"One Soul Shall Not Be Lost": The War in Heaven in Mormon Thought

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On January 12, 2010, Glenn Beck, as he put it, went “all Jesus Freak” on his radio show by linking the progressive agenda with Satan’s plan in the premortal world: “If you believe in the war in heaven where a third of the angels were cast out and all of that stuff, it was about man’s choice . . . and Satan’s plan was ‘hey, I’ll save everybody; give me the credit . . . I’ll make sure everybody returns home. It’s going to be fantastic. You just take away their choice and give me the credit.’ Well, gee, I think that plan was rejected because God knew that failure was important for growth.”¹ And in June 2011 when Newsweek celebrated “The Mormon Moment” authored by Walter Kirn, Congressman Jeff Flake (R-Ariz.) was quoted as an

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example of "an even deeper connection between his faith and his economic and political views. According to Mormon tradition, God and Satan fought a 'war in heaven' over the question of moral agency, with God on the side of personal liberty and Satan seeking to enslave mankind. Flake acknowledged that the theme of freedom—and the threat of losing it—runs through much of Mormonism, and "that kind of fits my philosophy."^2

Whether Beck and Kirn were aware that they were describing a uniquely Mormon version of this story or were instead attempting to subliminally convert their audience to Mormon theology is not clear. What is clear is that Beck, especially, follows a long tradition of employing this Mormon narrative of premortal ideological confrontation as a tool for earthly, political debate. Beck was, however, likely unaware that this narrative can be and has been used in radically different ways to support radically different agendas.

Like Beck, we often assume, especially when it comes to scripture, that a text means "just what it says." But texts, sacred or otherwise, must be interpreted; they require a reader to draw out their meaning. Add to that the fact that sacred texts are not just read but lived by communities. Faithful adherents of scripture look to sacred texts to find their pathway to God and to bring structure and meaning to their lives. This approach inevitably means that believers will read as much into the scriptural texts as they read out of them. In other words, interpreting sacred texts inevitably and unavoidably involves both exegesis and eisegesis. Such is certainly the case for the verses in Mormon scripture that speak of a war in heaven.

By looking at the specific ways the war in heaven narrative is used in LDS discourse, we can see how this narrative is shaped by its readers, how it comes to reflect those readers' anxieties and desires,
and how it, in turn, creates a community of believers tethered to cosmic history. To do this, I propose to borrow from (and slightly modify) the four medieval categories of biblical hermeneutics. In this fourfold system, the first level of interpretation was the literal level (or sensus historicus), with no underlying meaning. The tropological level (the sensus tropologicus or sensus moralis) identified a moral message from the scriptural passage. The allegorical level (or sensus allegoricus) was the symbolic meaning, most often used to read the Old Testament typologically as prophecy of the events and figures of the New Testament. Finally, the anagogical level (sensus anagogicus) revealed the deeper, immediate, often mystical nature of the passage, usually prophesying some future reality.

I use this interpretive lens, not to force LDS interpretation into some outdated frame of reference, but because I believe LDS interpretations fit with remarkable neatness into this framework. In other words, Mormons employ scripture, or at least the war in heaven narrative, in ways similar to those employed by medieval Christians. It is important, however, to understand that these levels of interpretation are not mutually exclusive; an individual can and often does invoke multiple levels of meaning in one discourse. In Mormon thought, the war in heaven has been read as a literal premortal event; as a moral message to orient lives; as an allegory to explain current events; and as an illustration of a prophetic future for God’s Church. The narrative explains past, present, and future, and knits the individual Mormon life into the fabric of sacred history.

In this essay, I first focus on the historical antecedents of the war in heaven, the origins and evolution of the narrative in Western religious traditions. Second, I explore the development of the narrative in Mormon thought and its literal level of interpretation. Third, I discuss the tropological level, the moral messages pulled from the text. Fourth, I examine in some detail the allegorical level, the metaphoric interpretations of the text to explain current events. I focus most of the paper on this level, since it most vividly illustrates the Mormon worldview engaging in increasing conflicts about agency. Finally, I conclude with a brief look at the anagogical level—how the narrative is used to portray future prophetic events of Church history.

**Origins and Evolution of the War in Heaven**

The idea of a war in heaven is rooted in the biblical story of fallen angels (Gen. 6); a reinterpretation of Isaiah 14; and the apoca-
William Blake, Casting of the Rebel Angels into Hell, 1808. A serene St. Michael, supported by orderly ranks of angels, draws a mighty bow whose arc separates the heavenly hosts from the chaotic wrath and horror of the falling demons.
lyptic writings of John (Rev. 12). An enigmatic passage in Genesis describes the "sons of God," divine messengers who were sent down to watch over humanity. They were attracted to the human "daughters of men" and transgressed the boundaries God set between them. The offspring of these unions were a celestial-human hybrid that became known as nephilim or "fallen ones," translated in the King James Version as "giants." Developed in post-biblical Judaism (particularly the Enoch literature), the nephilim become monstrous creations that, as Elaine Pagels puts it "took over the earth and polluted it."^3

Around the same time, legends about a high-ranking angel who was cast out of heaven for insubordination were combined with a passage in Isaiah that speaks of the fall of a great prince whose name is translated in Latin as Lucifer (Isa. 14). The apocryphal Latin narrative Vita Adae et Evae (Life of Adam and Eve) further develops the narrative of angelic rebellion. The Vita speaks of God's calling the angels together following Adam's creation to admire and "worship the image of God," the first human. Satan refuses, stating, "I do not worship Adam. . . . I will not worship one inferior and subsequent to me. I am prior to him in creation, before he was made, I was already made. He ought to worship me." The angel Michael threatens Satan, forcefully urging him to comply. Satan arrogantly replies, "I will set my throne above the stars of heaven and will be like the Most High."^4 With the hosts of angels who follow him, Satan is cast out of heaven onto the earth.

In Luke 10:18, Jesus says, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven." Later still, the eschatological Revelation of John tells of a "war in heaven" where "Michael and his angels fought against the dragon" and "the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world" (Rev. 12:7-9). Despite the past tense of this passage, it was originally read as a


prophecy of the last days, the narrator presumably using past tense to record what he had seen in his vision. However, the similarity between this end-of-times conflict and the beginning-of-times conflict found in the *Vita Adae et Evae* caused the two stories to be linked in the minds of readers. The idea that a third of the angels were expelled with Satan comes from Revelation 12:4, which speaks of the dragon’s tail casting a third of the stars of heaven to the earth, before the start of the “war in heaven.” As Frederick Holweck wrote in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, “St. John speaks of the great conflict at the end of time, which reflects also the battle in heaven at the beginning of time.”

The narrative crosses into Islam, where the Qur’an tells of the fallen angel Iblis who refused to bow down before Adam, stating, “I am better than him. You created me from fire and created him from clay.” God casts Iblis out of heaven, warning, “Whoever follows you among them—I will surely fill Hell with you, all together.” On earth, Iblis tempts Adam and Eve and all their posterity (Sura 7:10–20; see also 38:65–88).

Despite the lack of any coherent biblical account, the war in heaven as a trope became central to Christian thought. Speculation about the war in heaven appears throughout the writings of the Christian Church Fathers. Origen believed that the fall of Lucifer and the rebel angels effected the creation of the physical world, a cosmic fall into physicality. In *The City of God*, Augustine refers to the fall of Lucifer as the beginning of sin and expounds on the origin and status of the fallen angels. He also speculates that humans were created to fill the hole left in heaven by the banishment of the fallen angels—how “from this mortal race” God would “collect, as now He does, a people so numerous, that He thus fills up and repairs the blank made by the fallen angels, and that thus that beloved heavenly city is not defrauded of the full number of its citizens, but perhaps may even rejoice in a still more overflowing population.” This replacement theory was continued by Pope Gregory the Great (ca. 540–604) and eventually made its way into the Old English poem *Genesis A*, where humanity is


7St. Augustine, *The City of God*, translated by Marcus Dods, George
created to occupy the fallen angels' vacant "thrones, rich in glorious wealth, thriving with gifts, bright and fruitful, in the kingdom of God."8

The narrative was further developed in medieval mystery plays, with elaborate mechanical set-pieces called Hell-Mouths, complete with flesh-pots, flame and variously colored smoke, into which Lucifer and the fallen angels are cast. The fifteenth-century York cycle of plays depicts the sin of Lucifer as pride, his angelic hosts falling spontaneously rather than being cast out by God; it also recalls Augustine's replacement theory with God creating humans to take the place of the fallen angels.9 The replacement theory reappears in the Arthurian poem *Joseph d'Arimathie* written by Robert de Boron, a French poet of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Robert writes that, when God cast out the angels, "for three days and three nights they rained down, so that never fell a heavier rain, nor one which harmed us more." Robert postulates that the result of this "rain" was three classes of fallen angels residing in three different locations: one class landed in hell, where they torture lost souls; another class landed on earth, where they torment and tempt humanity; and another class remain in the sky, where they are able to assume different appear-

Wilson, and J. J. Smith (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2009), Bk. 22, chap. 1, 732. See also Bk. 3, chap. 5, p. 70; Bk. 10, chap. 24–25, p. 295; Bk. 11, chap. 13 and 15, pp. 321–23; Bk. 12, 9, p. 350; Bk. 14, chap. 11 and 13, pp. 413, 416; Bk. 15, chap. 23, p. 462; Bk 16, chap 17, p. 489; Bk. 21, chap. 25, p. 720; and Bk. 22, chap. 1, pp. 731–32. Augustine takes up the replacement theory again in his *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love*, translated by Thomas S. Hibbs (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 2002), Bk. 29, p. 36.


Pieter Bruegel I. *The Fall of the Rebel Angels*, 1562. With lance and armor, St. Michael and his bright angels force away the fantastic and nightmarish figures of Satan's hosts.

ances and get humans to turn from virtue. In his Arthurian epic *Parzival*, Wolfram von Eschenbach writes of fence-sitting angels, “those who did not stand on either side when Lucifer and Trinitas began to do battle,” who were cast down to earth where they were imprisoned in the holy grail (which Wolfram imagines to be a stone with mystical powers).

The most prominent account of the war in heaven was written not as scripture, but as an epic poem in 1667 by John Milton. In *Para-


dise Lost, Milton fused the Christian version of the narrative with scenes of classical epic warfare. In Milton’s version, Satan is never commanded to worship Adam (as in the apocryphal Life of Adam and Eve); still, the sins for which he is expelled from heaven are pride and jealousy.\(^1\) It is impossible to overstate the influence of Milton’s Paradise Lost on subsequent generations. By the middle of the eighteenth century, Milton’s Paradise Lost came to be, as Perry Miller has described it, “not so much a secondary Book of Genesis as a substitute for the original.”\(^2\) His text was more widely read than the biblical original for almost two centuries, its influence only beginning to wane in America at the time of Joseph Smith’s birth.\(^3\)

When John Dryden asked Milton if he could turn his blank-verse epic into a sacred opera, Milton replied, “Certainly, you may tag my


\(^2\) Perry Miller, Errand into the Wilderness (New York: Harper, 1956), 220. Miller further notes that “the effect of Milton upon American ‘primitive’ painting of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is especially striking” (220).

\(^3\) George F. Sensabaugh, Milton in Early America (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1964), 282–305. Many have noted the similarities between Milton and Mormon thought. Both append to the Genesis narrative a war in heaven; both posit a fortunate fall, and both read a Christian Adam. Whether Joseph Smith read Milton is not certain, but he does allude, whether intentionally or unintentionally, to Milton’s stated purpose in writing Paradise Lost to “justify the ways of God to men” (I, 26) in an article in the Times and Seasons on baptism for the dead. Smith states that an understanding of this ritual “reconciles the scriptures of truth, justifies the ways
verses, if you will." The result, in heroic couplets, was *The State of Innocence and Fall of Men*. It was published in 1674, the year Milton died, but no music was ever composed for the libretto and the play was never performed. Perhaps it was never intended to be performed since the elaborate stage directions called for a "Lake of Brimstone or rolling Fire; the Earth of a burnt Colour," and "the rebellious Angels, wheeling in Air, and seeming transfixed with Thunderbolts: The bottom of the Stage being opened, receiv[ing] the Angels, who fall out of sight." Nevertheless, it became, during Dryden's lifetime, one of his most widely read dramas.

Some sixty years after Milton, American minister Jonathan Edwards repeated the Miltonian myth in a series of 1733 sermons: "Satan and his angels rebelled against God in heaven, and proudly presumed to try their strength with his. And when God, by his almighty power, overcame the strength of Satan, and sent him like lightning from heaven to hell with all his army; [sic] Satan still hoped to get the victory by subtily." Edwards concluded: "God, therefore, has shown his great wisdom in overthrowing Satan's design." Then, some sixty years later, Thomas Paine attacked the logic of this narrative in his 1794, *The Age of Reason*, a vigorous defense of Deism. Paine ridiculed of God to man; places the human family upon an equal footing, and harmonizes with every principle of righteousness, justice and truth." Joseph Smith, "Baptism for the Dead," *Times and Seasons* April 15, 1842, 761; also available at BYU's Mormon Publications: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries Collection, http://relarchive.byu.edu/MPNC/. John Tanner has noted, however, that the differences that separate Milton from Mormon thought are enormous. While Milton, influenced by Hesiod, Homer, and Vergil, depicts his war in heaven as a heated epic battle, Mormons usually see a war of words and ideas; and while Milton's Satan is driven by envy alone, the Mormon Satan is driven by a desire to destroy free agency in order to claim all the credit of humanity's salvation. John S. Tanner, "Making a Mormon of Milton," *BYU Studies* 24, no. 2 (Spring 1984): 191–206.


the “Christian Mythologists” who believe “in an insurrection and a battle in Heaven, in which none of the combatants could be either killed or wounded.”

In the visual arts, depictions of the war in heaven appear in frescoes, sculpture, stained glass, etchings, and paintings from at least the middle ages on. In 1498, Albrecht Dürer produced the woodcut *St. Michael Fighting the Dragon*, a theme repeated by painters like Guido Reni (1636), Sebastiano Ricci (1720), and Johann Georg Unruhe (1793). A statue representing St. Michael fighting the dragon adorns the spire of the eleventh-century Romanesque chapel on Mont St. Michel in Normandy, France. The fall of the rebel angels is depicted in the fifteenth-century illuminated *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*, as well as in paintings by Hieronymus Bosch (1500), Pieter Bruegel I (1562), and Peter Paul Rubens (1620). Testifying of Milton’s enduring importance, three illustrated editions of *Paradise Lost* appeared in the nineteenth century, one by William Blake (1807), one by John Martin (1833), and one by Gustave Doré (1866); all contain depictions of the fall of Satan and his legions.

**LITERAL LEVEL**

Uniquely Mormon versions of the story emerged soon after the Church’s founding in 1830. Retained in the Mormon narrative is the idea of a premortal conflict, Satan’s fall, and the associated banishment of one-third of the hosts of heaven. However, several new concepts also emerge in the Mormon story. In Joseph Smith’s inspired translation of the opening chapters of Genesis (dictated in 1830 and later canonized as the Book of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price), the war in heaven was caused by a conflict about agency. Satan proposed “to redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost.” However, the price of such salvation would be “destroy[ing] the agency of man, which ... the Lord God, had given him” (Moses 4:1–3). The scripture

(accessed June 6, 2010).

transforms the war from a military battle into a conflict of ideas about salvation: Satan attempting to save all but prohibiting agency, God allowing failure and defending agency. That same year, Smith produced the revelation that is now Doctrine and Covenants 29, in which Satan rebels, stating, "Give me thine honor, which is my power; and also a third part of the hosts of heaven turned he away from me because of their agency" (v. 36).

In 1832, Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon's grand vision recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 76 included a glimpse of the war in heaven. New to this revelation is the idea that the war continues to be waged on this earth, though with different stakes, and that "those who know [God's] power, and have been made partakers thereof, and suffered themselves through the power of the devil to be overcome, and to deny the truth and defy my power" become sons of perdition "doomed to suffer the wrath of God" for eternity (D&C 76:25-38). Finally, in 1835, Joseph Smith produced a translation of some Egyptian papyri "purporting to be the writings of Abraham, while he was in Egypt." This text tells of a council in heaven where the pre-mortal souls or "intelligences"—including many who were "noble and great"—assembled to hear of the earth's creation. There Satan competed with Jesus to be the redeemer of humankind. When his prideful offer was rejected, he "kept not his first estate; and, at that day, many followed after him" (Abr. 3:28).

Joseph Smith elaborated on the topic in his King Follett sermon, April 7, 1844: "The contention in heaven was—Jesus said there would be certain souls that would not be saved; and the Devil said he could save them all, and laid his plans before the grand council, who gave their vote in favor of Jesus Christ. So the Devil rose up in rebellion against God, and was cast down, with all who put up their heads [sic] for him."

The account of the speech recorded in the History of the Church was a collation of four accounts by Willard Richards, Wilford Wood-
ruff, Thomas Bullock, and William Clayton. However, a retrospective summary of the sermon recorded by George Laub makes it clear that Smith’s discourse, like Doctrine and Covenants 76, placed the war in heaven in the context of the unpardonable sin. In Laub’s account, Jesus proposed that “he could save all those who did not sin against the Holy Ghost & they would obey the laws that was given,” while Satan countered that he “can save all Even those who Sined [sic] against the Holy Ghost.” Laub’s version adds that “he accused his brethren and was h[u]rled from the council for striving to break the law e-meditately and there was a warfare with Satan.”

Despite the intriguing hint in Joseph Smith’s link between the war in heaven and the sons of perdition in Doctrine and Covenants 76 and the King Follett sermon, the nature of the premortal conflict has primarily been seen in Mormon theology as a clash over limiting agency, an ongoing battle between good and evil in which mortals are engaged. The Mormon narrative also reverses the outcome of the war in heaven from the traditional Christian

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21 Two intriguing alternate theories should be mentioned. Jeffrey M. Bradshaw and Ronan J. Head, “Mormonism’s Satan and the Tree of Life,” Element 4, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 1–50, propose that the conflict of the war in heaven was that Satan offered a form of universal redemption without the possibility of exaltation or deification. The second is in an unpublished talk by Terryl L. Givens, “‘Moral, Responsible, and Free’: Mormon Conceptions of Divine Justice,” Phoenix, Arizona, May 7, 2010. Givens proposes that, since agency is an eternal aspect of human intelligences, Satan could not limit agency. Rather, his strategy was to limit the consequences of using that agency. The conflict continues, as Givens notes, in “the tendency of a decadent culture . . . always to obscure or deny the connection between choice and consequence.” Avail-
model. As Terryl L. Givens has noted: “The righteous partisans of Christ earn the reward of mortal embodiment and progression; those in league with Satan become the fallen angels doomed to nonphysicality.” Unlike Origen, Mormon thought sees the physical world as a reward for those who opposed Satan, rather than an unfortunate cosmic fall.

Mormons thus do not regard the war in heaven as a symbolic fable but have, from the beginning, read it as a reality of cosmic history. Early references to the war in heaven were often quite speculative and focused on things that now seem quaint or inconsequentially tangential, such as the demographics and prosopography of heaven and hell. For example, Orson Pratt proposed that there were prior rebellions in heaven since “God has always been at work,” and he attempted to calculate exactly how many spirits were cast out with Satan. “Their numbers, probably, cannot be less than...one hundred thousand millions of rebellious spirits or devils who were cast out from Heaven and banished to this creation.” Wilford Woodruff, engaging in his own mathematical inquiry, concluded that “one hundred million devils” were cast out of heaven, with “a hundred [assigned] to every man, woman and child that breathes the breath of life.” Brigham Young suggested that the premortal division took place only among spirit beings, not resurrected beings, and speculated that a “portion of grace allotted to those rebellious characters” prevented them from being returned to their “native element.” Jedediah M. Grant, one of Brigham’s counselors, posited that, when Satan was cast out, he was given a “mission” to tempt mortal souls. John Taylor hypothesized that Satan “probably intended to make men atone for their own acts” through “the shedding


Figure 1. Occurrence of references to the war in heaven in four bodies of authoritative Mormon discourse. Note: JD = Journal of Discourses, CD = Collected Discourses, CR = Conference Report, and E = Ensign.

of their own blood as an atonement for their sins." The war in heaven inspired a great deal of imaginative thought in early Mormon discourse. And the frequency of its use in Mormon thought has increased over time in light of increasing concerns about social mores, warfare, communism, and progressive politics.

In their analysis of rhetorical themes in LDS general conference sermons from 1830 to 1979, Gordon and Gary Shepherd outlined developments in the theology and changes in emphasis. I have tried to conduct a similar analysis of how the war in heaven theme has been used in general conference sermons, but such attempts suffer from significant limitations. For example, as the Shepherds note, conference records are incomplete during the nineteenth century, especially during the Church's first decade. While the Shepherds were able to use summaries of talks and other substitutions in their research, there is always a strong chance that a summary might skip a

brief reference to the war in heaven and that the substitute discourses they used contained no references to the war in heaven. So my analysis is limited in significant ways. To compensate, I have recorded two sets of numbers: the number of instances in which General Authorities have spoken directly or indirectly of a war in heaven, as recorded in the *Journal of Discourses* (1855–86), *Collected Discourses* (1886–89), *Conference Reports*, and the *Ensign* (1971–present). Since some of the early talks recorded in the *Journal of Discourses* and *Collected Discourses* were not given in general conferences, I further recorded the number of those references that were given at LDS conference. Even if, due to the sketchy data, we consider the numbers found in Periods 1 and 2 with extreme caution, a strong trend toward increased references is readily apparent in general conference addresses. These results can be compared with a search of the term “war in heaven” on the recently released *Corpus of LDS General Conference Talks*, a database of discourses from 1851 to 2010 produced by Brig-

\[\text{Figure 2. Frequency of “War in Heaven” from 1851 to 2010 in the BYU corpus of general conference talks.}\]

\[\text{28}^\text{Gordon Shepherd and Gary Shepherd, } A \text{ Kingdom Transformed: Themes in the Development of Mormonism} (\text{Salt Lake: University of Utah Press, 1984}).\]
ham Young University linguistics professor, Mark Davies. Searching for the specific term “war in heaven” in the Corpus reveals a significant increase during the 1930s, 1960s, and the 2000s, decades that have seen challenges to conventional notions of individual moral choice as well as society’s political and economic ideals, as we will see below. (See Figures 1 and 2 as well as the Appendix: “A Chronology of Selected References to the War in Heaven in Mormon Thought.”)

From the Church’s beginnings, the narrative has been read as a very literal event in cosmic history. However, that literal event has been given a specific moral function in Mormon discourse.

**TROPOLOGIC LEVEL**

One of the primary functions of the war in heaven narrative has been tropologic—providing a moral message by which Church members can orient their lives. This is the most common use of the trope in contemporary LDS conference talks. Representative of this mode is a discourse by President James E. Faust in the priesthood session of the October 2001 conference. He warned that the war in heaven “rages today ever more fiercely” and urged his listeners: “As priesthood holders we are marshaled into the great army of righteousness to combat the forces of Lucifer. Each of us needs to train ourselves to be bold, disciplined, and loyal men of the priesthood who are prepared with the proper weapons to fight against evil and to win.”

Citing this premortal conflict as an ongoing battle in which all Latter-day Saints are engaged is the most common homiletic use of the narrative in discourses dating from the mid-twentieth century to the present. It is true that Brigham Young cited the war in heaven to

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29 *Corpus of General Conference Talks*, Brigham Young University, http://corpus.byu.edu/gc (accessed April 3, 2011). See also Scott Taylor, “All 24 Million Words of LDS General Conference,” April 1, 2011, http://www.deseretnews.com/article/700123380/All-24-million-words-of-LDS-general-conference.html (accessed May 5, 2011). That this BYU corpus does not show the same steady progression in usage as my research can be explained by the fact that, by searching only one term for the concept, “war in heaven,” I am excluding places where a General Authority might have spoken of the war in heaven but did not use that terminology.

caution Latter-day Saints that Satan's followers were sent to earth to
"try the sons of men" and admonished the Saints to diligently "im-
prov[e] upon the intelligence given to them, the opportunity for over-
coming evil, and for learning the principles which govern eternity,
that they may be exalted therein." However, it is more common in
early LDS discourse to employ the narrative in the literal, analogical,
or anagogical modes.

In 1928, Rulon S. Wells of the First Council of the Seventy warned
that "Satan is abroad in the land endeavoring to lead the children of
God away here as there, continuing his work of destroying the souls of
men." He urged members "to reject the plan of the adversary, with all
his sophistry, his false religion, his deception, his evil and all com-
bined," explaining that "to resent and resist that, and to turn away from
it, is to overcome sin." In 1935, Rudger Clawson, president of the
Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, reminded Latter-day Saints of the war
in heaven and warned that now "is a time for the testing of the souls of
men." Harold B. Lee, then president of the Quorum of the Twelve
Apostles, referred to the war in heaven in April 1972 in the context of
lamenting the late-1960s/early 1970s culture of drugs and free love:
"Today we are constantly hearing from the unenlightened and mis-
guided, who demand what they call free agency, by which they appar-
ently mean, as evidenced by their conduct, that they have their agency
to do as they please or to exercise their own self-will to determine what
is law and order, what is right and wrong, or what is honor and virtue."
This, President Lee saw as "echoing the plan of Satan." In 1989 Elder
Russell M. Nelson cited the war in heaven as "the beginning of conten-
tion," warning that "Satan's method relies on the infectious canker of

Taylor spoke in a somewhat similar vein, stating that, since the time of the
war in heaven, "two grand powers" have opposed each other. "The conflict
is between right and wrong, between truth and error, between God and the
spirit of darkness, and the powers of evil that are opposed to Him." Taylor
continued, God "has a right to demand obedience from his children," but
"that right has been contested from the very first." July 29, 1877, Journal of
Discourses, 19:79.

32Rulon S. Wells, Conference Report, April 1928, 70.
33Rudger Clawson, Conference Report, April 1935, 66.
contention." Elder Dallin H. Oaks updated the war in heaven to his 1995 warnings about same-gender attraction: “Satan would like us to believe that we are not responsible in this life. That is the result he tried to achieve by his contest in the pre-existence. A person who insists that he is not responsible for the exercise of his free agency because he was ‘born that way’ is trying to ignore the outcome of the War in Heaven. We are responsible, and if we argue otherwise, our efforts become part of the propaganda effort of the Adversary.”

In October 2009, Boyd K. Packer, president of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, said that, as a result of the war in heaven, “we were given our agency,” adding, “We must use it wisely and remain close to the Spirit; otherwise, we foolishly find ourselves yielding to the enticements of the adversary.” During that same conference, Elder Quentin L. Cook stated that “the War in Heaven was fought after Satan said that he would force everyone to obey his ideas. That was rejected.” Cook advised members that, “as a result, we have our moral agency and the freedom to choose our course in this life. But we also are accountable for that agency.”

Perhaps setting a record for the most references to the war in heaven in one conference, during the October 2010 conference, six speakers cited the war in heaven to emphasize moral principles—including all three members of the First Presidency. President Henry B. Eyring linked Lucifer’s fall to a lack of “sufficient trust in God to avoid eternal misery.” Elder M. Russell Ballard said that the war in heaven continues today with Satan tempting us with addiction to “artifi-

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39 Henry B. Eyring, “Trust in God, Then Go and Do,” Ensign, November 2010, 70–73.
cial substances and behaviors of temporary pleasure.”

Elder Robert D. Hales described those who followed Satan in the premortal life as lacking “faith to follow the Savior.” He cautioned members that Satan and his followers’ “only joy is to make us ‘miserable like unto [themselves].’” President Dieter F. Uchtdorf told the priesthood session that “pride was the original sin” that “felled Lucifer, a son of the morning,” warning that if pride could corrupt “one as capable and promising as this, should we not examine our own souls as well?”

And Church President Thomas S. Monson talked of Satan’s plan in the premortal sphere to take away agency: “He insisted that with his plan none would be lost, but he seemed not to recognize—or perhaps not to care—that in addition, none would be any wiser, any stronger, any more compassionate, or any more grateful if his plan were followed.” Thus, in a single conference, General Authorities taught lessons on trust, faith, pride, addiction, and spiritual growth by referring to the war in heaven. President Boyd K. Packer pursued the theme in the October 2011 general conference, warning youth that they “are being raised in enemy territory. We know from the scriptures that there was a war in heaven and that Lucifer rebelled and, with his followers, was cast out into the earth.” His “spiritual” influence, Packer continued, meaning that Lucifer worked “to control the minds and actions of all,” would ultimately fail. He extended an apostolic promise “that you will be protected and steeled against the attacks of the adversary if you heed the promptings that come from the Holy Ghost.”

Despite the importance of the war in heaven in Mormon theology, it does not seem to occupy a central place in Mormon fiction, drama, or poetry. I am aware of only a few examples, and most of them function primarily at the tropologic level, depicting a moral


Raphael, St. Michael and the Devil, ca. 1503. St. Michael, beautiful and remote, pins down a writhing, screaming devil, while monsters creep around the battlefield before the Heavenly City.

message for the audience to emulate in the here and now. Nephi Anderson’s Added Upon, a popular didactic novel first published in 1898 (and in continuous print until 2005), depicts the war in heaven through a conversation between pre-mortal spirits Homan and Delsa:

“What do you think of Lucifer and his plan?” asked she. “The talented Son of the Morning is in danger of being cast out if he persists in his course. As to his plan, it is this: ‘If I cannot rule, I will ruin.’”
“And if he rule, it will still be ruin, it seems to me.”

The novel then relates how “many of the mighty and noble children of God arrayed themselves on the side of Christ, their Elder Brother, and waged war against Lucifer’s pernicious doctrine.”

Likewise, Orson F. Whitney’s 1904 *Elias: An Epic of the Ages*, one of two epic poems that depict the war in heaven (I discuss the other, by Edward Tullidge, below) depicts the competing arguments put forward by Jesus and Satan, then cuts quickly to the outcome:

'T was done. From congregation vast
Tumultuous murmurs rose;
Waves of conflicting sound, as when
Two meeting seas oppose.
'T was finished. But the heavens wept;
And still their annals tell
How one was choice of Elohim,
O'er one who fighting fell.

The popular 1977 production *My Turn on Earth*, written by Carol Lynn Pearson with music by Lex de Azevedo, has two musical numbers that depict the war in heaven. “I have a plan,” sings Satan. “It will save every man. / I will force them to live righteously. / They won’t have to choose. / Not one we’ll lose. / And give all the glory to me.” Jesus responds, “I have a plan. / It is better for man. / Each will have to decide what to be. / And choosing, I know, you'll learn and you'll grow, / And, Father, the glory to thee.” In another song, “Shout for Joy,” the premortal souls celebrate: “Satan’s plan we did destroy! / We’ll shout, we’ll shout for joy!”

All of these references have a common purpose: The war in heaven is cited to inspire individual moral behavior, to remind Lat-
ter-day Saints that they are engaged in spiritual warfare, and to reflect on their actions as part of a larger, cosmic drama. The war in heaven provides a moral lesson on the importance of using agency wisely. But it has also served a broader allegorical purpose, defending against threats to Church dominion, explaining inequality, and supporting particular economic and political agendas.

**ALLEGORICAL LEVEL**

The first use of the war in heaven to serve an allegorical function dates from the succession crisis of 1844. Wilford Woodruff used the narrative to urge members to follow Brigham Young and the Quorum of the Twelve rather than Sidney Rigdon, the sole surviving member of the First Presidency. In an impassioned letter published in the LDS *Times and Seasons* on November 1, 1844, Woodruff compared Rigdon to Lucifer “who made war in heaven.” By threatening to “turn traitor, publish against the church in public journals, intimating that he would bring a mob upon the church, stir up the world against the saints and bring distress upon them,” Rigdon had, according to Woodruff, proven his treachery and could not be trusted.⁴⁹ In a similar vein, Apostle Orson Hyde compared Rigdon’s claim to authority to Satan’s attempt to seize power during the war in heaven. Hyde stated that “none can bear rule” in God’s appointed station, “except such as are appointed and ordained of God. Lucifer once undertook it, but he with all his adherents, was cast out and thrust down to hell, because of an unlawful ambition in aspiring after a station that Heavyful, Utah: IVE Press). Satirical, though not mocking, the novel explores Mormon folk beliefs about premortal life, the unseen spirits tempting humanity, and the postmortal spirit world. In a chapter titled “The Unpleasanthness,” Candle, an inquisitive premortal spirit, highlights some of the theological implications of the war in heaven, asking “Why would the Council put the most important decision in Creation up for a vote? What would have happened if two-thirds of the Host of Heaven had voted for Lucifer’s Plan?” She further comments, “It looks like one single event, one single decision has cost one-third of all our brothers and sisters their eternal lives. Millions of years of progression and a potential eternity of heavenly bliss—poof, gone in one single incidence of poor judgment. Does that make sense to you?” (12).

en was not pleased to give."^50

In another defense of the Church against a perceived threat, the Deseret News published an anonymously written editorial in 1852 that warned against "false spirits" who were apparently making themselves manifest within the Spiritualist movement. The editorial cautioned that Lucifer's proposed plan in the premortal council appeared "more liberal, noble, benevolent and kind-hearted" than that proposed by Jesus, and that he drew away one-third of heaven with his "sophistry and false philanthropy." It suggested that spiritualism had real power but that mediums were contacting the wrong kind of spirits.^51 Reference to the war in heaven allowed Church leaders to lay out a kind of middle path to successfully navigate any potentially authoritative claims of spiritualists, without rejecting outright the possibility of spiritual continuity and communication after death.

One of the principal uses of the war in heaven trope has been to explain the origins of earthly inequality, especially as it related to the restriction on ordaining black males to the priesthood prior to 1978.^^ While the curse of Cain or Ham proved a common justification for prejudice and slavery in nineteenth-century America, just as it did in Mormonism, in 1845 Orson Hyde introduced a new theory

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50 Orson Hyde, Delivered before the High Priests' Quorum, in Nauvoo, April 27th 1845, upon the Course and Conduct of Mr. Sidney Rigdon, and upon the Merits of His Claim to the Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Nauvoo: Times and Seasons Press, 1845), 4, http://sidneyrigdon.com/Hyd1845A.htm#pg27a (accessed November 13, 2010).

51 "To the Saints," Deseret News, February 21, 1852. The editor of the paper at this time was Brigham Young's second counselor in the First Presidency, Willard Richards. The editorial was later published as "False and Delusive Spirits" in the Millennial Star 14 no. 18 (June 26, 1852): 277–80. See Davis Bitton, "Mormonism's Encounter with Spiritualism," in his The Ritualization of Mormon History and Other Essays (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 83–97. As Bitton has argued and as this editorial implies, spiritualism posed a difficult dilemma for Mormonism. To accept spiritualism's claims would be to accept every spiritual manifestation and lose control of the leadership's authority; but to denounce communication with the spirit world would be to deny the very foundation of the Mormon message. The approach then, was to acknowledge spiritual communication but to maintain that deciphering the intentions of the spirits thus encountered would require spiritual discernment available to Mormon priesthood holders.

52 Lester E. Bush and Armand L. Mauss, eds., Neither White nor Black:
that had strong explanatory power for more than a century. He posited that, during the war in heaven, some spirits “did not take a very active part on either side, but rather thought the devil had been abused, and considered he had rather the best claim to government.” Thus, according to Hyde, these spirits were born into the “African race,” the “accursed lineage of Canaan” as a sort of punishment. Brigham Young publicly repudiated Hyde’s hypothesis, likely for theological reasons, despite his own characterization of blacks as “uncouth, uncomely, disagreeable in their habits, wild and seemingly deprived of nearly all blessings of the intelligence that is bestowed upon mankind.” Nevertheless, Young assured members of the Church that “all spirits are pure that came from the presence of God. The posterity of Cain are black because he committed murder.”

Brigham Young’s repudiation of the idea of premortal neutrality did not stick after his death, however. In 1885, B. H. Roberts of the First Council of the Seventy suggested that blacks may not have “rebelled against God and yet were so indifferent in their support of the righteous cause of our Redeemer that they forfeited certain privileges and powers granted to those who were more valiant.” In 1889, Wilford Woodruff hinted that there might have been souls “astride the fence” in the war in heaven. A letter from the First Presidency to Milton H. Knudson, dated January 1, 1912, seemed to contradict this line of reasoning, however: “So far as we know, there is no revelation, ancient or modern, neither is there any authoritative statement by any of the authorities of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.”

53 Brigham Young, quoted in Bush and Mauss, Neither White nor Black, 72–73; Hyde, Delivered before the High Priests’ Quorum, 30.
Saints in support of that which many of our elders have advanced as doctrine, in effect that the negroes are those who were neutral in heaven at the time of the great conflict or war, which resulted in the casting out of Lucifer and those who were led by him, said to number about one-third of the hosts of heaven."

The 1931 publication of Apostle Joseph Fielding Smith’s *The Way to Perfection* trod a middle ground, stressing that black people had not necessarily been neutral but rather that they “did not stand valiantly.” In April 1939 general conference, Apostle George F. Richards repeated Smith’s concept of non-valor. Echoing Smith’s position, the First Presidency wrote to sociology professor Lowry Nelson on July 17, 1947: “From the days of the Prophet Joseph even until now it has been the doctrine of the Church, never questioned by any of the Church Leaders, that the Negroes are not entitled to the full blessings of the Gospel.” Evidently Church leaders were unaware of the ordinations of Elijah Abel (reportedly by Joseph Smith) in 1836, Walker Lewis in 1844, William McCary in 1846, and Abel’s son Enoch in 1900 and grandson Elijah in 1935. The letter goes on: “Some of God’s children were assigned to superior positions before the world was formed” based on the “preexistence of our spirits, the rebellion in heaven, and the doctrines that our birth into this life and the advantages under which we may be born have a relationship in the life heretofore.” Two years later in 1949, the same First Presidency announced it as a principal reason for priesthood denial to black men.

The idea that blacks were less valiant in the war in heaven ap-

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pears in the 1956 young adult novel *Choose Ye This Day* written by Emma Marr Petersen, the wife of Elder Mark E. Petersen. In the novel, when Milo Patterson, a black athlete from Los Angeles, joins the college football team, several southern athletes stage a boycott. Two students, Kent and Steve, debate the school’s position that the team be integrated. Steve is willing to play with Milo, but Kent doesn’t like the idea. “Even the Church holds out against the Negros,” Kent states (45). Steve suggests they talk with Hank Weston, a “crippled” hamburger stand owner “known for his honesty and practical good sense” (7), for his position. Hank opines that his “attitude on this subject is pretty well guided by my religious views...so I hope you won’t mind if I mix a little religion with what I say” (47). Hank then teaches the students that blacks are cursed in mortality because they were not as valiant in war in heaven. He confesses, though, that he has “heard some of our [Church] leaders teach that even the Negro can go to the celestial kingdom if he is faithful. However, he can be only a servant there.” He justifies this idea by adding: “That is more than many white people will receive, for many of them will be placed in the lower degrees of glory in the next world, because they did not live righteously. So in some respects, Negroes, if they are faithful, may receive a higher glory in the world to come than those of other races who defile their birthright” (49). Hank concludes: “Each race may develop within itself. So far as the Negroes are concerned, we will give them every right and privilege within their race that we claim for ourselves within our own race, but we will not become intimate with them in any way, and we will not intermarry with them. ... I believe that is a fair position to take, and I believe it squares with the word of God” (49–50). Hank’s position is finally summed up by one of the students: “So you would be in favor of allowing a Negro to play on our football team, as long as we did not take him so far into our social life that some white girl might become infatuated with him” (50). “That is just what I believe,” responds Hank (51).

After the 1978 revelation extending the priesthood to all worthy male members of the LDS Church, Apostle Bruce R. McConkie, who


62 Emma Marr Petersen, *Choose Ye This Day* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1956).
himself had perpetuated the idea of premortal “neutrality” in his highly influential *Mormon Doctrine*, stated: “Forget everything that I have said, or what President Brigham Young or President George Q. Cannon or whoever has said in days past that is contrary to the present revelation. We spoke with a limited understanding without the light and knowledge that now has come into the world.”63

The war in heaven narrative has also been employed to explain more generally the origins of inequality. In 1954, Apostle Mark E. Petersen speculated that the circumstances of our birth, whether we were born in “darkest Africa, or in flood-ridden China, or among the starving hordes of India, while some of the rest of us are born in the United States” is a “reflection of our worthiness or lack of it in the pre-existent life.”64 Likewise, in 1961, Alvin R. Dyer, who was then serving as Assistant to the Quorum of the Twelve, asked: “Why is it that you are white and not colored? Have you ever asked yourself that question? Who had anything to do with your being born into the Church and not born a Chinese or a Hindu, or a Negro? . . . There were three divisions of mankind in the pre-existence, and when you are born into this life, you are born into one of these three divisions of people. There is an imposed judgment placed upon everyone who leaves the Spirit World just the same as there will be when they leave

63Bruce R. McConkie, *Sermons and Writings of Bruce R. McConkie* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), 165. The entry for “Negroes” in editions of *Mormon Doctrine* prior to 1979 stated: “In the preexistent eternity various degrees of valiancy and devotion to the truth were exhibited by different groups of our Father’s spirit offspring. . . . Those who were less valiant in preexistence and who thereby had certain spiritual restrictions imposed upon them during mortality are known to us as the negroes.” This material was all deleted in post-1979 editions of the book. See also Marvin Perkins, “Blacks and the Priesthood,” FAIR, September 8, 2002, http://www.fairlds.org/Misc/Blacks_and_the_Priesthood.html (accessed May 4, 2010). Perkins astutely notes that, in the Book of Abraham, where the notion of different levels of valor is stated, “the discussion regarding varying degrees of valiancy or greatness . . . actually comes before the plan was laid out and presented, and before the rejection of the plan and rebellion by Satan, instead of after, as the tradition would have us believe.”

this life and go into one of three places."\(^{65}\)

It is fascinating to note, however, that another strand of this argument takes the exact opposite position. While suggesting that blacks were denied the priesthood because of their "degree of faithfulness, by the degree of development in the pre-existent state," B. H. Roberts denied that wealth and privilege were indications of premortal righteousness. "The favored sons of God are not those furthest removed from trial, from sorrow, from affliction. It is the fate, apparently, of those whom God most loves that they suffer most, that they might gain the experience for which men came into this world."\(^{66}\)

Thus, whom God loves, He sends not riches but trials, suggested Roberts. Reflecting perhaps more concern for diversity as the LDS Church becomes a world religion, BYU religion professor Terry Ball posed exactly the same question in a 2008 BYU Devotional as Elder Dyer had in 1961 but drew the opposite conclusion: "Have you ever wondered why you were born where and when you were born?" Ball continued, "We believe that when it came time for us to experience mortality, a loving Heavenly Father who knows each of us well sent us to earth at the time and place and circumstances that would best help us reach our divine potential and help him maximize his harvest of redeemed souls."\(^{67}\)

In short, for Mark E. Petersen and Alvin R. Dyer, inequality is an outward sign of premortal apathy—the worse your condition in this life, the more likely your indifference in the preexistence. Others have taken a much more charitable view of humanity. For B. H. Roberts, inequality may be a sign of premortal righteousness, while Terry Ball

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\(^{66}\) B. H. Roberts, January 27, 1895, Stuy, *Collected Discourses*, 4:235–38. Roberts also stated, "If all ... affliction was for the 'good' of one of the most favored of God's sons, is it not a fair conclusion that the trials and adversities of the other sons of God are for their 'good?'" *The Gospel and Man's Relationship to Deity* (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon & Sons, 1893), 345–50.

sees it as a result of divine understanding.

Perhaps the most common allegorical function the war in heaven has served in Mormon thought is to justify and defend certain political and economic structures. Brigham Young saw it as a warning against the type of political factions that had created the Civil War. Citing the division that existed in the war in heaven, Young concluded, “Where such disunion exists in any government, it ultimately becomes the means of the utter overthrow of that government or people, unless a timely remedy is applied. Party spirit once made its appearance in heaven, but was promptly checked.” Young continued, “If our Government had cast out the Seceders, the war would soon have been ended.” Young’s position was that the Mormons were witnessing the judgments of God against the United States for Americans’ treatment of the Mormons. “The people in the States have violated the Constitution in closing their ears against the cries of the oppressed, and in consenting to shedding innocent blood, and now war, death and gloom are spread like a pall over the land.”

Fifty years later B. H. Roberts took quite a different position and defended the U.S. entry into World War I by suggesting that the war in heaven proves that God does take sides in war, and surely He is on the side of the allies. To those who would say wars are “merely the machinations of men,” Roberts stated, “I would ask what of the war in heaven when Michael [sic] and his angels revolted and became the devils of this world?” He continued, “I have absolute faith and confidence that so far as the United States is concerned, God is with us.” On another occasion, Roberts linked the patriots of the American Revolution with an ongoing fight for freedom that began when Satan was cast out of heaven. “We read that there was war in heaven,” Roberts stated. “I think God was in that war, for Satan was overthrown and forced from heaven. I cannot help but think that when the patriot fathers who founded our nation drew the sword against the great empire of England, in the maintenance of their avowed rights, and for the establishment of free government in this world, God sustained their feeble arms and crowned them with glory.” Likewise, in 1917 Presiding Bishop Charles W. Nibley saw

World War I as a continuation of the struggle for freedom begun in the war in heaven and encompassing Henry VIII’s break with the Pope, Cromwell’s rupture with the Stuarts, George Washington’s clash with George III, and Abraham Lincoln’s opposition to the South:

The spirit of that contention did not cease to exist. It has existed and has come down to us through the ages; one side contending for individual liberty and the rights of man, and the other side contending for rule by force and by compulsion. That was essentially the issue in that great conflict before the world was. Christ stood for government by persuasion, by long suffering, by kindness and gentleness and love unfeigned. The other power was for government and salvation for all, to be secured by the spirit of force and compulsion, wherein all would be saved without agency, or what we call common consent.  

In a similar vein, Apostle Melvin J. Ballard denounced the German Kaiser Wilhelm II as leading the forces of evil in a continuation of the war in heaven. “The forces of evil were cast down to the earth, and here they have been and here the war wages and never have these combats ceased,” said Ballard. “When shall the conflict end? There is no doubt in our minds what the result will be when that end shall come.”

The trope took a new direction after Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected U.S. president in 1932. As historians have documented, LDS President Heber J. Grant became increasingly wary of FDR’s New Deal policies. When Roosevelt sought an unprecedented third term in office, Grant authorized the publication of an anti-Roosevelt editorial in the Deseret News on October 31, 1940. Days later, the November Improvement Era featured an editorial, penned by Richard L. Evans, stating that “the ability to influence public opinion is not always accompanied by a like degree of integrity or honesty or honorable motive. A man may be a spellbinder and a scalawag at the same time.” The editorial pointedly drew a comparison with “Lucifer, a brilliant personality” who “waged war in heaven and misled a third of the hosts thereof to their own downfall and to his,” reminding readers to keep this duplicity in mind “before we set aside any hard-won

71 Charles W. Nibley, Conference Report, April 1917, 144.
72 Melvin J. Ballard, Conference Report, October 1918, 149.
John Martin, Fall of the Rebel Angels, 1824–27, from a suite of mezzotints produced to illustrate Paradise Lost, 1833 edition. A blast of light streaming from the cliffs of heaven, accompanied by a torrent of boulders, blows the fallen angels out of the sacred precincts of God’s presence.
The United States’ entrance into World War II brought out the war in heaven narrative once again. On April 5, 1942, general conference was ripe with significance: The world was celebrating Easter and entering a war. American soldiers had been arriving in Great Britain since January. David O. McKay, second counselor in the First Presidency, addressed the audience gathered in the upper room of the Salt Lake Temple, stating, “On this Easter Day, the Risen Christ beholds in the world not peace, but war.” McKay continued:

War impels you to hate your enemies. The Prince of Peace says, Love your enemies. War says, Curse them that curse you. The Prince of Peace says, Pray for them that curse you. War says, Injure and kill them that hate you. The Risen Lord says, Do good to them that hate you. Thus we see that war is incompatible with Christ’s teachings. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the gospel of peace. War is its antithesis, and produces hate. It is vain to attempt to reconcile war with true Christianity.

McKay then used the war in heaven as an example of a war that is justifiable: “In that rebellion Lucifer said in substance: ‘By the law of force I will compel the human family to subscribe to the eternal plan, but give me thine honor and power.’” Defending the agency of another, McKay stated, “may justify a truly Christian man to enter—mind you, I say enter, not begin—a war.”

One of the most esoteric works on the war in heaven was Nels L. Nelson’s 1941 *The Second War in Heaven As Now Being Waged by Lucifer through Hitler as a Dummy*. Nelson had taught English, philosophy, public speaking, and religion at BYU between 1883 and 1920, except for a short hiatus between 1885 and 1887 while serving in the Southern States Mission, and had published many articles and three books: *Preaching and Public Speaking, The Mormon Point of View,* and *Scientific Aspects of Mormonism. When The Second War in Heaven* was published, Nelson was seventy-nine, well-respected by Church leaders, and, as Davis Bitton states, “we can safely say that Nelson’s name was well-known in the Mormon community.” The book combines a sort of New Age philosophy with political commentary to stress that the to-

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talitarian regimes of Stalin, Mussolini, and, in particular, Hitler are “trying to destroy” what he calls the “I am principle in man” and that these dictators oppose the “psychic evolution” of “pre-existence, earth-life, and after-earth life.”

Church President Joseph F. Smith had a deep respect for Nelson and his writing, going so far as authorize the Church to lend Nelson $800 to publish his book *Scientific Aspects of Mormonism*. As Richard Sherlock has written, President Smith “sent [Nelson] manuscripts to review before deciding whether they should be published by the church. From the mass of letters between Nelson and church leaders, it is clear that he was on close terms with Smith and others.” However, *The Second War in Heaven* struck a nerve with President J. Reuben Clark, first counselor to President Heber J. Grant. Clark took Nelson to task in a six-page personal letter critiquing Nelson’s manuscript, calling it “too philosophic to be good propaganda, and too ‘propagandish’ to be good philosophy.” Despite Nelson’s appeal to the war in heaven, Clark’s position as a laissez-fair conservative caused him to regard foreign entanglements with suspicion. For Clark, Hitler should not be singled out in the world’s history of evil. “It seems to me that the ‘second war in heaven’ began with Satan’s temptation of Eve, and swung into full march with Cain’s murder of Abel. From that date until the present . . . it has been the conflict between the two great forces, Good and Evil.” As he put it, “I think you have largely spoiled [the book] by over-emphasizing and over magnifying Hitler and his particular regime.” Clark was not siding with Hitler, stating “I am willing to convict him” but also adjudging that “the situation has created the man.” Recognizing the economic difficulties in


Germany caused by reparations after World War I, Clark believed that Hitler "was to the Germans as a voice crying in the wilderness and offering to lead them out of the economic and political bondage in which the Treaty of Versailles left them." And of the situation in Germany, Clark cautioned, "I should like you to excuse my warning you against your assuming as truth most of the criticism you see leveled against Hitler and his regime in Germany. . . . Hitler is undoubtedly bad from our American point of view, but I think that Germans like him." Clark further warned Nelson about taking the side of Jews. "There is nothing in their history which indicates that the Jewish race loves either free-agency or liberty. ‘Law and order’ are not facts for the Jews."  

The narrative gained even greater traction as an allegory for the proper role of government in light of Communism. One of the earliest references came from Rulon S. Wells of the First Council of the Seventy in the April 1930 general conference. Wells stated that "the war begun in heaven is continued here on earth. To follow the enemies of God means to follow them into slavery, but to serve God means freedom." Wells continued, "Think of poor afflicted Russia now under Soviet rule." Russia had suffered under the czars and had "good reason to rise up against such conditions," but had "no sooner liberated themselves" than the "Soviet seeks to plunge them into the still more deadly slavery of atheism."  

During the post-World War II developments of heightened diplomatic and military tensions known as the Cold War, the war in heaven became the primary metaphor for LDS thinking about the Soviet Union and concerns about the spread of Communism throughout the world. Apostle Ezra Taft Benson frequently spoke of the fight against Communism as a continuation of the war in heaven. "It is time, therefore, that every American, and especially every member of the priesthood, became informed about the aims, tactics, and schemes of socialistic-communism," Elder Benson stated in the October 1961 general conference. "This becomes particularly important

79Rulon S. Wells, Conference Report, April 1930, 70–72.
when it is realized that communism is turning out to be the earthly image of the plan which Satan presented in the pre-existence. The whole program of socialistic-communism is essentially a war against God and the plan of salvation—the very plan which we fought to uphold during ‘the war in heaven.’”

But he also began to link his anti-Communism discourse with any form of “welfare government” that would “force us into a greater socialistic society.” When some Church members took umbrage at his increasingly far-right agenda, Benson responded in a 1966 BYU devotional address: “We cannot compromise good and evil in an attempt to have peace and unity in the Church any

more than the Lord could have compromised with Satan in order to avoid the War in Heaven." Strikingly, Benson characterized differences of opinion within the Church as a continuation of the war in heaven, with his own right-leaning rhetoric defending the side of the angels. The war in heaven continued to be employed against the spread of Communism, but also against liberalism in general. In his self-published 1964 book *Prophets, Principles, and National Survival*, Jerrred Newquist, an Air Force major during World War II and convert to Mormonism, claimed that any “collectivist philosophy” is related to the plan proposed by Lucifer prior to the war in heaven. Likewise, Hyrum Andrus’s 1965 *Liberalism, Conservatism, Mormonism* branded “liberalism, like the plan proposed by Lucifer and his hosts in the war in heaven,” as “deficient and perverse.” The war in heaven was also used to justify greater political moderation and support for pluralism. For example, one letter to the editor of *Dialogue* suggested that, 


82 Jerreld L. Newquist, *Prophets, Principles, and National Survival* (Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1964), viii; Hyrum L. Andrus, *Liberalism, Conservatism, Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1965), 69–70. Receiving substantially less attention were reviews to these books published in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*. Thomas G. Alexander responded to Newquist’s claim about collectivism by stating: “Had opposition to collectivism been an eternal principle related to the War in Heaven and to man’s free agency, the Lord would never have had his Church practice it” as the Saints had in the nineteenth century. Martin Hickman suggested that Andrus was implying that only right-wing conservatives could be good members of the Church and that, “if the arguments of this book ever become widely accepted in the Church, criteria other than devotion to the gospel will be used to measure acceptable Church behavior, Church members will become confused about the nature and mission of the Church, divisions and bitterness arising from political differences will be infused into Church relationships, and members will be distracted from the principal task of giving effect to the teachings of Christ in their lives.” Thomas G. Alexander, “An Ambiguous Heritage,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 2, no. 3 (Autumn 1967): 127–34; Martin Hickman, Review of *Liberalism,*
by ignoring the rights of other nations to self-determination—to impose our ways on them despite the fact that their people have duly elected a Communist government—the United States was “getting close to” supporting Lucifer’s plan. Hugh Nibley took the position that “Satan wasn’t cast out of heaven for voting the wrong way . . . [but] for refusing to accept the verdict . . . Satan was cast out for refusing to accept the popular vote.” Voices on both sides of the debate could make their case by appealing to the war in heaven.

Returning to the tendency to use the war in heaven to justify the United States in times of war, Sterling W. Sill of the First Council of the Seventy invoked the narrative in 1970, the year U.S. and South Vietnamese forces invaded Cambodia and National Guardsmen fired on protesters at Kent State. Sill lauded the examples of war heroes like Generals Black Jack Pershing, Douglas MacArthur, and Dwight D. Eisenhower, as well as “our present great commander-in-chief, Richard M. Nixon,” and admonished Church members to remember that “the greatest of all military men was the Son of God himself. In the war in heaven, he led the forces of righteousness against the rebellion of Lucifer.” Sill apparently saw Christ as displacing Michael’s role in the premortal conflict. He continued, “We can also draw great significance from the fact that before the Savior of the world was the Prince of Peace, he was Jehovah the warrior.”

Despite the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, conservative writers and commentators like Glenn Beck have continued to use the war in heaven narrative to warn against what they regard as “socialism” and to denounce the progressive goals of universal health care and governmental efforts to alleviate poverty. A perusal of blog posts and web pages reveals conservative Mormons using the war in heaven to argue against paying taxes, voting for Harry Reid, and as


the creeping “socialism” into which they saw the nation sliding. In his 2001 self-published book *The Hidden Things of Darkness*, Christopher S. Bentley, a Mormon who has served as the director of operations for the John Birch Society, argued that the war in heaven “did not cease after Satan was cast out” but has rather intensified. It continues here on earth in the form of “Satanocracy,” “the ongoing effort to enslave mankind” by “convert[ing] government into a destroyer of rights.”

Less than a month following 9/11, President Gordon B. Hinckley spoke in October 2001 general conference of the terrorist attacks and warned members to prepare for the calamities of the last days: “Now, all of us know that war, contention, hatred, suffering of the worst kind are not new. The conflict we see today is but another expression of the conflict that began with the War in Heaven.” He continued, “Treachery and terrorism began with [Satan]. And they will continue until the Son of God returns to rule and reign with peace and righteousness among the sons and daughters of God.”

In 2003, President Hinckley compared the fight against terrorism

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to the war in heaven.\textsuperscript{88}

During the 2008 debate over California’s Proposition 8 to repeal gay marriage, LDS pollster and author Gary Lawrence published an article in the online \textit{Meridian Magazine} claiming that “the new battlefield” of the war in heaven was now California and arguing that Lucifer employed arguments of equality and sympathy to win over converts. Lawrence wrote, “If the arguments used in the war in heaven were persuasive enough to draw billions of God’s spirit children away from him, why should we not expect them to be used on the present battlefield? The same minions cast out from the Father’s presence still remember what worked up there.”\textsuperscript{89} Most recently, Elder Quentin L. Cook argued in the October 2010 General Conference that the war in heaven continues today as an attack on religious liberty. “Since the War in Heaven, the forces of evil have used every means possible to destroy agency and extinguish light. The assault on moral principles and religious freedom has never been stronger.”\textsuperscript{90}

Interestingly, when issuing cautions about economic issues or political tyranny, LDS authors have tended to stress that the war in heaven was about taking away agency; however, when the debate is about sexuality, the emphasis gets switched to Satan’s rhetorical power. The war in heaven is used to defend libertarian policies concerning governmental regulation and free-market economics. However, it is also used, with different emphasis, to argue against gay marriage, despite the fact that the opposing side could use the same narrative to justify a libertarian argument.

Perhaps, however, LDS discourse has conflated the issues of freedom and agency. Garth Mangum made this point in a short but insightful essay in \textit{Dialogue}. Citing 2 Nephi 2:16–27, Mangum emphasized: “Free agency was ‘given unto man’ and he is ‘free forever’ to act for himself and take the consequences. In that sense, the War in


Heaven was definitive.” The point, Mangum stressed, is that “regardless of what happens to freedom, free agency is not in danger.” As Victor Frankl put it in his powerful memoir of surviving the German concentration camps, “Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.”

**ANAGOGICAL LEVEL**

Finally, the war in heaven narrative serves an anagogical function within Mormon thought, highlighting the prophetic events of Church history and its eventual triumph over adversity. Persecution of the Church was early on seen as a continuation of the war in heaven and as evidence that members were on the right side of that battle. As Apostle George Q. Cannon told Church members in 1866:

> The war which was waged in heaven has been transferred to the earth, and it is now being waged by the hosts of error and darkness against God and truth; and the conflict will not cease until sin is extinguished and this earth is fully redeemed from the power of the adversary, and from the misrule and oppression which have so long exercised power over the earth. Do you wonder, then, that there is hatred and bitterness manifested; that the servants of God have had to watch continually to guard against the attacks of the enemy; that the blood of Joseph and Hyrum, David Patten, and others has been shed, and that the Saints, whose only crime was desiring to serve God in truth, virtue, uprightness, and sincerity, have been persecuted and afflicted all the day long? I do not wonder at it; there is no room for wonder in the minds of those who understand the work in which we are engaged.

Likewise Wilford Woodruff stated that those who were cast out of heaven—the “thousands and millions of fallen spirits”—dwell on the earth and strive to “make war upon the Saints of God, wherever

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or whenever they are found upon the earth.”^93 In his introduction to the third volume of the *History of the Church*, editor B. H. Roberts opined that since “in heaven [Satan] opposed the gospel of Jesus Christ; cast out into the earth will he not oppose it there?” Roberts thus saw the persecution of the Latter-day Saints as a manifestation of Lucifer’s hatred for the “institution wrought out in the wisdom of God to bring to pass the salvation of man.”^94 Edward Tullidge launched an ambitious effort in “A Chapter from the Prophet of the Nineteenth Century,” an unfinished Miltonian epic poem written in heroic couplets. He linked opposition to the Restoration with a continuation of the war in heaven. Only a fragment of the poem was ever published. It depicts Satan calling the forces of fallen angels together to glory in their past rebellion. “We were not crushed. Our strength and hate remained; / And even now the loss might be regained.” Satan announces to the host that the “councils of the skies” had created a plan to “break our spells and rescue fallen man”:

“I need not tell you how the Seers of old,
"By vain illusions and conceits made bold,
"Foretold that in the latter times should rise
"A mighty kingdom towering to the skies,—
"That Saintly dreamers held a foolish boast
"That it should break and scatter all our host.
"Know, then, my lords, those vaunted times now loom,
"And we must conquer or receive our doom.”

This kingdom would be ushered in by an “Anointed and pre-ordained Seer” who must be opposed, concludes Satan. He urged his forces: “Away, my lords! Crush all who brave our sway! / Flood them—drown them with hate! Away, away!”^95 Tullidge, Roberts, Cannon, and Woodruff saw LDS Church history as a continuation of the war in heaven with persecution as a sign that the Church was fully engaged

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in the battle against Satan. The narrative ties the history of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to a larger, cosmic history.

But even though the Latter-day Saints will suffer persecutions in this continuing battle, they are assured of eventual success. President Gordon B. Hinckley spoke of it as “the war we are winning” and “a victory assured.” And as Elder James Hamula reminded young men at the October 2008 Conference, “We are entering the final stages of a great war.” He urged these young men to live righteous lives, assuring them: “His salvation will come, delivering you and yours from every evil.” Speaking in October 2011 general conference, President Packer mobilized his apostolic authority against Satan’s power to similarly promise his listeners: “As one of His special witnesses, I testify that the outcome of this battle that began in premortal life is not in question. Lucifer will lose.” In a very real way, members of the LDS Church sense they are engaged in a great battle against evil, but one they will eventually win, just as the forces of God triumphed over Satan in the war in heaven.

CONCLUSION

The war in heaven narrative has provided moral meaning for individual Latter-day Saint lives; served an allegorical function, challenging threats to the Church, explaining earthly inequalities, and promoting individual economic and political agendas; and has linked the mission of the Church to a sacred history, beginning with the premortal councils of heaven and culminating with the final judgment and millennial reign of Christ. At the personal level, the narrative provides a sublime sense of meaning for Latter-day Saints. At the community level, it provides a sense of shared purpose and values. In both the individual and community, it can help make sense of an in-


98 Packer, “Counsel to Youth,” 16, 18.
creasingly complex world. By examining the ways the narrative is used we can see how it shapes and defines both the individual and the community.

With the current political discussion focusing on issues like “big government” and gay marriage, the war in heaven will likely continue to occupy the collective imagination of Latter-day Saints for some time to come. However, a cautionary note is in order: When this narrative is employed as a tool for earthly, political debate, the results can be quite ugly, at least from the vantage point of history. It is challenging, to say the least, to encounter statements by Church authorities that by twenty-first-century standards seem discomfiting at best, disgusting at worst. But only by confronting the past can we learn from it. If we bury this past, as psychologists warn, it will only come back to haunt us.

We often use scripture as if it is the final, ultimate proof in a debate. In this case, if one can compare an opponent’s position to Satan’s in the war in heaven, the argument appears settled. But these scriptural narratives are really the beginning of conversation, not the end of it. Language is slippery and stories are always elusive, hinting at meaning while evading our grasp. At the same moment, one reader will use the war in heaven narrative to describe the evil of limiting agency, while another reader will apply that narrative to describe the dangers of listening to a charismatic secular leader, whether that leader is a Glenn Beck or a Barack Obama. Even more troubling is attempting to read the narrative consistently across different debates. For surely the war on heaven can be seen as a morality tale on the importance of preserving agency, but consistently placing agency over all other principles results in the need to defend things one may not want to defend. The libertarian interpretation of the war in heaven narrative can be used to support limited government and free market economics, but it may also be used to support the right to abortion, the legalization of drugs, gay marriage, or guns in schools. Or, as I have witnessed first-hand, it can be used by children to argue with their diabolical parents against being forced to do chores, go to school, or attend church. We soon discover that allegories applied consistently only prove the open-endedness of the allegory. Also, an even bigger problem is that when we start using this particular narrative allegorically, someone is bound to end up being compared to Satan, and this is not the most productive way to win friends or arguments.

Finally, this narrative, as sublime to the individual soul and com-
munity ethos as it is, does not, in the final analysis, productively grapple with the complicated issue of earthly inequality. The motive behind such misguided thinking is, like Milton’s, a noble desire “to justify God’s ways to man.” It attempts to account for the unjust conditions in a world created by a just God. While this reasoning may let God off the hook, it doesn’t let us off the hook with God, who has commanded us to “judge not that [we] be not judged” (Matt. 7:1). Furthermore, as we have seen, it is just as easy to argue that those who were valiant in the war in heaven are given greater trials in mortality as it is to argue that they are given greater blessings. Since Mormon theology holds that all who came to earth with physical bodies passed the premortal world’s testing, it is safest, and indeed most doctrinally sound, to assume that all of us fought, and fought valiantly, on the side of the angels.

APPENDIX

A CHRONOLOGY OF SELECTED REFERENCES TO THE WAR IN HEAVEN IN MORMON THOUGHT

September 1830. Joseph Smith reveals Doctrine and Covenants 29, in which Satan demands God’s honor and power.

October 21, 1830. Joseph Smith completes war in heaven section of his translation of Genesis. It becomes the Book of Moses. War in heaven is transformed into a war of agency.

February 16, 1832. Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon receive “The Vision” (D&C 76), in which they see war in heaven and reveal that it continues on this earth.

November 1835. Joseph Smith completes his translation of the Book of Abraham, which discusses the premortal council in heaven, great and noble intelligences, and Satan’s competition with Jesus to be the Savior.

April 7, 1844. Joseph Smith delivers his King Follett sermon, in which he states that the war in heaven was caused when Jesus explained a plan that would not guarantee the salvation of all souls. Satan proposed an alternative plan that would save everyone. The council votes rejected Satan’s plan and he was cast out.

November 1, 1844. Wilford Woodruff compares Sidney Rigdon to Lucifer “who made war in heaven.”

April 27, 1845. Orson Hyde compares Rigdon’s claim to the presidency to Satan’s plan to usurp power in the war in heaven. In the same discourse, Hyde proposes that those born in the “accursed” African race
“did not take a very active part on either side” of the war in heaven.

February 21, 1852. An unsigned *Deseret News* editorial warns of the spiritualist movement, citing the war in heaven and Satan’s use of “sophistry and false philanthropy.”

February 19, 1854. Jedediah M. Grant, a counselor in Brigham Young’s First Presidency, stated that, when Satan was cast out, he was given a “mission” to tempt mortal souls.

March 16, 1856. Brigham Young says that Satan’s followers were sent to earth to “try the sons of men.” Saints must work to overcome temptation by improving intelligence.

January 2, 1858. *Millennial Star* publishes Edward Tullidge’s “A Chapter from the Prophet of the Nineteenth Century,” the opening to an unfinished epic poem, which casts opposition to the Church as a continuation of the war in heaven.

August 3, 1862. Brigham Young compares the Civil War to the war in heaven: “If our Government had cast out the Seceders, the war would soon have been ended.”

May 6, 1866. George Q. Cannon uses the war in heaven to explain why Church members were persecuted.

April 8, 1871. Brigham Young states that a premortal division did not take place among resurrected beings and that rebellious spirits were allotted a portion of grace so they did not return to their “native element.”

June 6, 1880. Wilford Woodruff states that “one hundred million devils” were cast out of heaven, with “a hundred [assigned] to every man, woman and child.”

July 18, 1880. Orson Pratt says that there were prior rebellions in heaven and calculated that the number of spirits cast out “probably, cannot be less than . . . one hundred thousand millions.”

1882. In his book *Mediation and Atonement*, John Taylor suggests that Satan “probably intended to make men atone for their own acts” by shedding their own blood.

1885. B. H. Roberts hypothesizes that blacks may not have “rebelled against God” but “were so indifferent in their support of the righteous” that they were cursed.

July 14, 1889. Wilford Woodruff states that there might have been souls “astride the fence” in the war in heaven.

January 27, 1895. B. H. Roberts describes trials in this life as a sign of premortal favor.

1898. Nephi Anderson’s didactic novel *Added Upon* portrays war in heaven.
through conversations between Homan and Delsa, two premortal spirits.


1905. B. H. Roberts links the persecutions of the Saints to the continuation of the war in heaven in his introduction to Vol. 3 of *History of the Church*.

January 13, 1912. The First Presidency (Joseph F. Smith, Anthon H. Lund, and Charles W. Penrose) states: “So far as we know, there is no revelation, ancient or modern, neither is there any authoritative statement by any of the authorities of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in support of that which many of our elders have advanced as doctrine, in effect that the negroes are those who were neutral in heaven at the time of the great conflict or war.”

October 1914. B. H. Roberts defends the U.S. entry into World War I, reasoning that war in heaven proves that God does take sides in war.

April 1917. Charles W. Nibley characterizes World War I as a continuation of the struggle for freedom begun in the war in heaven.

October 1918. Apostle Melvin J. Ballard compares the German Kaiser to Satan in the war in heaven.

April 1928. Seventy Rulon S. Wells states that “Satan is abroad in the land endeavoring to lead the children of God away here as there.”

April 1930. Rulon S. Wells states that the war in heaven continues on earth and cites Russia’s enslavement under the czars turning into enslavement under the Soviets as an example.

1931. Joseph Fielding Smith’s *The Way to Perfection* states that blacks had not necessarily been neutral but “did not stand valiantly.”

April 1935. Apostle Rudger Clawson, in the context of the war in heaven, states that now “is a time for the testing of the souls of men.”

April 1939. George F. Richards repeats Joseph Fielding Smith’s idea that blacks were not valiant.

November 1940. An *Improvement Era* editorial cites the war in heaven and warns that smooth political rhetoric may entice members to give up freedoms.

1941. Nels L. Nelson publishes *The Second War in Heaven as Now Being Waged by Lucifer through Hitler as a Dummy*.

April 5, 1942. David O. McKay, second counselor in the First Presidency, cites the war in heaven as precedent for a justifiable reason to enter
war: to fight for agency.

July 17, 1947. The First Presidency (George Albert Smith, J. Reuben Clark Jr., and David O. McKay) writes to sociology professor Lowry Nelson that it has been Church doctrine to deny priesthood to blacks based on the "preexistence of our spirits, the rebellion in heaven, and the doctrines that our birth into this life and the advantages under which we may be born have a relationship in the life heretofore."

1949. A First Presidency (George Albert Smith, J. Reuben Clark Jr., and David O. McKay) statement asserts as a principal reason for denying priesthood to worthy black men the idea that they had not been valiant in the war in heaven.

August 27, 1954. Apostle Mark E. Petersen asserted that the conditions we were born into were a "reflection of our worthiness or lack of it in the pre-existent life."

1959. Bruce R. McConkie of the First Council of the Seventy publishes Mormon Doctrine in which, under the heading for "Negroes," he wrote: "Those who were less valiant in the preexistence and who thereby had certain spiritual restrictions imposed upon them during mortality are known to us as the negroes."

March 18, 1961. Alvin R. Dyer, Assistant to the Twelve, defines "three divisions of mankind in the pre-existence, and when you are born into this life, you are born into one of these three divisions of people."

October 1961. Apostle Ezra Taft Benson calls "whole program of socialistic-communism" a continuation of the war in heaven. He later came to see the war in heaven in any form of "welfare government."

1964. Jerreld Newquist published Prophets, Principles, and National Survival, which claims that any "collectivist philosophy" is linked to Satan's plan in war in heaven.

1965. Hyrum Andrus's Liberalism, Conservatism, Mormonism links liberalism with "the plan proposed by Lucifer and his hosts in the war in heaven."

December 1970. Sterling W. Sill of the First Council of the Seventy termed Christ "the greatest of military men" since he led forces against Lucifer in the war in heaven.

April 1972. Harold B. Lee warned that those who demand the right to do as they please are "echoing the plan of Satan."

1977. Carol Lynn Pearson and Lex de Azevedo's musical play, My Turn on Earth, contains two numbers focusing on the war in heaven: "I Have a Plan" and "Shout for Joy."

April 1989. Apostle Russell M. Nelson summarized the war in heaven and
commented, “Satan’s method relies on the infectious canker of contention.”

October 1995. In the context of denouncing homosexuality, Apostle Dallin H. Oaks warned: “A person who insists that he is not responsible for the exercise of his free agency because he was ‘born that way’ is trying to ignore the outcome of the War in Heaven. . . . We are responsible, and if we argue otherwise, our efforts become part of the propaganda effort of the Adversary.”


October 2001. According to James E. Faust (second counselor in Gordon B. Hinckley’s First Presidency), the war in heaven “rages today ever more fiercely,” and priesthood holders are “marshaled into the great army of righteousness to combat the forces of Lucifer.”

October 2001. Speaking in general conference of 9/11, President Gordon B. Hinckley warned members: “War, contention, hatred, suffering of the worst kind are not new. The conflict we see today is but another expression of the conflict that began with the War in Heaven. . . . Treachery and terrorism began with [Satan]. And they will continue until the Son of God returns to rule and reign.”

May 2003. President Gordon B. Hinckley linked the war on terrorism to the war in heaven.

March 11, 2008. BYU faculty member Terry Ball told his BYU devotional audience that God “sent us to earth at the time and place and circumstances that would best help us reach our divine potential.”

November 2008. President Gordon B. Hinckley says we are winning the continuation of the war in heaven.

November 2008. Elder James Hamula of the Seventy instructed young men: “We are entering the final stages of a great war.”

October 2009. President of the Twelve Boyd K. Packer, speaking of the war in heaven, asserted that we must use agency wisely or we will “find ourselves yielding to the enticements of the adversary.”

October 2009. Apostle Quentin L. Cook urged members to fight for moral principles and religious freedom because, “since the war in heaven, the forces of evil have used every means possible to destroy agency and extinguish light.”

January 12, 2010. Popular conservative talk show host Glenn Beck links his progressive agenda with Satan’s plan on his nationally syndicated ra-
dio program and returns to the same theme on February 4, 2010, and July 9, 2010.

October 2010. Apostle Henry B. Eyring says that “those who lost the blessing of coming into mortality lacked sufficient trust in God to avoid eternal misery.” Apostle M. Russell Ballard cites the war in heaven to warn of Satan’s desire “to exploit and ensnare us with artificial substances and behaviors of temporary pleasure.” Apostle Robert D. Hales said that those who became mortal “chose to have faith in the Savior Jesus Christ” while those who followed Lucifer did not. Apostle Quentin L. Cook spoke of the “assault on moral principles and religious freedom” as a continuation of the war in heaven. President Dieter F. Uchtdorf said: “Pride was the original sin” that “felled Lucifer, a son of the morning” and that if pride could corrupt “one as capable and promising as this, should we not examine our own souls as well?” And President Thomas S. Monson warned that “none would be any wiser, any stronger, any more compassionate, or any more grateful if [Satan’s] plan were followed.”

October 2011. President Boyd K. Packer reviewed the “war in heaven” in which “Lucifer rebelled and, with his followers, was cast out into the earth” where he tries “to control the minds and actions of all.” However, “the outcome of this battle that began in premortal life is not in question. Lucifer will lose.”