

Book Reviews

BRUCE C. HAFEN. *The Broken Heart: Applying the Atonement to Life's Experiences*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1989. x; 212 pp. Index. \$10.95.

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I was reared in a Latter-day Saint home in Louisiana, where most of my boyhood friends were Protestant. Just before leaving on my mission, I asked my father—a lifelong Southerner and member of the Church—a few doctrinal questions. One question was “Dad, what does it mean to be saved by grace?” He answered quickly, “We don’t believe in that.” “We don’t?” I said. “Why not?” Without any hesitation he replied, “Because the Baptists do!” Some months ago a colleague of mine spoke to a Relief Society gathering on the topic of salvation by grace and the necessity of trusting more in the Lord and less in ourselves. He later commented to me that one sister remarked tearfully after the meeting, “This is too good to be true!” Both of these experiences show that Latter-day Saints are sometimes not comfortable with the idea of being saved by grace. On one hand, the notion strikes too close to a belief of some in salvation by grace alone. On the other hand, many of us, well conditioned by American society, are committed to the proposition that we can literally do anything we set our minds to.

However, the scriptures, especially the Book of Mormon, abound in the language and logic of grace. Until recently, though, Latter-day Saints have made few serious efforts to discuss this timely yet weighty issue. In *The Broken Heart: Applying the Atonement to Life's Experiences*, Bruce C. Hafen directs our attention to those works and labors that Christ alone can perform, those aspects of the Savior’s redeeming power that reach beyond deliverance from death or even forgiveness of sin, and those divine gifts and graces that enable us to engage with trust and optimism the disparity in our lives between the ideal and real. The book seems to build upon an address delivered to Church Educational System personnel in August 1988 and later published in the April 1990 *Ensign*. The title

of the book is an effort to tie man's offering with the Lord's. "*The Broken Heart*," Hafen writes, "has a double meaning: first, the breaking of Christ's heart at the moment of his death on the cross. . . ; second, the broken heart and contrite spirit the Savior asks each of us to place before him on the altar of sacrifice. Through the breaking of his heart and ours in these two interactive senses, the full blessings of the Atonement are realized in our individual lives" (27).

Some Latter-day Saints are prone to doctrinal confusion about grace. "We may be saved by grace," they concede, "but we are exalted by our works." Bruce Hafen addresses such fuzzy thinking by suggesting that the grace of Christ is manifest in every aspect of the Atonement—in deliverance from physical death and deliverance from fallen mortality. That is, the Savior delivers us from both the grave and ourselves—from carnality as well as from our carelessness and inadequacies. In short, the Atonement is not just for sinners: "The Atonement not only pays for our sins, it heals our wounds—the self-inflicted ones and those inflicted from sources beyond our control. The Atonement also completes the process of our learning by perfecting our nature and making us whole. In this way, Christ's Atonement makes us as he is" (29).

Hafen acknowledges early in the book that there is some risk associated with teaching that Jesus offers to compensate for our limitations if we rely wholly upon him—namely that many of us might choose to do less than "all we can do" (2 Ne. 25:23). On the other hand, he adds, "I sense that an increasing number of deeply committed Church members are weighed down beyond the breaking point with discouragement about their personal lives. When we habitually underestimate the meaning of the Atonement, we take more serious risks than simply leaving one another without comforting reassurances—for some may simply drop out of the race, worn out and beaten down with the harsh and untrue belief that they are just not celestial material" (5–6). This book has been written to offer hope. I find that it effectively accomplishes that objective.

In what I believe to be the most important contribution of this work, the author stresses that the Atonement is not merely retributive: it is not simply an offended God's means for righting wrongs, an effort by Deity to regulate and restrict and regiment the wayward. Rather, the Atonement is rehabilitative: it is a gracious act on the part of an omniloving being, an offering made eagerly which seeks to aid us in our inadequacies, to make and remake us into what we could never be without divine assistance. Early in the book, Hafen comments:

I once wondered if those who refuse to repent but who then satisfy the law of justice by paying for their own sins are then worthy to enter

the celestial kingdom. The answer is no. The entrance requirements for celestial life are simply higher than merely satisfying the law of justice. For that reason, paying for our sins will not bear the same fruit as repenting of our sins. Justice is a law of balance and order and it must be satisfied, either through our payment or his. But if we decline the Savior's invitation to let him carry our sins, and then satisfy justice by ourselves, we will not yet have experienced the complete rehabilitation that can occur through a combination of divine assistance and genuine repentance. Working together, those forces have the power permanently to change our hearts and our lives, preparing us for celestial life. (7–8)

Hafen restates and expands on the issue later in chapter 8, "Justice, Mercy, and Rehabilitation." There he reformulates the question: "Suppose some of us do not repent and, as a result, personally satisfy the law of justice by suffering in payment of our own transgressions. Would that place us in the same position with respect to our salvation and exaltation as those whose payment is made by Christ through operation of the law of mercy? If it would, why not lead a sinful life, accept the punishment for it, and still achieve salvation by our own responsibility?" (148). No, Hafen contends, such is not possible, for "we would still, then, be unable to live the laws of the celestial kingdom. Our basic nature would still be whatever it was when we transgressed the law and we became, to that extent, an enemy to God." And again, "The doctrines of grace and repentance are rehabilitative in nature. The great Mediator asks for our repentance *not* because we must 'repay' him in exchange for his paying our debt to justice, but because repentance initiates a developmental process that, with the Savior's help, leads us along the path to a saintly character" (149).

Hafen organizes the book around two scriptural types, the tree of knowledge and the tree of life. Beyond the trees' theological importance, "they also link our personal experience with the experience of Adam and Eve in ways that illuminate the connections between the Atonement and our own journey through mortality" (28). More specifically, the tree of knowledge represents the lessons of mortality, the bittersweet experiences through which we are required to pass as a vital dimension of the plan of salvation. The tree of life represents the restoration from sin and the renovation of human character, all of which comes through the mercy and grace of the Almighty. Hafen writes, "Neither tree—neither force—is sufficient unless completed by the other" (30). The tree of knowledge is associated with "all we can do" in mortality to regain the Eternal Presence, while the tree of life points toward those labors of the Lord which are beyond mortal capacity and power but are absolutely essential for our deliverance and ultimate celestialization.

Inasmuch as our trek through life is as tied to the two trees in the Garden of Eden as was that of our first parents, we must enter the “life cycle of Adam and Eve.” The author suggests three ways we enter this cycle: sin, errors in judgment, and adversity. The first refers to a deliberate choice to violate the laws of God, the second to mortal frailties or limitations and the consequent pain associated with them, and the third to those trials and vicissitudes of life that are no respecter of persons. Hafen suggests that the Atonement of Jesus Christ enables us to meet and deal with each of these, not just with sin. The Good Shepherd thereby seeks to restore all of his “lost sheep,” all of us who suffer under the burdens of disobedience, foolishness, or mortal circumstances or tragedies over which we have little or no control. The Atonement is not just for sinners:

The lost sheep are not just the people who don’t come to church. . . . The lost sheep is a mother who goes down into the valley of the dark shadows to bring forth children. The lost sheep is a young person, far away from home and faced with loneliness and temptation. The lost sheep is a person who has just lost a critically needed job; a business person in financial distress; a new missionary in a foreign culture; a man just called to be bishop; a married couple who are misunderstanding each other; a grandmother whose children are forgetting her. I am the lost sheep. You are the lost sheep. (60)

Those of us in the U.S. have developed a preoccupation with excellence during the last two centuries. Books and tapes and seminars abound. Counsel, advice, directions, charts, schemes, and planners fill the earth. Organization and effectiveness are fine. But too much goal-setting, inordinate structure, and planning can cause us to focus on ourselves unduly—on our views, our desires, our abilities, and our strengths. Such things can, if unchecked, militate against a trust in God. In chapter 5, “Two Cheers for Excellence,” Hafen expresses a similar concern. “I cannot help wondering,” he writes, “what we are doing to each other in the Church these days, as we subtly but continually reinforce in one another the assumption that tangible and visible ‘rewards’ and ‘success’ are promised those who do what is right or even those who work their hardest. Where does that assumption come from? It certainly is not taught by the gospel” (94). In addition, “it is natural to assume that when we don’t appear to be doing ‘excellently’ the perfection process is not working. But the exact opposite may be true. Our moments of greatest stress and difficulty are often the times when the refiner’s fire is doing its most purifying work” (97). Rather than issuing a blanket condemnation of excellence programs, Hafen stresses the need for perspective, for identifying and complying with the Lord’s plan for us with at least as much zeal as we would pursue a personal

program of improvement, and for seeking the approbation of God, rather than man (98–99). About the approbation of man, he warns:

However, not only is popular opinion too fickle and fleeting to serve as a reliable guide for our self-worth, but others cannot possibly know enough about our hearts and the innermost elements of our lives to judge us fairly. Also, men's standards of judgment are not sound, because they lack the perspective of eternity. Thus our dependence upon outward signs of success and our vulnerability to adverse judgments by others can divert us from establishing a relationship with the only One whose judgment ultimately matters very much. (102–3)

In chapter 9, Hafen discusses the higher blessings of the Atonement and emphasizes that “the Savior's gift of grace to us is not necessarily limited in time to 'after' all we can do. We may receive his grace before, during, and after the time when we expend our own efforts” (155–56). He distinguishes between a preparatory stage of gospel growth where our sins are forgiven and we are pronounced clean and an advanced stage wherein those higher blessings of spiritual development—the means whereby we are, in time, transformed into the image of Christ—begin to have place in our lives. He writes that such doctrines as the law of Moses and the gospel of Jesus Christ, the doctrine of spiritual rebirth, and the concept of entering the rest of the Lord point well beyond cleansing the vessel; they in fact point toward filling it with divine power. Further, he stresses that too often we stop short of the perception and the privileges that might otherwise be ours. Thus “without some breakthrough in attitude that lifts us to the plane of the higher law, we may think of living the gospel as little more than a superficial adherence to external commandments. At that limited level, we may not even recognize the Savior when he comes into our lives hoping to lead us beyond the schoolmaster that brought us to him” (161).

After writing of the Atonement and its possible effects on our spiritual maturity and outlook, Hafen turns to a consideration of “Charity and the Tree of Life” (chapter 11), another section I feel justifies reading this book. His treatment of the principle and doctrine of charity is superb. He repeatedly distinguishes between what the world denominates as noble and selfless actions and what the scriptures identify as the highest and greatest gift of the spirit. Charity, the pure love of Christ, is a gift of the spirit. We do not develop charity on our own, any more than we become proficient prophesiers by practice or marvelous healers through seeking out and administering to all the sick. Charity is a gift, a grace: “To be sure, our own internally generated compassion for the needs of others is a crucial indication of our desire to be followers of the

Savior—clearly part of ‘all we can do.’ For that reason, we must be reaching out to others even as we reach out to God, rather than waiting to respond to others’ needs until our charitable instincts are quickened by the Spirit. But even then, charity in its full-blown sense is ‘*bestowed upon*’ Christ’s righteous followers” (195–96).

Charity is not bestowed, however, simply to motivate us to serve others, noble as such a cause is. Rather, Hafen reminds us, it is given to help us become like Christ (see Moro. 7:48):

The ultimate purpose of the gospel of Jesus Christ is to cause the sons and daughters of God to become as Christ is. Those who see religious purpose only in terms of ethical service in the relationship between man and fellowmen may miss that divinely ordained possibility. It is quite possible to render charitable—even “Christian”—service without developing deeply ingrained and permanent Christlike character. Paul understood this when he warned against giving all one’s goods to feed the poor without true charity [see 1 Cor. 13:3]. President [J. Reuben] Clark understood it when he warned [in “The Charted Course of the Church in Education” in 1938] against equating man-made systems of ethics with the gospel of Christ. We can give without loving, but we cannot love without giving. If our vertical relationship with God is complete, then, by the fruit of that relationship, the horizontal relationship with our fellow beings will also be complete. We then act charitably toward others, not merely because we think we should, but because that is the way we are. (196–97)

In short, social gospel programs, though ostensibly beneficial, are in the end woefully deficient:

Religious or ethical systems whose highest good is social justice do not necessarily provide the members of a society with the opportunity for personal, individualized development of true religious character. Indeed, such systems may impede the development of individual character by assuming that man’s nature is fixed—either good or bad—and that institutional religion as a change agent should devote its attention to healing broad-scale social ills rather than to personal development. The restored gospel has a loftier and longer range purpose than this, which is empowered by forces that can change and develop the individual to the point of also solving social problems in permanent ways through the aggregation of personal solutions. (197)

As with any work of this sort, there are always matters which could be discussed further, issues and questions over which the reader would enjoy a personal audience with the writer. I found certain aspects of the organization unusual and at times difficult to follow. For example, it is uncommon to have a twenty-three page introduction, followed by a brief (nine-page) prologue. In addition, though the concept of two trees—the tree of knowledge and the tree

of life—weaves its way through most of the book and serves as a type of organizing principle, occasionally I felt the connections to be strained. Along those same lines, the purpose of the epilogue (the last three pages), which basically restates in nonscriptural language the place of both trees in the plan of salvation, may be seen by some as irrelevant to the book. The epilogue seems anticlimactic, perhaps because I felt the chapter on charity had placed a touching capstone on all that had been said.

In the prologue, the author states that “this book *applies* the doctrines of the Atonement to some common elements of human experience. Thus it is more a practical book than a doctrinal one” (25). Further: “I make no claim to having fully researched and developed the theological issues this framework raises. I am acquainted enough with scholarly methods to have some idea about the scope and the rigor required to complete such a project, and I believe it is a project worth doing. But I have not done it here; that is a book for someone else on another day” (26). I personally found the book to be a sound and stimulating, doctrinal encounter. There are a few items, however, where some readers might desire further clarification. Hafen does not seem prone to draw sharp theological distinctions where others might. For example, in some places the author uses the words *sanctification* and *perfection* synonymously: “We know very little about *this process of sanctification* [he has just quoted Moroni 10:32–33], but it is clear that *we do not achieve perfection* solely through our own efforts” (17–18, italics added). Later in the book he explains that when we become just or are justified, “the demands of justice are then satisfied. This may be the ‘*justification* through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,’ which ‘is just and true.’ (D&C 20:30.) Then as a second stage, we may be ‘*made perfect*’ or *sanctified* (in addition to receiving forgiveness of our sins) as a further manifestation of the Savior’s mercy” (166, italics added). Some Latter-day Saints might be more inclined to see justification as acquittal and exoneration from sin; sanctification as the means by which we are made pure and holy, free from the effects of sin; and perfection as the process by which we ultimately become whole and entire, prepared finally to be with and like God, all through the infinite grace and goodness of God. I find myself, however, less inclined to complicate matters by forming clear and fixed and systematic theological delineations, especially when it is not always evident what the Lord intended in particular scriptural passages.

In chapter 7, “Human Nature and Learning by Experience,” the author provides excellent insight into the rather sticky problem of the nature of man. He clearly restates the uniquely Latter-day

Saint position that Adam's was a fortunate fall, that the act in Eden was not sin, but was as much a part of a foreordained plan as was the Atonement of Christ. Human agency allows men and women to chart their course and determine their fate; we are not only gods in embryo, but also perdition in embryo, depending upon our choices to follow either the Lord or Lucifer. Thus "whether man's nature is good or evil depends ultimately on the man, or the woman, and on the divine or satanic influences to which they submit" (134). The difficulty here has to do with the effects of the fall upon humankind. As Latter-day Saints we do not believe in human depravity, in an "original sin" which entails upon the posterity of Adam and Eve as a result of the fall. In the language of the Book of Mormon, people are "lost, because of the transgression of their parents" until they put off the natural man and put on the atonement of Christ (Mosiah 3:19; 2 Ne. 2:21). Further, "because of the fall [their] natures have become evil continually" (Ether 3:2). In short, I have some question as to whether men and women are really neutral by nature.

Questions that may arise when sincere Latter-day Saints read this book include, When have I done all I can do? How do I know when I have done all I can do? Can I ever do all I can do? These are appropriate queries, answers to which are implied in *The Broken Heart* but which I wish had been stated more directly. In addition, a misunderstanding may arise in the minds of many Latter-day Saints regarding Nephi's words "after all we can do." Some may conclude (erroneously) that the Lord's grace can be extended to us only after—meaning following or subsequent to—my doing all I can do. This notion is incorrect. The fact is, as Bruce Hafen seeks to show again and again, the Lord's enabling power comes to us all along the way. I feel that "after all we can do" means instead "above and beyond all we can do, it is by the grace of God that we are saved."

Nevertheless, *The Broken Heart* is an important contribution to our literature and one of the most penetrating books I have studied in some time. It deals with a subject that needs to be grasped by more Latter-day Saints. An understanding of grace is needed not only as we interact with members of other faiths who hold their own beliefs regarding grace, but particularly as we seek to come unto Christ through a deeper understanding and application of his Atonement. This is a book about hope, a book that extends hope. "Sometimes we say," the author writes, "that no other success can compensate for our failures in the home. And while it is true that no other success *of ours* can fully compensate, there is a success that compensates for all our failures, after all we can do in good faith. That success is the Atonement of Jesus Christ. By its power, we may arise from the ashes of life filled with incomprehensible beauty and joy" (22). Certainly no message could be more vital, more central, than that.