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October Conference Critique

The news flash from this conference was that, for the first time since Janice Allred, moderator of the discussion, has been keeping track, "Christian living" talks edged past the previous front-runner, institutional (14 to 12 respectively). Not only have institutional talks (stressing members' responsibilities to the organization) led the pack but have done so by a very comfortable margin.

Why? Could it be President Monson's influence, since most of his talks have traditionally dealt with Christian living. Are other speakers emulating him? Another possibility was Church image. If the number of non-Mormon listeners has become larger (a hypothesis), speakers want to appeal to a broader audience.

The tie-report showed red dominating. President Monson wore red on both days. Yellow ties were briefly popular in the past, but only one golden tie appeared at this conference. President Dieter F. Uchtdorf wore light blue. Elder David A. Bednar's tie featured an unusual (for conference) bold pattern.

Leaders' health was a matter of particular interest since President Packer (born 1924) delivered his address while seated. An attendee at the dedication of new Family History Center observed that he was using oxygen with the tubing making use of his glass frames for less conspicuousness. One television watcher of conference also reported seeing oxygen lines as he spoke. President Monson, three years younger than President Packer, has diabetes but says it is under control. The succession after Packer is L. Tom Perry (b. 1922), Russell M. Nelson

(1924), and Dallin H. Oaks (1932).

As usual, conference speakers did not comment on current affairs, although Elder Marlin K. Jensen's prayer mentioned the Samoa tsunami and the Indonesian earthquake.

Another question that didn't come up in the addresses was stipends. Several participants contributed their understanding of the topic. The First Quorum receives stipends but not the lower quorums, who are limited to five-year callings. Theoretically, those for whom callings are part-time can continue to support themselves, but the reality is that sufficient wealth becomes a virtual requirement. For example, Elder Wilford Anderson, a real estate developer in the Second Quorum, has an income that allowed him to donate \$100,000 to the anti-gay marriage contest in Arizona. (See <http://www.boxturtlebulletin.com/2008/08/23/2748>). One attendee has a friend who is a Church's groundskeeper; their duties include taking care of General Authorities' yards. General Authorities also reportedly receive (voluntary) discounts on clothing and vehicles from LDS businessmen.

The women auxiliary presidents and board members have traditionally not been recompensed at all, since the assumption was that they would all be married to supportive husbands. One participant reported a possibly apocryphal story that, when Elder Oaks called Sherri Dew to the Relief Society general president, he was taken aback when she asked, "How are you going to take care of me?" The question had not come up before. (In Sister Dew's case, the answer was that she should continue with

her day job at Deseret Book.) Barbara Thompson, now a counselor in the Relief Society general presidency, is also single. Her employment situation is not known.

The Relief Society meeting on the weekend preceding conference had been "hard watching" for several women. President Henry B. Eyring, "praised" the Relief Society's history of activism in running hospitals, grain storage, and other programs but "glossed over" how it was shut down after Joseph Smith's death, the long hiatus (although it claims to have been continuous), and the fact that priesthood leaders appropriated successful programs and resources. The official version--that inspired priesthood leaders thus let the women concentrate on personal service--was cynically received by several listeners. Another found offensive his claim that the charity of Relief Society sisters is superior to that of women in other organizations because only Mormon women have made temple covenants. A third commented that the ritual deference given to the presence and leadership of priesthood leaders seems to have been ratcheted up to new heights.

Sister Ann Dibb in the Young Women's presidency was one of only two women speaking. Watchers commented on how uncomfortable it made them to see her "smiling brightly" while talking about disasters and delivering the talk at a frantic pace. She is President Monson's daughter. Michael T. Ringwood of the Seventy is a son-in-law of Elder Nelson; sons of Boyd K. Packer and Gordon B. Hinckley are also in the Seventy.

President Monson's talk in priesthood meeting was on avoiding anger and that is always wrong. Janice commented that there was no analysis of the meaning of anger or how to address it righteously. Anger arises when there is a perceived injustice--and is justified by real injustice. "We must try to find a just way to deal with the injustice," she commented. "We cannot just decide not to feel angry."

Reactions varied to Elder Jeffrey R. Holland's testimony of the Book of Mormon. One participant found it moving because she believes in the Book of Mormon both as scripture and as a history, but she was troubled by his harshness against those who lack such a testimony. "The Church is partly responsible

for making it hard for people to judge the book on its own merits," she explained. "The Church has always used the Book of Mormon as a proof that the Church is true, but the Book of Mormon is a witness of Jesus Christ, not of the Church." Others found his comments "prickly" and "defensive."

Several participants nominated Elder Oaks's talk on the relationship of law and love as the conference's worst. Janice commented that his examples undermined his analysis. One of her relatives, though a mainstream member who always likes conference, said it "gave him a bad feeling," although he was unable to explain why. Others also thought that it rang false. One participant commented that the topic was actually a pretext--a set-up to give members orders about including gay members in family activities but without completely accepting them and their partners.

One participant commented that when her children have a relationship with a "life partner," she treats them as a couple, houses them in the same bedroom when they visit, and treats the partner as a daughter- or son-in-law. One participant commented on the never-healed breach between Elder Richard G. Scott's adopted gay son and the family because of their lack of acceptance. For his part, the son also rejects the Church.

Nominated for best talk was President Uchtdorf's priesthood meeting address in which he talked about being a refugee, poor, and discriminated against. It may give young people around the world hope.

Although participants applauded the commendable internationalization of the leading quorums, the rule that they must all speak in English even when it is not their first language came in for criticism, especially given listeners' eagerness to hear from Elder Joseph W. Sitati, the first Kenyan General Authority. "Why not have them speak in their own language and provide translation for English-speakers?" asked one.

As participants drifted into the hall, a discussion arose about President Monson's impact on the Church. Is he just going around visiting the sick and speaking at funerals? What kind of an administrator is he?

Elder Bruce Hafen's address to the pre-conference Evergreen Conference "moves the Church back from reality in three areas: homosexuality is your choice, you can change, and it will all be fixed in the resurrection if you live right." (See first part of a two-part analysis by James Cartwright in this issue.) One participant proposed that maybe we should look at our gay brothers and sisters as a gift that challenges the Church to live Christian lives, not as something that needs "fixing," now or in the resurrection. Furthermore, they may be God's gift to us to understand better the nature of love.

Dialogue with Elder Hafen, Part 1: Doctrine

James F. Cartwright

Elder Bruce R. Hafen addressed the Evergreen International Conference in Salt Lake City in September 2009, posted at <http://newsroom.lds.org/ldsnewsroom/eng/public-issues/elder-bruce-c-hafen-speaks-on-same-sex-attraction> (accessed January 17, 2010), making arguments that I think can be profitably discussed in the interests of mutual dialogue. This article, the first of two parts, looks at Elder Hafen's doctrinal interpretations. Part 2 on his report of research will follow in the next issue of *By Common Consent*.

Perhaps the most problematic statement in Elder Hafen's address is: "If you are faithful, on resurrection morning--and maybe even before then--you will rise with normal attractions for the opposite sex. Some of you may wonder if that doctrine is too good to be true. But Elder Dallin H. Oaks has said it MUST be true, because 'there is no fullness of joy in the next life without a family unit, including a husband and wife, and posterity.'"

This statement is disturbing for five reasons. First, it contains a logical fallacy: the appeal to authority. It has to be true because someone--in this case, Elder Oaks--said it is true. This fallacy is best dealt with by determining whether the statement is, in fact, true. However, since a universal resurrection has not yet occurred, this question cannot be answered one way or the other.

Second, this "doctrine" maintains that men and

women attracted to those of their own sex are not now "normal." Numerous animal species, both domesticated and in the wild, engage in same-sex activities. (See, for example, Bruce Bagemihl, *Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity* [New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999], and Volker Sommer and Paul L. Vasey, eds., *Homosexual Behavior in Animals: An Evolutionary Perspective* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2006). The behavior of animals in the wild is, by definition, *natural*.

Nor are gays and lesbians "unnatural." I have always been attracted to men. I was aware of a strong attraction to maleness even as a preschool child. A turning point for me was finally recognizing that God would not change me as much as I tried to get Him to do so. He would not change me because He loves me as I am and I should do likewise. For me, being resurrected with an attraction to women would be very unnatural.

Third, Elder Hafen makes a nonscriptural assertion about the resurrection. While the doctrine of the resurrection clearly asserts that it will bring about physical perfection and immortality, the doctrinal status of same-sex attraction is far less clear. The Prophet Joseph Smith, the Savior, and the Book of Mormon prophets do not address same-sex attraction. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," asserts that "gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose" but this statement has not been canonized.

Nor is "gender" the same as sexual attraction. It usually denotes social roles appropriate to the biological sexes. As such, "gender" varies widely throughout history and among different societies. Historically, Church leaders up to the mid-twentieth century were well aware of same-sex attraction but did not find it an issue necessitating a pronouncement of doctrine. Elder Hafen's "doctrine" is a new invention.

Fourth, Elder Hafen states that only "a man and wife" will have eternal family units. Historically, the Church has always recognized monogamous marriages but it strongly asserted until 1890 that the ideal marriage form was that of a man and more

than one wife (polygamy) and still allows eternal sealings between a man and more than one woman. Sociologically speaking, "family" is not limited to "a husband and wife, and posterity" but takes many variant forms. Are these forms wrong or inadequate?

Fifth, Elder Hafen's addition of "and posterity" ignores Jesus's pronouncement on marriage: "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife" (Mark 10:7). Marriage separates children from their parents and from their siblings. The family unit is formed by spouses, not by parents and children, and not among siblings. Although children are a natural and desirable part of most marriages, the family does not cease to exist if a couple does not or cannot have children.

Elder Hafen continued: "It's true that the law of chastity forbids all sexual relations outside the bonds of a married heterosexual relationship. And while same-gender attraction is not a sin, you need to resist cultivating immoral, lustful thought toward those of either gender."

My memory of the temple's definition of "chastity" is quite different from Elder Hafen's version. That covenant for a man simply forbade sexual relations with any woman to whom he had not been "legally and lawfully" wedded; women made a parallel covenant. (This definition would have presented certain difficulties, obviously, with the historic practice of polygamy.) If a couple had premarital sex, they could be sealed in the temple a year after their civil marriage. I recall the rather specious argument that homosexuality was a sin because sex took place outside of marriage. That argument fell silent while the Church spent millions to prevent the possibility of same-sex marriage. Now that marriage is legal for lesbians and gays in some countries and states, the definition has shifted to banning sex outside a *heterosexual* marriage. Each reluctant step the Church has taken toward clarifying its position has only made clearer its rejection of gays as having any place in the Church.

My revelation that God accepts me as a gay man did not come from Satan. I was a faithful, active member of the Church. Though I had had infractions of the law of chastity in my early teen years which I had confessed to my bishop, from age fifteen, I had

lived celibately, having sex with no one, male or female. I fasted and prayed. I served as elders' quorum president, counselor in the high priests' group, Gospel Doctrine teacher, instructor in Melchizedek Priesthood quorums (elders, seventies and high priests), executive secretary, ward financial clerk, on stake boards, etc. I always paid a full tithing and other offerings, including serving thirty months as a full-time missionary for the Church. After my mission, I dated women, sought therapy, maintained a temple recommend, and used it frequently and regularly. Still I was attracted to men. The revelation came forcefully, peaceably.

Elder Hafen states: "Men (and women) are that they might have joy." I agree completely. No one should be forced, physically, emotionally, or spiritually, to live alone. "It is not good for man to be alone," the Father and Son concurred in Eden. Having parents, siblings, and friends does not cure that loneliness. In reality, single men and women in the Church as well as outside it, are alone. They no longer belong to their parents' nor to their married siblings' family units. I lived that lonely life for almost forty years as a teenager and adult, and it decidedly was not good for me to be alone.

Elder Hafen continues: "You are literally God's spirit child. Having same-gender attraction is NOT in your DNA, but being a child of God clearly IS in your spiritual DNA—only one generation removed from Him whom we call Father in Heaven. As the Family Proclamation states, 'Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.' As part of an eternal plan, our Father placed us in this world subject to death, sin, sorrow, and misery--ALL of which serve the eternal purpose of letting us taste the bitter that we may learn to prize the sweet."

Although the Proclamation on the Family asserts that gender is part of our premortal, mortal, and eternal identity, I agree. I believe that I have always been gay and that I always will be. As to the DNA argument, being a child of my mortal father does not mean I am a clone of him. We each have attributes that the other does not. I am left handed; he was not, nor was my mother nor anyone else in my immediate family. I am taller than my father, yet