Dale Beecher

The Office of Bishop

In a revelation received 4 February 1831, Edward Partridge was called to be the first bishop in the newly formed Church of Jesus Christ. Before that time, the Church's structure consisted of elders, priests, teachers, and deacons. No one, including Joseph Smith, had any prior notion that the organization would include the office of bishop. Even ten months later, when Newel K. Whitney was also called to the office, "he did not Know at the time nor Joseph either what the position of a bishop was. Thought like the Catholics and Episcopalians a Bishop was the highest office in the church." [1]

Paul's epistles to those New Testament bishops Timothy and Titus suggest some idea of what the calling entailed. Additional revelations, as recorded in the Doctrine and Covenants, gradually gave more direction, providing a guide to explain the biblical information, and describing the responsibilities in modern terms. These scriptures, however, did not provide a manual of explicit procedures nor a chart to show where the office of bishop fit into the Church structure or what its jurisdiction was to be.

Specific instructions have traditionally confined themselves to specific situations. General Authorities have constantly admonished bishops to do their duty but have been careful not to define it too closely. Brigham Young said, "It is not for me to say what the bishops do." [2] Robert T. Burton of the Presiding Bishopric told a bishops' meeting in 1882, "Nobody can point out the detailed duties of a bishop, for circumstances are constantly arising in the various wards that need the wisdom of God to fathom and correct." [3]

Scriptural instructions show the bishop's responsibilities in four general categories: presidency of the Aaronic priesthood; stewardship over the temporal affairs of the Church; pastoral care of his members; and judicial authority over those same members. Through the first century of the Church, each of these functions underwent considerable modification as conditions changed and as bishops felt their way toward the present concept of the office.

Before 1839 there were only two bishops, Edward Partridge and Newel K. Whitney. They were "general bishops" whose jurisdiction was Church-wide, although they were also assigned regional responsibilities. Their place in church or stake organization was uncertain, and as they progressed toward an under-

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standing of the office, the scope of their activities stayed safely within the limits of what was specified in the revelations.

Then an innovation in Church organization changed the status and duties of bishops. In 1839 two new stakes were created with bishops definitely assigned to them. The Zarahemla Stake, on the Iowa side of the Mississippi, had one bishop, Alanson Ripley. The Nauvoo Stake, being more populous, had three; Edward Partridge of the upper ward, Newel Whitney of the middle ward, and Vinson Knight of the lower ward. These last three men, and later George Miller, functioned as general bishops in addition to their ward responsibilities, but after that point, all but the Presiding Bishop of the Church were set apart to serve in specific geographical areas.

Nauvoo's city charter designated municipal wards; three in 1839, thirteen in 1842. A bishop presided over each to care for the incoming Saints, many of whom were sick or destitute. These wards were thought of more as divisions of the town than of the stake. Outside Nauvoo each stake or branch (the terms were used almost interchangeably) had only one bishop.

Shortly after the death of Joseph Smith, the Twelve felt the need of a more uniform organizational structure. In August 1844 they divided the Church into districts and branches: "Bishops will also be appointed in the larger branches to attend to the management of the temporal funds, such as tithings and funds for the poor, according to the revelations of God and to be judges in Israel." [4] This announcement shows no significant change in concept, but it helped establish an organizational precedent for the future.

During the exodus from Nauvoo, even this embryonic structure was put aside temporarily. Bishops had no specific responsibilities on the trek except at the more permanent settlements on the Missouri. For example, at Council Bluffs in July 1846 over eighty men, some already ordained bishops, were called as acting bishops to care for the families of Mormon Battalion volunteers.[5] A list of their names was posted and Battalion "widows" were invited to pick out the one under whose care they wished to be.

After a few days' attempt to make this work, the Twelve recommended that the Pottawattamie High Council divide the needy of the camp by areas with bishops assigned to them. A few weeks later the Municipal High Council of Winter Quarters divided the town into thirteen wards, each with an ordained bishop. By the end of the year there were twenty-two wards. All of the outlying camps had bishops or acting bishops. In 1847 the Pottawattamie High Council became a stake organization and its bishops presided over units designated as wards and branches.

Also in 1847 Newel K. Whitney was set apart as the first Presiding Bishop of the Church. Edward Partridge had been known only as "First Bishop." Vincent Knight had been called as Presiding Bishop (D&C 124:141) but was never set apart to that position. By 1847 they had died and George Miller, the only other general bishop, had apostatized, leaving Bishop Whitney with unquestioned seniority.[6]

In Utah the makeshift communalism of the trek rapidly gave way to a revived system of wards and branches. But while the Church still relied heavily on personal direction from the First Presidency or a resident apostle, the bishop's place in a loose administrative structure was not clearly defined. In the outlying settlements there was little contact between local bishops and the presiding bishopric. There was seldom a specific mandate of authority or responsibility.

Two organizational innovations tried to bring order to this untidy system. The first was an attempt to divide responsibilities along priesthood lines. The second gamely tried to bridge the gaps in frontier communications with supernumerary bishops.

The first innovation tried to relieve one man from the responsibility for everything in a settlement/branch, which was thought to be an excessive burden as well as an imprecise use of the priesthood. Before the exodus, larger branches outside the stakes were organized with a presidency to take care of Melchizedek Priesthood functions and a bishopric to handle Aaronic duties. In the 1850s a number of Utah branches were set up this way as models.

The system did not work. Both bishop and president were to preside over the ward, each in his own sphere, but the spheres were not clearly defined, and contentions developed from the beginning. Matters of conflicting jurisdiction or prerogative would have the two officers struggling to defend their territory or to achieve a dominant position, often with branch members taking sides.

Opposition to the presidency of Joseph Heywood in Nephi is an example. A petition to replace him was circulated, and an election for president was held. Bishop Jacob Bigler won and, with the approval of higher authorities, took on both jobs. The question arose of "his requiring two counsellors extra of the two he had in the bishopric — and he gave it as his opinion that he needed them not, that the two offices were so intimately connected that except presiding at meetings his duties would be as usual. He could not see that there was one hairs difference between the offices — he would even split the hair and say there was not that much difference." [7]

The issue came to a head in the general conference of April 1862. Brigham Young, Daniel H. Wells, George A. Smith, and Orson Hyde all spoke forcefully on the subject.[8] They explained, exhorted, accused, and said that in failing with this system the branches were depriving themselves of an inspired organizational device and of some of the blessings of the Melchizedek Priesthood. But it was already too late. By that time the presidencies of several contentious units had been released without replacement. Little was heard of the ward president idea after that time.

The other innovation was the appointment of specialized bishops. Beginning in the early 1850s, the Presiding Bishopric sent out a handful of "travelling bishops" to counsel with the local bishops. They instructed them in accounting and record keeping, in handling tithes and in their duties generally, and reported their findings and progress to the Presiding Bishopric.[9]

This device helped, but it was sporadic at best and did not solve the problems inherent to distance and isolation. From the early 1850s regional presiding bishops were installed in the populous counties away from Salt Lake. The precedent for this position dated back to 1847 in Kanesville, Iowa, under the

Pottawattamie High Council, but now it was institutionalized. An idea of this office is found in a letter of 1870:

> Bishop Samuel F. Atwood, you are hereby appointed and assigned as Presiding Bishop to repair to, and take charge of, and preside over the settlement in Kamas Prairie and on the Weber River, as far north as Wanship, including that place, and also the settlements in Parley's Park and Silver Creek. . . . You will look after and see to the settlement and collection of tithing and taking care of the public property; counselling and guiding the local bishops; settling difficulties between brethren; seeking to inspire the people to unions of effort, interest and practice in their lives, and generally to attend to, and transact business pertaining to the temporal interests of the Church in that region of country over which you are called to preside. . . .
>
> Brigham Young, Geo. A. Smith, Daniel H. Wells.[10]

This was still patchwork organization, however, and results depended more on personality than on system. In the last year of his life, Brigham Young recognized that a large and growing church could no longer be run from one office or by force of personality. He determined to rectify the situation and regularize Church administration while he could.

An address of Orson Pratt defined the reorganization in 1877. Citing the example of men who for years had acted as bishops without ordination or counselors, he observed that circumstances had always required alterations in the system as well as adaptations within it. The renovation then in progress would bring about, "as far as we have knowledge and understanding, a more perfect organization throughout the Church." [11]

This more perfect structure divided the Utah settlements into stakes, each with several wards. Each ward was to be "thoroughly organized with a bishop and two counselors — who must be high priests and set apart to preside as the bishop and two counselors and with the priests, teachers and deacons assigned their duties by the bishops as ministers to the wards." [12] The Melchizedek Priesthood of a ward came under the direction of the bishop in all things except quorum duties. Thus he was also given the position of presiding high priest in his ward, and the idea of a separate ward president was laid to rest.

Calling special bishops also ended at that time. The circular outlining the reorganization says: "In consequence of it having been thought more convenient in some of the stakes for the tithing to be concentrated in one place, and for one bishop to receive reports from others and keep charge of the tithing, etc., the idea has grown up that such a bishop is a presiding bishop, and in many places he has been so regarded. This idea is an incorrect one." [13] Clearly, this explanation shows a change in policy, not just the correction of an erroneous idea. It abolished the local presiding bishops and established the precept that there is but one Presiding Bishop in the Church. The regional presiding bishops were retained for several years as "agents" of the Presiding Bishopric, then were finally replaced by stake tithing clerks.

Early in Mormon history there was some question whether any bishop could preside over the lesser priesthood or whether that authority were reserved for the literal descendants of Aaron himself. Scriptural references are indefinite but were evidently interpreted to mean that the calling covered anything Aaron could do. In a meeting in Kirtland in 1836, "Bishop W[hitney] proceeded to nominate pres[iden]t[s] for the Priests, Teachers, and Deacons. He then ordained them." [14]

In Missouri two years later a "conference of teachers met by order of the high council under the direction of the Bishop, he being authorized to organize the lesser Priesthood." [15] This is the first mention of Bishop Partridge in the teachers' record, and the extent of his contact with the quorum is not known. Even at this meeting, nominally under his direction, he was not present and the quorum elected its own officers, thus setting a precedent for an informal direction of the Aaronic Priesthood by the bishops which was accepted as a de facto presidency.

In 1841 the Aaronic Priesthood of Nauvoo was placed under the leadership of Bishops Whitney, Miller, Higbee, and Knight.[16] Quorums as yet were not affiliated with wards. At the same time in Kirtland, Nehemiah Greenhalgh was elected president of the lesser priesthood of that stake rather than Bishop Thomas Burdick, although the bishop subsequently reorganized quorums of deacons and teachers, an apparently glaring error in procedure that went unquestioned.[17]

This seemingly tentative relationship continued through the pioneer era. The bishops used the teachers' quorums as their prime working arm but did not instruct them in their priesthood callings. The other quorums were set up on a stake or regional basis, if at all, and were outside the bishop's jurisdiction. The membership of the Aaronic Priesthood was almost exclusively adult, and the pioneer bishop had little to do with its supervision.

In the 1877 reorganization the "proper order" was clarified, at least in theory. In his keynote address, Orson Pratt said that President Young had received a revelation to "introduce the more perfect organization of the Aaronic Priesthood, as is revealed in the Doctrine and Covenants." [18] A few months later the Twelve sent a circular to all bishops outlining their duties to teach and actively preside. President Joseph F. Smith reinforced this instruction in a 1907 talk, in a circular letter in 1909, and in *Improvement Era* articles from 1912 to 1917.[19] By that time the modern priesthood role of the bishop was fairly well defined.

A judge of ancient Israel held a multi-faceted position, including administration, defense, and the judicial functions of a high magistrate. The latter-day bishop has been expected to carry on this one-man government in his own area of assignment, always under Melchizedek Priesthood direction.

The magisterial capacity was defined in Doctrine and Covenants, sections 58 and 102. Before the exodus there was "High Council upon High Council, Bishop's trial upon Bishop's trial," [20] using somewhat the same procedural format that has been in force ever since. However, with so few bishops covering so much territory and such a variety of disputes and offenses, it was impossible for a bishop to be present at each hearing and no permanent patterns were established.

With the repeal of the Nauvoo city charter early in 1845, civil order began to deteriorate. For the next several months the peace was kept by the "whistling and whittling brigade," composed of acting deacons led by bishops, some of whom were set apart specifically for the purpose. The assignment came partly because the wards were the only active organizational units, but also because it was an appropriate function of the bishops' magisterial role.

At the settlements on the Missouri River, that role was further expanded. On the Iowa side, the laws of the new state had not reached the western frontier, so the high council empowered the bishops to act as civil as well as ecclesiastical judges. In 1849 Bishop Jacob Bigler "was elected justice of the peace, and the following year was elected probate judge of Pottawattamie County." [21] When a complaint arose in Winter Quarters, "Brother D. A. Miller was instructed to choose him a counsel and acting as bishop attend to the above case and all such as shall come under his notice. He was ordered to give notice to the other bishops on this side of the river to organize their courts to do business." [22] The bishops adjudicated matters of personal conduct, settled disputes, and tried such criminal cases as theft and counterfeiting. They often tried to conciliate in criminal cases as they would in a dispute, having the offender make restitution, but they also levied fines, disfellowshipped, excommunicated, and in rare cases ordered whippings.

The system continued in pioneer Utah. In the fall of 1847, the high councils of Salt Lake and Kanesville, acting on their own authority, enacted tentative statutes pending establishment of a more complete government. Non-Mormons passing through Utah also made use of the bishops' courts, sometimes turning to them as the only judiciary available, and sometimes being called before them for allowing livestock to stray or for other offenses.

This system was generally satisfactory, but there were complaints, usually about the extralegality of the bishop's court. Largely because of this tenuous authority and a growing case load, the state of Deseret formed in March 1849 had judges among the first officers elected. Judicial districts were laid out to coincide with ward boundaries, and the bishops were duly voted in as magistrates or justices of the peace.

The bishops took every case until 1850 when the state supreme court was given original jurisdiction over the more serious cases. County courts were created a few months later.[23] When the territorial government took over in 1851, all civil cases were turned over to county or federal courts, leaving the bishops as probate judges handling inheritances and divorce settlements. But when two federal judges quit their posts later that year, the probate courts were assigned original jurisdiction over all cases not otherwise provided for by the legislature. This lasted until the Poland Act of 1874 again reduced them to administering wills and estates.[24]

During this period, a priesthood quorum would often hold its own trial when the offender was a member of the group, a practice that became so prevalent that it usurped episcopal authority. Indeed, some bishops apparently delegated much of their judicial power to their teachers' quorums. In some settlements there were "teachers' trials" of civil and church cases in which the acting teachers apparently functioned as police, prosecutors, witnesses, judge, and jury. The bishops did not always preside or even attend.[25]

Changes came with the Poland Act and the priesthood reorganization of 1877. Quorum trials were discontinued, and ward teachers were charged to settle small difficulties between neighbors but refer more serious problems to the bishop. The bishop was to handle all possible disputes and transgressions, keeping them out of the civil courts if he could. His own civil authority diminished and soon disappeared. Procedure became divorced from the common law: "Each case stands on its own merits. There is no precedence. You cannot judge one man by the conduct or action of another. The inspiration of the Lord should guide you to the right course to pursue in each case." [26]

Aside from very broad guidelines of this kind, there was no standardization in church trials. Feeling this to be a disadvantage, the Nebo Stake in 1902 assigned one of its presidency, Joseph B. Keeler, to research the subject. His pamphlet, "The Bishop's Court: Its History and Proceedings," received an immediate popular response. The Church insisted that only the scriptures were authoritative and that, while such studies might be helpful, bishops should be guided by the spirit, not by a book.[27] Nevertheless, requests from wards and stakes were so numerous that from 1921 the Presiding Bishopric included an outline of court procedures in the annual instructions and, in 1956, finally issued its own comprehensive guide, *Handling the Transgressor.*

By far the greatest task of nineteenth-century bishops was handling Church funds and property. The attempt to live the Law of Consecration centered upon the two general bishops in Kirtland and Missouri who received the members' consecrations, distributed their "inheritances," and supervised the storehouses of the United Order.

The bishop received, by legal title, every stick and thread owned by each participant, then deeded back to him those things needed for his family as his stewardship or inheritance. The amount returned to the participant was to be decided by mutual consent. Deadlocked negotiations went to the high council. All instruments of transfer were in the bishop's name, and he was to use all property acquired for building up the church in the area.

This accumulated capital was used first for buying land for incoming Saints. Bishop Whitney also supervised disbursements for building Kirtland and its temple. Other uses included supplying the Missouri settlers and the Church's print shop. It would appear from all accounts that Bishops Partridge and Whitney had nearly complete charge of Church finances, including budget, property, expenditures, seeking loans, etc., in their respective areas.

After the collapse of this first united order, the temporal responsibility of bishops changed radically. The law of tithing eliminated some negotiating and title transfers, but the job was still huge since, through the nineteenth century, tithes were appropriate only in kind. This meant one dollar of ten, one chicken of ten, or one bushel of ten, not a chicken in lieu of a bushel or dollar. The bishop collected all this, stored the commodities, and disposed of them. He also had to work out adjustments — nobody ever devised a satisfactory tithe in kind on eleven cows — where monetary values were assigned to items and a method of payment arranged.

Without the communal order, there was some uncertainty about the bishop's role in temporal matters other than tithing. That they bore some responsibility in such things was unquestioned, but accounting and administration were now largely done by Melchizedek Priesthood authorities. After the death of Joseph Smith, Bishops Whitney and Miller were named joint trustees-in-trust for the Church, but that calling was soon reclaimed by the Twelve.

Temporal affairs during the exodus were managed in a mild form of collectivism. Tithing was still collected where possible, but the stark necessities of physical survival forced these refugees into a new degree of cooperative effort. Those who had anything to spare turned it in to their bishops, calling it tithing, and it was distributed to those in need. An innovation to manage work projects was labor tithing, a system that lasted through the pioneer period.

Selected items from the record book of Bishop Isaac Clark illustrate the poignant story in detail:[28]

1847	*Receipts*	
Jan. 3	O. Pratt cr. by 22½ lbs. of flower	67½¢
Jan. 30	Isaac Clark cr. by one days work cutting house logs for Bishop Miller, Tithing	62½¢
March 1	Rec'd of George Lyman and A.B. Lambson three and one half cords of wood	
March 16	Daniel Allen Cr. by 3 lbs. and 10 ounces of meat	16¢
July 9	Received of Joseph Fleming five cen'ts in cash for the support of a certain boy name Henry Turner	05¢
July 9	Do. Oliver Dudley 12 lbs. of meal	12¢
July 27	Isaac Clark Cr. by 6¼ cts in salleratus	06¼¢
Aug. 25	Sarah Gibbons Cr. by 1 dress 2 aprons 1 pare of stockins	$02.25
Sept. 1	Thomas Dew Cr. by 22 hundred lbs. of hay it being his tenth	2.75
Oct. 4	Received of N.K.Whitney 1 cabbage head	02¢
	Distributions	
Jan. 3	To George A. Smith 26½ lbs. of flower for the support of some orphans in his care and a young man that is sick name of Abijah Reed	79½¢
	also 6½ lbs. of corn meal	06½¢
March 12	To Harriet Whitney one dollar in provisions by Jacob Bigler	$01.00
July 9	Distributed 29 lbs. of meal to Joseph Night Bishop in Winter Quarters for the support of the said Henry Turner	29¢

July 31	To the family of McCullough candles also 4 lbs. of flower	13¢
Aug. 16	To the widow Ann Smith one peck of meal	13¢
Aug. 29	To Ann Smith 1 dress 2 aprons 1 pare of stockins	$02.25
Oct. 4	To Ann Smith one cabbage head	02¢

As the community became settled in the Salt Lake Valley, the emergency communal economy faded away and tithing was reinstated as a regular program, evidently dating from 8 October 1848.[29] The bishops took in the produce for storage and distribution. The central storehouse received any surplus and kept track of where supplies or deficiencies existed. This remarkable but unwieldy system, held together with shaky and irregular administrative procedures, often fell short of expectations. The discourses of Brigham Young sometimes contained scathing rebukes of bishops' failure to grasp the spirit of their calling.

Labor tithing continued in the public works program, which was handled through the bishops. In a meeting of Salt Lake bishops in 1849, President Young told them to "see that every man works his tenth day" and to be at the projects themselves to ensure that no one would fail to show up, slack off, or slip away.[30] The Presiding Bishop assigned each ward its days and number of men; the ward bishop assigned the individuals. In some cases, especially in outlying settlements, cash or produce was accepted in lieu of labor.

Since the pioneer era the bishops' temporal stewardship has undergone three structural alterations. The first, another experiment of limited success and duration, was the second try at communalism. Initially, as part of the ZCMI co-op, each ward or settlement set up its own store as the main retail outlet of the system. Each store was incorporated separately with the bishop heading the board of directors. When local orders and cooperatives were established later in the 1870s they had either an elected president or a bishop in charge, but in every case the bishop was responsible for getting it organized.

The second change was the creation of the Presiding Bishop's Office to oversee policy, procedures, and administration of temporal affairs. President Young and Presiding Bishop Edward Hunter had worked together and conducted most matters personally with the aid of the county bishops; but by the 1880s this was no longer feasible. After much discussion, the Twelve "agreed on revision of system of doing Church business. Bishop's office gatherer and custodian of all funds." [31] The old, cumbersome system was overhauled and new methods were instituted for operation in a modern age.

The third shift was in the concept of tithing itself. The task of handling a great variety of produce had become so onerous, with so much spoilage, that by the early years of the twentieth century, something had to happen. The annual instructions manual revealed the trend: in 1909 it said that tithing not in kind was not in the spirit and meaning of the law, though acceptable. The 1913 edition said that "cash is always acceptable" and other commodities not in kind might also be accepted, although "not strictly a proper kind of payment." By 1923 the manual said that "tithes 'in kind' should be acceptable when offered," indicating that money had replaced goods in official favor as well as in practice. By the 1930s virtually all tithing came in as money and the bishops' job in this and most other temporal matters was largely reduced to routine paperwork.

The concept of a bishop as a shepherd of his flock or as father of the ward developed slowly. In the pre-Utah period it was largely limited to physical welfare. Again, an illustration can be drawn from Isaac Clark's 1847 record book:

March 4 — To Lewis Hulse one lb. of coffee one of sugar, six of flour

March 11 — To Doctor Bradley 30 cts in wood for attendance on Lewis Hulse

March 12 — To Asa Lyman one bushel of meal for the support of Lewis Hulse

March 15 — To Lewis Huls one pint of whiskey and brimstone

March 20 — One pint of molasses to Huls

March 21 — George A. Smith Cr. by 25 cts for the burial of Lewis Huls

In Utah the bishops were assigned to furnish wagons, teams, and teamsters to bring immigrants of straitened means across the plains. Once in Utah, these people had to be situated and looked after. An observer of the 1860s told how it was done:

> The unpaid functions of a bishop are extremely numerous, for a Mormon prelate has to look, not merely to the spiritual welfare of his flock, but to their worldly interest and wellbeing; to see that their farms are cultivated, their houses clean, their children taught, their cattle lodged. Last Sunday after service in the Tabernacle, Brigham Young sent for us to the raised dais on which he and the dignitaries had been seated, to see a private meeting of the bishops, and to hear what kind of work these reverend fathers had met to do. We rather wondered what our friends at Bishopsthorpe and Wells would think of such a scene. The old men gathered in a ring; and Edward Hunter, their presiding bishop questioned each and all, as to the work going on in his ward, the building, painting, draining, gardening; also as to what this man needed and that man needed in the way of help. An emigrant train had just come in, and the bishops had to put six hundred persons in the way of growing their cabbages and building their houses. One bishop said he could take five bricklayers, another two carpenters, a third a tinman, a fourth seven or eight farm servants, and so on through the whole bench. In a few minutes I saw that two hundred of these poor emigrants had been placed in the way of earning their daily bread. "This," said Young, with a sly little smile, "is one of the labors of our bishops." [32]

Another of the labors, as alluded to here, was to look after the Saints' spiritual welfare. This aspect of the calling was recognized but received little attention until the Reformation of 1856–1857. During that episode, many authorities "did not feel that a bishop was to be considered as a father so much as a commander in the ward," enforcing a disciplined righteousness.[33] This attitude produced a subtle change in the relationship between the bishop and his ward. He began to take a personal interest in every facet of people's lives, and the ward took on more the character of a shepherd and his flock than merely an organizational unit.

By 1860 the intimidating rigor of the reformation had worn down, but the new concept remained. President Young charged bishops to "see that all lived as they should, walking humbly with their God, attending to their prayers, observing the Sabbath-day to keep it holy, and ceasing to swear and steal. There would not be a person in his ward that he does not know, and he would be acquainted with their circumstances, conduct, and feelings." [34] Within a few years the principle was firmly established that the bishop had direct responsibility for the spiritual welfare of his ward, though now he was again acting less as a commander and more than ever like a father.

Visits to the home by the bishop or (block, ward, home, etc.) teachers representing him have always been the most personal means of spiritual guidance, but most of the bishop's spiritual influence has come through his built-in forum, the ward meeting. After 1851 the mass preaching meetings were gradually replaced by weekly ward meetings of various kinds. Except for the brief interlude when ward presidents existed, these meetings have all come under the bishop's direction. Not surprisingly, their diaries and meeting minutes show continual frustration at the problem of irregular attendance.

Another area of the ward father's responsibility to his "family" members is their intellectual and psychological welfare. In pioneer settlements, the ward provided the school, the teacher, and the extracurricular activities. With the emergence of public schools to replace ward schools, instruction in the auxiliaries and priesthood quorums expanded, technically still under the bishop's direction.

However, it is in the psychological dimension, personal counseling, that the greatest change in the bishop's work has come. Early bishops and ward teachers had worked with their charges to help preserve family harmony, overcome bad habits, reactivate faltering members, etc. Then beginning with Nauvoo's revivalist spirit, the helping hand was replaced by an admonition, a rebuke, or even a bishop's court. Until very late in the nineteenth century, Church authorities, like American society generally, attributed personal problems to a weak-willed failure to resist temptation. Only the sinful person experienced mental disorders or personal problems. Over the next two generations the General Authorities exhorted bishops to treat personal and family matters delicately and to reconcile more than punish, but the methods to be used remained hazy. Bishops' counsel nearly always took the form of a call to repentance.

As late as 1954 a member of the First Presidency could tell a Relief Society Conference, "I do not believe that the remedy for irritation and quarreling in the home is divorce. I believe that the remedy the Lord approves is repentance . . . repentance from sin in one form or another against the laws of God which makes fertile ground for dispute and contention, envy, jealousy, and hatred." [35]

In 1982 a counseling bishop comes at this kind of problem from an entirely different approach: "All marriages — happy or otherwise — have the need to manage different viewpoints, different feelings, in a manner that is helpful rather than destructive to the relationship. . . . Think how depressing it would be to think that your marriage was the only one in the world that had challenges — and lots of people *do* add guilt to their difficulties by thinking that way." [36]

The growing acceptance of psychology as a science from the 1930s has encouraged more people to go to their bishops for advice and personal counseling. Studies done at Brigham Young University show that religious leaders of all denominations have seen an increase in counseling, even when it is not part of their traditional role, and that most Latter-day Saints regard the bishop as the natural person to turn to outside the immediate family.[37] This latest development in the bishop's job has placed an extra burden on his shoulders — a gratifying burden, say bishops I have interviewed, but one that often takes more time than all the other functions combined.

The office of bishop continues to evolve. Within the last two years, the burden of upkeep on ward buildings has been shifted from the bishops to a more economical system at the stake level. The bishops have been charged with implementing a more urgent campaign for personal and family preparedness. There is now a simplified version of a bishop's duties for areas where the members are all recent converts without experience or where the level of education is low. The ways, means, and organizational patterns change frequently, albeit subtly, to meet the changing demands of a mandate whose functional concept, the physical and spiritual wellbeing of members, stays always the same.

NOTES

1. Edward Hunter in Aaronic Priesthood Minutes, Miscellaneous Minutes, 1855–1972, Presiding Bishopric Collection, 3 March 1877, Historical Department Archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, hereafter cited as Church Archives.

2. Brigham Young in Salt Lake Bishops, Minutes of Meetings, 1849–1884, 7 April 1855, Church Archives.

3. Robert T. Burton in Salt Lake Bishops, Minutes of Meetings, 1849–1884, 28 Sept. 1882, Church Archives.

4. James R. Clark, ed., *Messages of the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 5 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965–1970), 1:236.

5. Pottawattamie High Council, Minutes of Meetings, p. 5, Church Archives.

6. See D. Gene Pace, "The L.D.S. Presiding Bishopric, 1851–1888: An Administrative Study" (M.A. Thesis, Brigham Young University, 1978); and D. Michael Quinn, "The Mormon Hierarchy, 1832–1932: An American Elite" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1976).

7. Martha Spence Heywood, Journal, date, pp. 48–49, Church Archives, published as *Not by Bread Alone: The Journal of Martha Spence Heywood, 1850–56*, ed. Juanita Brooks (Salt Lake City: Utah Historical Society, 1978), p. 104.

8. See *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–86, addresses of 7 April 1862: Brigham Young, 9:280, 10:971; Daniel H. Wells, 9:299–300; Orson Hyde, 10:31; George A. Smith, 10:60–62.

9. Clark, *Messages of the First Presidency*, 2:283.

10. First Presidency to Samuel F. Atwood, 29 Oct. 1870, Brigham Young Letterbooks, Ms., p. 405 ff., Church Archives.

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