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# BY COMMON CONSENT

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## APRIL CONFERENCE CRITIQUE

Count the changes since October conference: the calling of Henry B. Eyring into the First Presidency to replace the recently deceased James E. Faust, the death of President Hinckley, the accession of Thomas B. Monson at Church president (to absolutely no one's surprise), and the calling of Apostle Dieter Uchtdorf as the new second counselor, while President Eyring took the first counselor's place formerly occupied by President Monson. In short, the First Presidency line-up, so to speak, will present some novelties at April conference.

But will the emphasis be on new initiatives and fresh voices, or will this new First Presidency concentrate on presenting a seamless transition and a virtually imperceptible continuation of the accustomed? Furthermore, since a new apostle will be appointed at this conference, will President Monson follow President Hinckley's precedent and appoint a non-North American? And will he go outside the Quorums of Seventy to do it?

Observe, take notes, and participate in the Mormon Alliance's semi-annual confer-

ence critique Monday, April 7, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. in the Salt Lake Public Library. We will be meeting in one of the conference rooms on the lower level (right side of the main corridor running east-west from the elevator). Take the elevator just inside the east plaza-level entry and go down one floor. Janice Allred will lead this freewheeling and insightful exchange.

The best parking (though not free) is in the lot under the building. Go east on Fourth South and turn right at the mid-block entrance between 200 East and 300 East.

## OCTOBER 2007

### CONFERENCE CRITIQUE

Participants at the Mormon Alliance's semi-annual Conference Critique were intrigued by the appointments of Henry B. Eyring as a counselor in the First Presidency and by Elder Quentin Cook's elevation to fill the vacancy in the Quorum of the Twelve. Although nobody had predicted Elder Eyring's appointment, one participant commented, "I thought President Hinckley would pick one of the young ones, so it makes sense." Although calling a seventy-four-year-old man young seems counter-intuitive, "it's all relative," and

he's a full generation younger than the ninety-seven-year-old President Hinckley who appointed Eyring to the Quorum of the Twelve twelve years ago--his first apostolic appointment as Church president. President Hinckley drew a laugh from the Conference Center attendees by tapping Eyring on the head with his famous cane in an "I dub thee knight" gesture.

Participants agreed that President Eyring's two talks were "unusually good and distinctly pastoral." "He rose to the occasion. He sounded presidential," commented one observer.

An interesting fact was that President Hinckley did not issue the callings to either man until Thursday afternoon, barely 36 hours before the conference session in which they were sustained. "He obviously didn't want any leaks." Another is the impression that the appointments were definitely Hinckley's choices although, historically, depending on the Church president, the Quorum of the Twelve has had some input. One participant remembered that Spencer W. Kimball, as a new apostle, was asked with other quorum members with nominate two men for a vacancy. These nominations then went to the Church president at the time, either George Albert Smith or David O. McKay. Another interesting fact is that, although Elder Cook met personally with President Hinckley, Elder Eyring's call was apparently issued over his cell phone while he was outdoors.

President Hunter had called Elder Jeffrey R. Holland to the Twelve as soon as a vacancy occurred, but delaying these two callings until conference was not necessarily seen as a departure from that pattern.

One participant had been in Elder Eyring's ward at Stanford University and recalled him as a good bishop, kindly and concerned about the students. The Eyrings were then living in a

lavish house "on a hill in Atherton, big enough that we were holding a ward party there the night that I got my mission call," he recollected. "But it was a temporary arrangement, not a house they owned."

Despite obvious emotion that occasionally choked President Eyring up, those who watched the press conference with the new appointees commented on President Eyring's obvious good humor, wit, ease with the press, and a quality defined as "deftness." For example, when a San Diego reporter asked the first question (about gay rights and marriage), President Eyring simply alluded to the Church's known position on that issue; and when another reporter asked about Mitt Romney's campaign, President Eyring rejoined, "It'll be interesting to wait and see how that develops." The consensus was that he displayed the same ease with the media that has become President Hinckley's hallmark. "Maybe President Hinckley sees him as continuing to fill that role in the First Presidency after he himself is gone," speculated one. "Maybe he thinks that's who President Monson needs when he's church president." (President Monson, of course, can choose his own counselors, but it's rare for a counselor not to be retained by the next president if his health is good.)

One participant had attended Utah State University at the same time as Elder Cook and recalls him as "a cheerleader type, bouncing around campus, high-energy, skinny, and wiry." An email participant recalled gleefully that her father, Elder Cook, and a couple of friends went on a roadtrip to Las Vegas with an older brother's filched ID. "The security people happened to notice that they all had the same name, address, and birth date, and they told them to get lost. So, Quentin went on to be a lawyer and my dad a doctor. Who would have guessed they could be so dumb?"

His talk was seen as "very appropriate to the occasion--a time to thank everyone, look back, pledge to do your best."

Janice Allred, moderator of the lively discussion, noted that there were more talks than usual in this conference (31), meaning that the seventies who spoke had less time than previously. "The international presence was more pronounced," commented another participant. "More accents, more new faces, many more stories about conversions or growing up in poverty, or dealing with cultural circumstances that were out of what we've come to see as the conference mainstream." Participants agreed that these talks were, for the most part, interesting and inspiring.

Janice also did her usual categorization of talks into institutional (16), Christian living (8), and doctrinal (an "unusually high" 5). In the latter category were Elder Holland's defense of Mormon views of the godhead and President Monson's on the resurrection. "Even though it was primarily an extended two-part personal story, and President Monson nearly always talks on Christian living, there's no way to 'live' the principle of the resurrection," Janice explained. Elder Hales's talk on personal revelation, in contrast, was really support of the Church as an institution since all of his examples were of inspiration in the selection of stake presidents. "I assumed that its purpose was to assure listeners that revelation had been employed in choosing Elders Eyring and Monson," commented one participant.

Elder Holland's talk generated considerable interest, particularly in company with Elder Ballard's, which seemed to focus on instructing members in how to define Mormonism proactively rather than defensively (against the "you're not Christian" accusation). Both were seen as examples of "branding." Elder Ballard seemed to deliberately downplay doc-

trinal differences. "Doctrine is hard to talk about clearly and succinctly," acknowledged one participant. "It's things like the Book of Mormon, the First Vision, polygamy, the plan of salvation, exaltation to godhood." "And let's face it," chimed in another, "to most people, doctrine is irrelevant. They want peace. They want something that will help them and their families."

Elder Holland's talk was, however, seen as a departure from the general trend of past conferences which have stressed elements Mormonism shares with the Christian world. It got points for being "a serious and responsible look at the Mormon doctrine of the godhead" but some viewers raised questions about what seemed to be his "exasperated" tone at dealing with the accusations of not being Christians and for sidestepping elements in the Book of Mormon that seem best explained as trinitarian.

One participant commented that the real issue is not the doctrine but its consequences. Will one church accept the baptism of another? Mormonism won't. Can Mormons claim to be "saved" according to evangelical criteria? Mitt Romney in his suspiciously conveniently timed *Newsweek* article said that he accepted Jesus as his "personal Savior," language not characteristic of Mormons but a phrase that Elder Ballard repeated. One participant who spent some years in the Midwest said that he routinely answered "are you saved?" questions by saying "yes" and giving the date of his baptism. He also commented that he had carpooled with a Presbyterian elder and complained to him about a local Baptist minister who was publicly accusing Mormons of not being Christian. When he told the Presbyterian the Baptist's name and church, the Presbyterian laughed and said, "Oh, him. He doesn't even think the other Baptists in town are Christian."

The question came up about whether Elder

Holland's talk was more closely linked to President Hinckley's address, largely a repeat of his 2007 conference address during the Joseph Smith bicentennial, which stressed Mormonism's uniqueness. "Both talks seemed quite aggressive. It's as if we've worked for years to get into the Christian tent," commented one observer, "and now that we're sitting there, we're saying, 'But we're different from you--and better, because we're right and you're wrong.'"

"Yes," commented another participant dryly. "It hardly seems like the Christian thing to do somehow."

When the discussion moved to the address of Relief Society general president Julie B. Beck, stressing the importance of motherhood, both the volume and the energy in the room accelerated. Janice Allred, mother of nine who has never been employed outside the home, praised President Beck's "sincere" voice ("she didn't simper") and also her "courage" in tackling such a problematic topic, but agreed that the talk was unsatisfactory in several ways.

One (male) participant expressed vigorous delight at the "forthright" defense of motherhood. "The basic message was that women are in charge of the next generation, and that's always been true. Fathers have a very small role by comparison." Another (male) participant acknowledged the truth of the previous speaker's comment by looking at "evolutionary biology" but noted that "we're in a transitional period now where we're trying to get fathers to make more contributions than being a sperm donor."

An email correspondent (father of several daughters) called the address an example of "the Plan of Sappiness" and dismissed it as "simplistic, emotionally based nonsense." He took particular umbrage at focus on problems that were trivial compared to the literal life-

and-death risks to children "in Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan, Congo, Rwanda and a hundred other locations around the world where children are caught up daily in the crossfire of warring adults. [President Beck] would set all right again with...white shirts and missionary haircuts!"

Another email correspondent, mother of a toddler and pregnant with her second child, provided a list of problems with which most participants agreed:

1. The young mothers, who are most likely to take her words seriously, without a grain of salt, are the least likely to be able to do what she advises. (She listed the demands of young children, time-consuming callings, their status as, in essence, single mothers during waking hours because their husbands were also juggling full-time jobs or studies plus "time-consuming leadership callings.")

2. It's pretty much an upper-middle-class, First World privileged point of view that says women actually have free time and energy to get all of this work done. (Others pointed out that President Beck made several unlikely assumptions: that all Mormon women were married and, furthermore, to men whose incomes were sufficient to support wives and children. The accompanying visuals of modern, well-equipped kitchens, and double-paned thermal windows reinforced the image of assumed affluence.)

3. It sends a subtle message to LDS women that if they're not better homemakers than their benighted Gentile acquaintances, they really aren't living up to all of the righteousness standards. One woman pointed out that the "emphasis on custodial duties" seemed to focus on the wrong area, if what Sister Beck meant to communicate was the importance of parental influence on a child's development. Another agreed, pointing out that involving children in



doing the laundry or working in the garden shouldn't be ends in themselves, but rather occasions for quality time together. "Children really enjoy helping with chores." "Yes," agreed another wryly, "and that stage usually comes just before they get any good at it."

While no one argued that housekeeping wasn't important or that children shouldn't work with parents in household maintenance, others found the idea of a chore-driven, curriculum-heavy "pre-MTC" home environment unappealing. Other problem areas were the absence of husbands/fathers from the talk, the lack of historical awareness that teaching values has been assigned particularly to women since the days of the early United States ("republican motherhood"), and the fact that current housekeeping standards were largely created in the 1950s as a consumer mentality driven by advertising with the result that time spent on housekeeping went up, not down, as "labor-saving devices" proliferated.

Single women participants commented that it reinforced the already strong message that motherhood is not only women's most important role but, by implication, her only role. "The Mormon lifestages exclude us. You matter when you're a youth, then when you get married and have kids, then when you and your husband are couple missionaries. But right now, you don't matter." Another pointed out that this talk "makes targets" of young couples who do not yet have children and validates others in asking "intrusive personal questions" about their parenthood plans.

Despite this laundry list of problematic areas, most participants agreed that the problems wasn't what Sister Beck had said as much as "what--and who--she'd left out." "The fact that she went back more than twenty years to pick up quotations from President Benson says that we've had a generation of greater sensitiv-

ity to and recognition of women's diverse circumstances," commented one participant. "Maybe when it's Sister Beck's turn to speak again in three years after she's talked to a lot more women and logged a lot more time outside Utah, we'll see a shift."

One participant who had followed part of the voluminous discussion on this thread on [feministmormonhousewives.org](http://feministmormonhousewives.org) was puzzled that some posters seemed to see Elder Oaks's talk on good-better-best as countering Sister Beck's talk. "It just seemed like more things to feel guilty about." Another older participant gloomily said, "I destroyed my life trying to do everything the Church told me to do. I always felt guilty. I was never good enough--and now I'm supposed to be not only better but the best?" An email participant saw it as adding "a new level of guilt" to members who already think they should "earn their way" into heaven. "The problem is, every time we have a change of bishop or stake president or YW leader, the definition of 'best' can change, leaving us forever on a treadmill to exaltation." He reported that his teenage daughter was "filled with guilt" by this talk, wondering if she should give up sports "which she loves" to attend more "poorly planned" Young women activities.

Another participant saw in it an example of the analogy used by Elder Daniel K. Judd of trying to attract horses on the farm by rattling dirt in the bucket instead of grain. Still others thought the talk was "great" and encouraged listeners to use it to "decide what's best for you. Maybe it's staying home and reading a good book."

Relatively few had seen the women's general meeting, but Silvia H. Allred's talk had been appreciated "as another Latina voice" and its "real-life examples" of visiting teaching. Was Barbara Thompson's appointment an indication that "there's now a 'single' seat in the Relief

Society general presidency? And here's a woman who has spent her career working with children who need intervention. Maybe she'll inject more realism into policy making." Sister Beck's talk on the importance of motherhood was seen as the introduction to the theme she followed up with in her general session.

President Packer's address seemed "very dissonant. He was talking about the basic equality of all members--which is good--but he's someone who insists on being treated with complete deference and immediate obedience." One participant wondered if it was a "sour grapes" talk because he wasn't selected as the new counselor. Another found startling his admission that, after hints for years that he had had a personal manifestation of the Savior, he "all but admitted that he hadn't."

Concern was expressed about Elder Wirthlin's tremor that developed to serious proportions while he spoke. About seven minutes from the end of the talk, Elder Nelson stood behind him, gripping his arm to steady him. "Elder Wirthlin was saying some really lovely things about unconditional love," commented one observer, "and Elder Nelson was the person who wrote that *Ensign* talk in which he argued that God doesn't love us unconditionally. So I found his behavior ironic." Added another participant, "I thought it was a great sermon in itself. In fact, I can't remember what he spoke on, but I'll remember what he did."

The music, although occasionally excessively slow in tempo, had been a highlight of the conference for nearly everyone, particularly the solo section and the numbers that were not just hymn arrangements. "And there were no talks on why we sing only hymns," approved one participant.

A trend that conference-watchers want to observe in the future is "what seems to be a greater acceptance of becoming emotional

while speaking. President Eyring has always been someone who chokes up, but there seemed to be quite a number of similar reactions in this conference. Is this trend intensifying?" One participant reported sociologist Armand L. Mauss's observation that, when he grew up, a set of scriptures always adorned the pulpit at sacrament meeting. "Now it's always a box of Kleenex."

Although Sister Beck's talk was unquestionably front-runner for "worst talk," there were several candidates for "best talk," including both of President Eyring's, and also Bishop Richard Edgley's talk which not only quoted humorist Robert Kirby (without using his name) but supplied numerous examples of neighborly service.

Unlike previous conferences, there seemed to be less emphasis on pornography, although those attending priesthood meeting said that speakers in that session included frequent warnings against internet porn.

Some conversations continued after the meeting had formally closed. Elder Michael J. Teh received kudos, not only for his personal account of the transformation of "Uncle Fred" but for his pleasant demeanor and his quotation from C. S. Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters*. Another participant quipped that Elder Steven Snow's characterization of his mother as "the travel agent for guilt trips" could apply to Sister Beck as well. The "shoe" art accompanying both Elder Oaks's and especially Elder Enrique R. Falabella's touching first-person account received special mention. Another participant commented that although he appreciated Elder Octaviano Tenorio's personal experience at the death of his first daughter, he could not see himself reacting so calmly "just because my wife and I were sealed."

## "You Are the Light of the World"

Harry Robert Fox

This statement was made by Jesus to a group of disciples on whom he had just bestowed his Beatitudes as recorded in Matthew 5:1-12. Notice that he did not say, "you *ought* to be the light of the world" but rather "You *are* its light." Yet most preachers on this subject have treated Jesus's statement as an "imperative" (authoritative command) rather than as an "indicative" (statement of fact). So we must ask: Why was Jesus able to speak thus to his disciples?

The answer must be found in the Beatitudes-context which preceded the statement in question. Those Beatitudes were spoken in the indicative mood rather than in the imperative. That is, instead of telling his hearers what they ought to be, Jesus, in his Beatitudes, spoke and *related* to his hearers so lovingly and graciously that they were transformed into radiant lights, lit up\* with joyful gratitude for what Jesus had just said and done for them.

It was to these radiant, glowing hearers that Jesus proceeded to deliver the remainder of his Sermon on the Mount in the imperative mood. Only after he had richly bestowed on them his indicative Beatitudes did he then tell them what God required of them--even to loving their enemies! Thus, someone has observed that all of God's imperatives are based on his indicatives. This applies even to the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20). In the first verse of that chapter, God reminds his people of all he had done for them in delivering them from

Egypt before commanding them to obey his commandments. Thus, God consistently bestows His grace-gifts on us *before* He commands our faith-obedience.

Notice how this order operates in the epistles of Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and Hebrews, each of which is divided into two sections. The first section is devoted to an articulation of God's gospel of grace while the second section is devoted to the faith-response which is elicited by that gospel. In this connection, we are reminded of the Apostle Paul's question in 1 Corinthians 4:7: "What do you have that you did not receive? If, then, you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?"

The most impressive of God's gifts is the astonishing truth that, long before any of us had adequately believed in God or repented of our sins or asked for forgiveness, God forgave us at the precise moment in which we crucified His Son on the Cross! In other words, according to Romans 5:10, "while we were [His] *enemies* we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son"--not when we were his obedient friends but were His disobedient enemies. Could there possibly be any other information that would "light us up" more than this?--and transform us into His obedient children? Such radiant people are indeed the light of the world, so sorely needed in today's darkness.

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\*The context for this phrase is Acts 2:13, in which those who heard the apostles on the day of Pentecost commented: "These men are full of new wine." Their statement recognizes that these apostles were radiantly ecstatic with joy regarding the good news they were proclaiming. Thus, they were practicing what the Apostle Paul said in Ephesians 5:18: "Be not drunk with wine . . .

but be filled with the Spirit." By this he meant, "Be Spirit-intoxicated" rather than "wine-intoxicated."

## The Thirteen Postulates

*Rustin Kaufman*

A certain man who grew up in Salt Lake City as the member of another faith moved to the East Coast where he was astonished to discover that members of his congregation knew nothing about the correct responses to Mormon claims and didn't care much when he tried to explain them. Confused and upset, he moved back to Utah. He was Mormonized.

Following are Thirteen Mormon Postulates that he disputed:

1. Hordes of wild Indians slaughtered the victims of the Mountain Meadows Massacre.
2. Adam and Eve lived in Missouri.
3. Jesus drove the money-changers out of the temple twice.
4. The presently constituted Book of Mormon was translated from plates.
5. Early in the Christian Era there was a "Great Apostasy" after which a just God abandoned his children for at least 1500 years.
6. The DNA of *some* American Indians matches up well with the peoples of the Pales-

tine Area.

7. Those Indians (of the Book of Mormon) lived in an area (as yet undiscovered) which was roughly 200 by 600 miles in size.

8. Bible scholars are wrong when they say that certain passages from Isaiah quoted in the Book of Mormon were actually written by someone besides Isaiah.

9. Jesus was a polygamist who was married to many of the women mentioned in the New Testament.

10. Adam was God.

11. Brigham Young never did attempt to promote (in Southern Utah) the cultivation of certain products condemned by the Word of Wisdom.

12. The Book of Abraham was translated correctly from papyrus scrolls by the Prophet Joseph Smith.

13. One can detect the devil by shaking hands with him.

There are, incidentally, a few quasi-orthodox Mormons who disbelieve one or more of these "Thirteen Postulates." Shame on them for not holding their ground! As President Bush says, "Stay the course!"

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