caused BYU to close in October 1918; when classes resumed in January 1919, students still wore masks. Courtesy University Archives, BYU.

sobbed like a little child. Then he arose, wiped his eyes with his big red bandanna handkerchief, looked up at the sky, and said: “Thanks, Father, for the elders of our ward.”<sup>62</sup>

The Armistice was declared on November 11. A few days later, on November 19, just after his eightieth birthday, President Smith died. As the small inset under his photograph in the *Deseret Evening News* account indicates, the General Authorities of the Church and family representatives agreed that “in view of existing health conditions in the community, it would be improper to hold public funeral services.”<sup>63</sup> A month later, Church leaders designated December 22 as a day of fasting “for the arrest and speedy suppression by Divine Power of the desolating scourge that is passing over the earth.” Shortly thereafter the epidemic seemed to have passed its crest, and the decision was made to resume Church services on January 5 and to reopen the temples on Monday, January 6. But a further wave of the epidemic in the spring caused the April general conference to be postponed until June, the only time April conference has not been held.<sup>64</sup>

In the end, 675,000 Americans died of the flu, more than all the deaths (620,000) suffered in the Civil War.<sup>65</sup> From 1917 to 1918, the nation’s average life expectancy dropped by twelve years.<sup>66</sup> Worldwide, the death toll was staggering. The most conservative estimate is twenty million (more than twice the number of combat deaths in the entire First World War); British virologist John Oxford thinks one hundred million is a more likely number, arguing that twenty million died in India alone.<sup>67</sup> The most recent study locates the toll somewhere between these two, at fifty million.<sup>68</sup>

---

62. Account by Les Goates, Charles Hyrum’s brother (who was serving in France at the time of the deaths), as quoted by Bishop Vaughn J. Featherstone, *Ensign* 3 (July 1973): 37; the four deaths in three days are reported in “Four Members of One Family Succumb to Attack of the Dreaded Spanish Influenza,” *Ogden Standard Examiner*, October 22, 1918, 6.

63. Anthon H. Lund and Charles W. Penrose, “No Public Funeral,” *Deseret Evening News*, November 19, 1918, front page.

64. “Special Announcement,” in Clark, *Messages of the First Presidency*, 5:115–16 (December 20, 1918); and “General Conference Notice,” in *90th Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1919), 1.

65. Crosby, *America’s Forgotten Pandemic*, 206.

66. Kolata, *Flu*, 8.

67. Kolata, *Flu*, 7, 285–86.

68. Niall P. A. S. Johnson and Juergen Mueller, “Updating the Accounts: Global Mortality of the 1918–1920 ‘Spanish’ Influenza Pandemic,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 76, no. 1 (2002): 105–15.

According to historian Alfred Crosby, “Nothing else—no infection, no war, no famine—has ever killed so many in as short a period.”<sup>69</sup>

### Timely and Timeless: “A Document without Parallel”

Katherine Anne Porter also nearly died of influenza. Her condition was so hopeless that she was left on a gurney for dead; the Denver newspaper for which she wrote set her obituary. She did not know, during her long periods of delirium and unconsciousness, that her fiancé, the lieutenant who had cared for her before she was hospitalized, had himself died of the flu.<sup>70</sup> In her short autobiographical novel *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, her fictionalized self, struggling through hallucination, her face covered with a white cloth, hears a voice in her mind ask: “Where are the dead? We have forgotten the dead, oh, the dead, where are they?”<sup>71</sup> The vision given to Joseph F. Smith on October 3, 1918, answers this question and speaks to the great, worldwide need that underlies it.

D&C 138 first shows us the vast concourses of dead—“the hosts of the dead, both great and small” (verse 11); “innumerable company” (verse 12); “vast multitude” (verse 18); “vast congregation” (verse 38); “great world of the spirits of the dead” (verse 57)—vast, even when (as in verses 12, 18, and 38) the reference is only to the just.

The vision proceeds from and affirms the “great and wonderful love” of God (verse 3) as it is expressed through the Atonement of Christ—an atonement it shows to be universal, proffered to all who have ever lived or died. The vision comes, in a sense, *in medias res*: addressing the unfathomable losses of the war years just past, and anticipating the even greater quantity of dying that lay ahead, not only in the next months of the pandemic, but through the Second World War (which would grow directly out of the First and would, with its millions of civilian casualties, be five times more costly in loss of life than World War I) and beyond—comforting, “bind[ing] up the brokenhearted” (verse 42), and providing hope and reassurance.

The vision shows how the work of redemption was and is organized among the dead. (With respect to the war, the quasi-military language of verse 30—“organized his forces,” “commissioned them”—is intriguing.) In the last weeks of his life, Joseph Smith had alluded to missionary work

---

69. Crosby, *America’s Forgotten Pandemic*, 311.

70. Joan Givner, *Katherine Anne Porter: A Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 125–28.

71. Katherine Anne Porter, *Pale Horse, Pale Rider: Three Short Novels* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1939), 255. (This novella, too, ends with an empty room.)

among the dead, and this teaching was affirmed (speaking of the work by the Prophet himself) by Brigham Young and (more generally) by Wilford Woodruff.<sup>72</sup> Joseph F. Smith had also earlier spoken of such work.<sup>73</sup>

---

72. In a sermon on May 12, 1844, the Prophet said, “Now all those [who] die in the faith goe to the prison of Spirits to preach to the ded in body, but they are alive in the Spirit & those Spirits preach to the Spirits that they may live according to god in the Spirit and men do minister for them in the flesh and angels bare the glad tidings to the Spirits & the[y] are made happy by these means.” George Laub Journal in *The Words of Joseph Smith*, ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, Religious Studies Monograph Series vol. 6 (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 370. Of the Prophet, Brigham Young declared: “When he died he had a mission in the spirit world, as much so as Jesus had. Jesus was the first man that ever went to preach to the spirits in prison. . . . Joseph has not yet got through there. When he finishes his mission in the spirit world, he will be resurrected, but he has not yet done there.” Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–86), 4:285, March 15, 1857. And in early 1868 Wilford Woodruff wrote: “Those who have died without the gospel will have to receive the gospel in the spirit world from those who preach to the Spirits in Prison & those who dwell in the flesh will have to attend to all the ordinances of the gospel for & in their behalf by Proxy.” Wilford Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal, 1833–1898, Typescript*, ed. Scott G. Kenney, 9 vols. (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1983–84), 6:390, January 24, 1868. The latter two passages are discussed in Richard E. Bennett, “‘Line upon Line, Precept upon Precept’: Reflections of the 1877 Commencement of the Performance of Endowments and Sealings for the Dead,” *BYU Studies* 44, no. 2 (2005): 38–77, especially 47–48, 59–67.

73. At an MIA conference in June 1910, President Smith said: “This gospel revealed to the Prophet Joseph is already being preached to the spirits in prison, to those who have passed away from this stage of action into the spirit world without knowledge of the gospel. Joseph Smith is preaching that gospel to them. So is Hyrum Smith. So is Brigham Young, and so are all the faithful apostles that lived in this dispensation under the administration of the Prophet Joseph. . . . Not only are these engaged in that work but hundreds and thousands of others.” *Young Woman’s Journal* 21 (1910): 456–60; as cited in Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 596; He expressed this belief again in a funeral address in 1911, extending the scope to include the original Apostles, as well as women engaged as temple workers during their time on earth:

I have always believed, and still do believe with all my soul, that such men as Peter and James and the twelve disciples chosen by the Savior in his time, have been engaged all the centuries that have passed since their martyrdom . . . in proclaiming liberty to the captives in the spirit world and in opening their prison doors. . . .

[Of women who had served in the temple:] These good sisters who have been set apart, ordained to the work, called to it, authorized by the authority of the holy Priesthood to minister for their sex, in the House of God for the living and for the dead, will be fully authorized

Yet from a purely scriptural perspective, the teaching remained a matter of inference. In *Jesus the Christ*, for example, a work completed in 1915 during the first year of the war, James E. Talmage considers the same passage from 1 Peter that Joseph F. Smith later pondered. Talmage's language is provisional, if assertive: "The fact that the gospel was preached to the dead necessarily *implies* the possibility of the dead accepting the same."; or "Missionary labor among the dead was inaugurated by the Christ; *who of us can doubt* that it has been continued by His authorized servants, the disembodied."; or further, "A continuation of such labor among the disembodied, is so abundantly *implied* in scripture as to be made a certainty."<sup>74</sup> Joseph F. Smith's vision not only affirms that this is so, but it also articulates how such work was established and how it is continued. Although the vision was not officially adopted as canonized scripture until 1976, its formal ratification on October 31, 1918, gave it particular authority. In its grandeur and scope, the vision is the capstone of all teachings on the work of salvation among the dead.

The vision renews the connection of temple work to the redemption of the dead, inviting us, the living, to remembrance and active participation, through seeking after the dead and performing "vicarious baptism" (verse 33) and other ordinances, and in so doing drawing the two worlds together. The references to temples (verses 48 and 54), should remind us that two of them, Hawaii and Alberta—the first outside Utah since the Saints settled in the West—, were begun while Joseph F. Smith was President of the Church.<sup>75</sup> The timing of the Alberta temple, dedicated in 1923, well before the Canadian memorials at Vimy Ridge (1936) and elsewhere, is especially pleasing given the extraordinary valor and losses of the Canadian forces, including LDS soldiers, during the war.<sup>76</sup> It seems a poignant juxtaposition to

---

and empowered to preach the gospel and minister to the women while the elders and prophets are preaching it to the men. (*Young Woman's Journal* 23 (1911): 128–32; as cited in Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 460–61)

74. James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (1915; repr. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), 675–76; italics added.

75. President Smith dedicated the site of the Alberta Temple on July 27, 1913, and that of the Hawaii Temple on June 1, 1915, but did not live to see their completion. Both temples were dedicated by President Heber J. Grant: Hawaii on November 27, 1919; Alberta on August 26–29, 1923. (Apostle Hyrum Mack Smith also visited Cardston in August 1917, five months before his death, to dedicate the Alberta Stake Tabernacle.)

76. Like those of other nations in the British Empire (now Commonwealth), Canadian troops fought in the war nearly from its outset. They were engaged in almost every major action, suffering the first gas attack of the war near Ypres in 1915

see on the corner across from the temple grounds Cardston's war memorial bearing the names of the small town's fallen. At the unveiling of the memorial in 1925, stake president Hugh B. Brown, who had served in the war as a cavalry officer and who would later become a counselor in the First Presidency, was a speaker.<sup>77</sup>

In an age so painfully preoccupied with absence, especially where the bodies of loved ones had irretrievably vanished—"corpselessness" is the term most often used by cultural historians—,<sup>78</sup> the vision, with its inherent promise that the Atonement opens the way for all to be resurrected, affirms the central and eternal importance of the body in very vivid terms. For after enumerating ancient patriarchs and prophets up to Elijah, whose mission "foreshadow[ed] the great work to be done in the temples of the Lord . . . for the redemption of the dead" (verse 48), it says of this righteous host: "All these and many more, even the prophets who dwelt among the Nephites and testified of the coming of the Son of God, mingled in the vast assembly and waited for their deliverance, For *the dead had looked upon the long absence of their spirits from their bodies as a bondage*" (verses 49–50, emphasis added). Hence their eager gladness at the prospect of being liberated "from the bands of death": "Their sleeping dust was to be restored unto its perfect frame, bone to his bone, and the sinews and the flesh upon them, the spirit and the body to be united never again to be divided, that they might receive a fulness of joy" (verses 16–17).

As an inspired commentary on a scriptural passage (1 Pet. 3–4), which draws upon other passages in its explication (Isa. 61:1 [verse 42], Ezek. 37:1–14 [verse 43], Mal. 4:5–6 [verses 46–47]), the vision—with its representation of "great and mighty ones" (verse 38) from Adam and Eve through the

---

and in April 1917 distinguishing themselves spectacularly at Vimy Ridge, now site of the country's most important memorial abroad; they also captured Passchendaele later that year at great cost, bringing to an end the Third Battle of Ypres. Despite its small population, the nation mobilized some 620,000 troops, of whom 241,000 (about 39 percent) became casualties, with sixty-seven thousand slain. On the country's participation in the war, see Desmond Morton and J. L. Granatstein, *Marching to Armageddon: Canadians and the Great War 1914–1918* (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1989); on its remembrance of the war, Jonathan F. Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997).

77. On Brown's military service, its high points and vexations, see Eugene E. Campbell and Richard D. Poll, *Hugh B. Brown: His Life and Thought* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1975), 52–74. Brown was later LDS servicemen's coordinator during the Second World War.

78. See, for example, Booth, *Postcards from the Trenches*, chapter 1 "Corpselessness"; and Moriarty, "Absent Dead," 8–15.



patriarchs and prophets to Joseph, Hyrum, and their associates—harmonizes Old and New Testaments, the Book of Mormon (verse 49), the Restoration, and the inspiration of the living prophet, at once expanding our understanding and showing us that the gospel is, indeed, everlasting. As Richard Bennett has observed, the section affirms biblical authority in the midst of the “higher criticism” prevalent in the early twentieth century.<sup>79</sup>

As revealed truth, the vision counters and corrects many widespread, well-intentioned but erroneous teachings, such as some found in Conan Doyle’s treatises *The New Revelation* (which also appeared in 1918) and *The Vital Message* (1919). It is fascinating to read Conan Doyle’s treatises in relation to D&C 138. There are many common themes—the reality of a spirit world and of the soul’s existence after death; whether, given the sheer abundance of dying, Christ can appear to all who die; and the evidence of scripture. But these are mostly addressed in opposite ways. For example, Conan Doyle would “tear the Bible in twain,” setting aside the Old Testament, and would emphasize Christ’s life rather than his death and resurrection, believing the idea of redemption to be a mystical accretion which is “hardly ever spoken of” in spirit communications. D&C 138 does the opposite;<sup>80</sup> it harmonizes the Old and New Testaments and reasserts

---

79. Bennett, “And I Saw the Hosts of the Dead,” 119.

80. Some short passages from Conan Doyle will suggest the contrast:

Christianity must be modified by this new revelation. . . . People are alienated because they frankly do not believe the facts as presented to them to be true. . . . Above all, many cannot understand such expressions as the “redemption from sin,” “cleansed by the blood of the Lamb,” and so forth. So long as there was any question of the fall of man there was at least some sort of explanation of such phrases. . . . But if there were no fall, then what became of the atonement, of the redemption, of original sin, of a large part of Christian mystical philosophy? (Conan Doyle, *New Revelation*, 54–55)

The whole Christian system has come to revolve round [Christ’s] death, to the partial exclusion of the beautiful lesson of His life. Far too much weight has been placed upon the one, and far too little upon the other. . . .

Reading many authentic spirit communications one finds that the idea of redemption is hardly ever spoken of, while that of example and influence is for ever insisted upon. In them Christ is the highest spirit known, the son of God, as we all are, but nearer to God, and therefore in a more particular sense His son. He does not, save in most rare and special cases, meet us when we die. Since souls pass over, night and day, at the rate of about 100 a minute, this would seem self-evident. After a time we may be admitted to His presence, to find a most tender, sympa-

the centrality of “the great atoning sacrifice that was made by the Son of God, for the redemption of the world” (verse 2).

Finally, the vision affirms the foundations of faith in a world where the faith of so many was shattered by the great calamities they witnessed and experienced,<sup>81</sup> declaring to all the world through the mouth of the Lord’s

---

thetic and helpful comrade and guide, whose spirit influences all things even when His bodily presence is not visible. This is the general teaching of the other world communications concerning Christ, the gentle, loving and powerful spirit which broods ever over that world which, in all its many spheres, is His special care. (Conan Doyle, *Vital Message*, 19, 25–26)

After visiting Salt Lake City in May 1923 where he addressed some five thousand people in the tabernacle during a lecture tour of the United States, Conan Doyle wrote of Mormonism in *Our Second American Adventure* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1924), 86–104. Acknowledging in general the authenticity of Joseph Smith’s own narrative, Conan Doyle suggests that because of Smith’s “ignorance of psychic matters, [he] lost all sense of proportion and misinterpreted to a great extent the evidence which was put before him.” He felt that Joseph Smith was honest “but that he was not aware of the strange way in which things are done from beyond” (90–91). After enumerating some analogies between Joseph Smith’s teachings and those of spiritualism (for example, that the Christian creeds had wandered from primitive spiritual truths, that “spirit itself is super-fine matter,” and that “true marriage” carries on into the next life), Conan Doyle concludes: “I believe, then, that Smith was a true medium, but that his controls were not always reliable, nor did he have sufficient character to check them as they should be checked” (103). On Mormonism and spiritualism, see Davis Bitton, “Mormonism’s Encounter with Spiritualism,” *Journal of Mormon History* 1 (1974): 39–50, and Michael W. Homer, “Spiritualism and Mormonism: Some Thoughts on Similarities and Differences,” *Dialogue* 27, no. 1 (1994): 171–91.

81. See, for example, Vera Brittain: “That night I prayed earnestly to God to make the dear King [Edward VII] better and let him live. The fact that he actually did recover established in me a touching faith in the efficacy of prayer, which superstitiously survived until the Great War proved to me, once for all, that there was nothing in it.” Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth: An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900–1925* (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin Books, 1989), 22–23. Focusing not so much on lost faith as on the affect on values, Samuel Hynes writes:

Even as it was being fought the war was perceived as a force of radical change in society and in consciousness. It brought to an end the life and values of Victorian and Edwardian England; but it did something more fundamental than that: it added a new scale of violence and destruction to what was possible—it changed reality. That change was so vast and so abrupt as to make the years after the war seem discontinuous from the years before, and that discontinuity became part of English imaginations. Men and women after the war looked back at their own

anointed that the Father and the Son live and are still earnestly engaged in the ongoing work of salvation for all God's children.

This remarkable "Vision of the Redemption of the Dead" is more than a doctrinal clarification that when Christ visited the spirits in prison (1 Pet. 3–4) he did not go himself among the wicked but "organized his forces" and "commissioned them" (verse 30) to go forth on his behalf. Nor is its audience limited only to members of the Church who may be interested in such questions. It is, as President Hinckley declared, "a document without parallel." In its grandeur and scope, it is, indeed, the capstone of all teachings on the work of salvation among the dead. But it is more than this. Addressed to all the world through the living prophet in the last weeks of his life, the vision came at a time of great, worldwide need. Such a panoply of dying; such universal and unresolved grief, particularly where loved ones had vanished without a trace; such pervasive hunger to know the fate of the dead—all these things give a special resonance to D&C 138, with its great concourses of the dead, its assurance of divine love and of the unspeakable comfort of the Atonement, the blessings of which extend to all mankind, both the living and the dead. Timely and timeless, the vision spoke directly and compassionately to an agonized world in 1918, as it still speaks to us today and will continue to speak in future ages.

---

pasts as one might look across a great chasm to a remote, peaceable place on the other side. . . .

The sense of a gap in history that the war engendered became a commonplace in imaginative literature of the post-war years. Poets and novelists rendered it in images of radical emptiness—as a chasm, or an abyss, or an edge—or in images of fragmentation and ruin, all expressing a fracture in time and space that separated the present from the past. (Hynes, *War Imagined*, xi, xiii)

George S. Tate (george\_tate@byu.edu) is Professor of Humanities and Comparative Literature and former Dean of Undergraduate Education at Brigham Young University. Most of Dr. Tate's scholarship has concerned itself with patristic and medieval literature, though he has also previously written on LDS topics. His passion for the Great War is explained in the author's sidebar. This article is expanded from an illustrated devotional given in the BYU College of Humanities in 2003 and subsequently taped for BYU Broadcasting. Professor Tate is grateful to Professor Richard E. Bennett for his encouragement in the revisions.