The Priesthood Reform Movement, 1908-1922

WILLIAM HARTLEY*

Most Latter-day Saints know a good deal about the duties and functions of the various priesthood quorums, but few appreciate the great effort required of past Church leaders to produce the well-ordered priesthood programs which characterize the Church today. Since the restoration of the Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthoods, the various quorums have been alive and functioning to a greater or lesser degree. But organized and systematic priesthood work as we know it today actually dates from the period of 1908-1922, when a specially called General Priesthood Committee instituted a Churchwide priesthood reform and reorganization movement under the direction of President Joseph F. Smith.

THE NEED FOR PRIESTHOOD REFORM

To fully appreciate the importance of this movement, we first need to understand the priesthood practices prior to 1908 which made reform necessary. At that time, ninety percent of the Church members lived in Utah, Idaho, and Arizona. Their stakes often covered huge geographic areas and contained as many as twenty wards or as few as three. Individual wards showed similar variations in sizes, ranging from a dozen

*Brother Hartley, a Brigham Young University Master's in history, is a historical associate in the Historical Department of the Church.

families to fifteen hundred souls. Priesthood holders numbered about 70,000 out of 400,000 total Church members.[1]

In terms of organization, the priesthood quorums generally lacked strong central direction. Presiding Bishop Charles W. Nibley stated that as of June 1908, he had "no way of becoming directly in touch with the work that was being done in the different quorums of the lesser priesthood."[2] He was soon to learn that some wards had no deacons, and many no priests, and that it was common for older men to perform Aaronic Priesthood functions. Some bishops would not ordain their young men to a particular office until there were sufficient numbers to make a quorum. Others complained that they were unable to learn of elders, seventies, and high priests ordained or disfellowshipped among their ward members. Functioning quorums held meetings weekly, or bi-weekly, or monthly, depending on local circumstances. Individual quorums in a given area frequently met on different days of the week, and rarely did many wards have regular general priesthood meetings. Most quorum meetings traditionally were adjourned during summer months, such as the lesser priesthood in one Logan ward which concluded its 1908 meetings on March 30 and did not commence again until November 2—a seven months' vacation.[3]

Priesthood activity and instruction, therefore, were dependent upon the dedication or carelessness of local bishops and stake presidents. Some stakes, such as Granite and Jordan, provided their quorums with printed, systematic lesson outlines. But more often the lesson materials were selected by the quorums themselves or by local officers, resulting in some unusual priesthood meetings by our standards. One lesser priesthood group, for example, divided its class time between religious lessons and such adventure books as *Tom Sawyer, The Jungle Book, The Call of the Wild, Pigs is Pigs,* and *Frank Among the Rancheros.*[4] In another case a lesson was given

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[1]General Priesthood Committee Minutes, 5 December 1911 (cited hereinafter as GPC), Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, (hereinafter cited as HDC). Also, Joseph B. Keeler, *First Steps in Church Government* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1906), pp. 6-7.

[2]GPC, 5 June 1908.

[3]GPC, 4 October 1910 and 27 April 1911; also, Presiding Bishopric, Policy Directives, Box I, HDC; and Logan Fourth Ward Priests Quorum Minutes 1906-1910, HDC.

[4]Logan First Ward Aaronic Priesthood Minutes 1905-1910, HDC.

on the life of United States President William McKinley—in a *Canadian* teachers' quorum.[5] In December, 1908, a deacons' quorum in Ogden "went downstairs and Brother ———— gave a lecture on Ben Hur."[6] Other bishops had their lesser priesthood members meet with the ward mutuals to study MIA lesson materials.

Despite such diverse efforts to make meetings interesting, the activity level of the lesser priesthood boys was often poor. In a Provo ward, for instance, the deacons were assigned to regular fast offering districts, where a typical monthly collection might be "2 lbs bacon, 40c cash, 1 bottle fruit, 1 pk raisins, 1 can oisters and 43 lbs flour." But the 1903 quorum minutes reveal that rarely did even half of these deacons' districts report any monthly collections.[7] One Church official wryly observed that it was easy to get deacons to go on missions but very difficult to get them to function in their quorums.[8]

Examples taken from the minutes of a successful lesser priesthood in a Canadian stake delightfully describe priesthood practices on the eve of the reform movement: In 1894 two boys were appointed by the bishop "to visit all the boys in town and find out what preasthood [sic] they held and ask them to come to meetings." A few days later the teachers were appointed to dig a well for a sister in the ward. On one occasion the bishop made his boys pledge to refrain from profanity and tobacco. Feeling the need to get a greater commitment from them he requested that the boys prepare themselves for *rebaptism.* All were rebaptized a month later. Near the turn of the century, the priests and teachers began meeting together, minus the deacons. In 1901 the bishop ordained six deacons to the office of priest. The next year the boys voted to drop their current lesson topics and begin a missionary preparation course. That same year, their meeting night was changed to Mondays from Wednesdays due to choir practice on Wednesdays. For their classes the next year the quorums agreed to study the Junior Mutual lessons. As part of a later lesson,

[5]Cardston Ward, Alberta Stake, Lesser Priesthood Minutes 1897-1909, HDC, 14 October 1901.

[6]Ogden First Ward First and Second Deacons Quorums Minutes 1906-1907, HDC, 14 December 1908.

[7]Provo First Ward, Deacons Quorum Minute Book 1903-1904, HDC.

[8]GPC, 6 February 1912.

"a moral story was read, but it got tiresome and was moved and seconded that it would be stopped." Each summer the priesthood meetings were discontinued, so the last meeting of spring became a special event. In April 1907, all of the priesthood quorums joined together in a closing meeting to which everybody else in the ward was invited, including females who provided musical numbers.[9]

Elder J. Golden Kimball of the First Council of the Seventy, bluntly assessed the unsatisfactory state of priesthood quorums in 1906 by comparing them with the Church auxiliaries:

> The auxiliaries have been urged forward with great enthusiasm, everywhere, from Canada to Mexico, these organizations are to the front. The Priesthood quorums are apparently weary in well doing, and the officers and members seem to think that their organizations can run themselves. They have become lax in their work and let loose their hold. While the auxiliary organizations have taken the right of way, the Priesthood quorums stand by looking on awe-struck. . . . So the auxiliary organizations are going away up the hill and we, the Priesthood quorums, stand down in the valley and look on. Perhaps you don't like that picture, you men of the Priesthood quorums, but I tell you there is a lot of truth in it. . . . I am in favor of the Priesthood quorums taking their proper places, and if they do not do it, they ought to be ashamed of themselves, for they have the power and intelligence, and they have the authority.[10]

THE SYSTEMATIC PRIESTHOOD PROGRAM

No one was more distressed about this priesthood slackness than President Joseph F. Smith. In April conference, 1906, he expressed his oft-quoted hope that one day "every council of the Priesthood in the Church . . . will understand its duty, will assume its own responsibility, will magnify its calling, and fill its place in the Church." He predicted that when that day came, the quorums would take over the work done by the auxiliary organizations for "the Lord . . . made provision whereby every need may be met and satisfied through the regular organization of the Priesthood."[11] Two years

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[9]Cardston Lesser Priesthood Minutes.

[10]*Seventy-sixth Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* . . . (Salt Lake City, Utah [1906]), p. 19 (cited hereinafter as *Conference Reports*.)

[11]*Ibid.*, p. 3.

later he formally requested in April Conference that the priesthood quorums become better organized and of more usefulness to the Church. Specifically he asked that the lesser priesthood boys be given "something to do that will make them interested in the work of the Lord."[12]

To spearhead a more ordered priesthood program, the First Presidency established a General Priesthood Committee on Outlines, which served as a "standing committee on Priesthood work" until its release in 1922. Its primary responsibility was to prepare lesson outlines for the quorums, which in turn involved it in almost all aspects of priesthood work. The committee initially included Rudger Clawson and David O. McKay of the Council of the Twelve, plus Charles W. Nibley, Orrin P. Miller, and David A. Smith of the Presiding Bishopric. It was soon enlarged to nearly twenty members, half of whom brought with them valuable experience as general board members of the Sunday School, the YMMIA, and religion classes.

At its first meeting the Committee sensed that a great work was commencing. Stephen L. Richards felt that quorum work had been neglected, and that disinterest by priesthood leaders was due to the "lack of having a general plan to follow." Joseph J. Cannon noted that "the auxiliary organizations had been actually doing the work that the quorums should do." David O. McKay rejoiced that the plan given in the Doctrine and Covenants was finally being systematized so that each quorum would no longer choose its own course of study. Rudger Clawson reported that the First Presidency expected that the Committee's work "would be the means of bringing in a great many young men who are now neglecting this work." But it was fully realized that their work required "the combined efforts of all those in authority" in order to succeed.[13]

Priesthood problems were thoroughly investigated by the Committee during the middle months of 1908. They studied the systematic lessons and weekly meeting plan newly developed by the seventies as well as the systematic quorum work already inaugurated in Weber, Granite, and other stakes. Their final recommendations for revitalizing the Priesthood, intended

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[12]*Ibid.*, 4 April 1908, p. 6.

[13]GPC, 5, 16, and 23 June 1908.

to become operative the first week in 1909, had three main parts. First, all quorums except the seventies were to meet in Monday night ward priesthood gatherings. Also, thirty-six lessons were designed by the Committee for each of these quorums, to be studied in the weekly meetings. Finally, monthly stake priesthood meetings would be held to preview the next month's priesthood work and to develop classroom teaching skills.[14]

But before appropriate lessons could be written for each quorum, the Committee found it necessary to establish age groupings for the lesser priesthood. After 1877 it had been customary in the Church for boys at age twelve to be ordained deacons. But standard age practices for ordaining teachers or priests, or for advancing young men through the priesthood were lacking. The Committee therefore suggested specific ages at which specific Aaronic Priesthood ordinations should occur. Bishops were then instructed by the Presiding Bishopric to advance boys when worthy,

> and unless there are special reasons to the contrary they should be advanced in the priesthood from deacon to teacher and from teacher to priest. There can be no set age when persons should be ordained to the various offices in the Aaronic Priesthood, but we suggest that as near as circumstances will permit boys be ordained as follows: Deacons at twelve, Teachers at fifteen and Priests at eighteen years of age.[15]

The Committee's proposals were introduced and approved at October General Conference, then at special priesthood conventions in November and December in every stake in the Church. Acceptance was enthusiastic. Seventies quorums asked to be included in the new movement and were allowed to join the regular weekly meetings which began in most wards early in 1909. In one stake, elderly high priests traveled seven or eight miles to attend these classes, even though they were

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[14]GPC, 15 September 1908. High priests, elders, priests, teachers, and deacons met as localized quorums, while the seventies, due to their unique missionary responsibilities, functioned as general quorums directed by their own general authorities, the First Council of the Seventy. Their organizational independence caused many seventies to hold feelings of exclusiveness from other quorums and from ward and stake leaders. As a result of this reform movement, the seventies quorums became more fully integrated into ward and stake priesthood programs, with a simultaneous decline in their importance as general quorums in the Church. They became, in fact, standing ministers at home, and their quorum work became subordinate to the needs of the wards and stakes.

[15]Presiding Bishopric, Circular Letter File, 1 January 1909, HDC.

officially excused on account of age.[16] Lesson outlines were ordered by the thousands. *The Improvement Era* became the official organ for the priesthood quorums. One year's experience with weekly meetings, reported the Presiding Bishopric, had confirmed the initial high hopes, for

> ward authorities have been brought into close and frequent touch with the male members of their wards, by means of which they have acquired accurate personal knowledge as to the status of those under their watchful care. The social aspects of the meetings is altogether valuable.[17]

The *Era* termed the move "not only a step towards the destined prominence of the quorums in the Church—it was a bound."[18] But as with all new institutional changes, it took time for the new programs to become fully implemented, and periodically regional priesthood conventions were called to infuse new "zest" into the movement. During the first few years a number of problems related to the new priesthood work became evident, and received extensive attention from the Committee.

Priesthood quorums did not always coincide with ward boundaries, so when weekly ward priesthood classes were commenced there was confusion about the relationship between quorum and class, particularly among high priests and seventies. When the latter began missing their seventies' meetings, they received this instruction:

> For the convenience of men who belong to quorums that are widely scattered, and who could not come together frequently for instruction, owing to the distance to be traveled, a system of ward priesthood meetings has been introduced by the presiding authorities of the Church which divides quorums that are located in more than one ward into ward classes, but this arrangement does not contemplate excusing men from coming together in quorums as the Lord has commanded.[19]

By 1913 the Church leaders felt it necessary to remind the

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[16]"Priesthood Quorums Table," *The Improvement Era* 12:500 (April 1909). Cited hereinafter as *Era.* This "Priesthood Quorums Table" appeared as a regular monthly feature of the *Era* and contained valuable priesthood directives and reports from the General Priesthood Committee; all references to the *Era* which follow are taken from this monthly section, unless otherwise designated.

[17]Presiding Bishopric, Circular Letter, 1 January 1910.

[18]*Era* 13:287 (January 1910).

[19]*Era,* 14:841 (July 1911).

Church that bishops were to be the presiding high priests over all local priesthood matters, and that all quorum loyalties therefore were subordinate to his local needs and directives.[20]

SUMMERS AND SUNDAYS

Holding weekly meetings during the summer months was a revolutionary practice for a majority of wards, and the change was not easily made. Following a thorough study of the problem, the Committee reported in 1909 that:

> It is going to be a difficult task to continue the quorum meetings during the summer. . . when the strawberries are ripe, how are we to leave them an hour or two earlier to go to meeting? . . . So with the hay, the grain, the fruit. Is our meeting going to be important enough to warrant our leaving these labors once a week to attend? It will not do to work as late as usual on Monday evenings. If we do, we will be too tired to go to quorum meetings; will we have faith enough to feel that we will be as blessed in our temporal affairs by going, as by staying in the field at work.[21]

Only five out of the thirty-one stakes reporting to the Committee in 1910 had held summer meetings. But four years later, due to continual pressure from Church officials, nearly eighty percent of the wards were continuing priesthood classwork the year round. Generally, however, wards which succeeded in holding summer meetings had to shift their meeting times to Sundays, freeing the weekdays for the hard summer farm work.[22]

In fact, Monday nights were not the preference of many wards, summer or winter. Therefore, in late 1909 the Committee proposed that priesthood meetings be on Sunday morning, thereby shifting Sunday School meetings to the afternoon. Questionnaires regarding this idea were sent by the First Presidency to all bishops. Voting showed only 160 in favor and 430 opposed, so President Smith decided that the successful operation of the Sunday Schools should not be disrupted. However, with written permission individual stakes were allowed to switch their meetings from Monday nights, and many did. Cassia Stake, for example, argued that "most

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[20]*Era,* 16:648 (April 1913).
[21]*Era,* 12:573 (May 1909).
[22]GPC, 29 November 1910; also *Era* 17:692 (May 1914).

of the men were on their farms which as a rule were so far from meeting place that regular attendance suffered," and were therefore allowed to meet on Sunday nights, alternating with the Mutuals. Other wards, as mentioned, adopted Sunday priesthood meetings during the summer months sometimes as part of the Sunday Schools or Sunday Mutuals. But Sunday morning meetings did not become the uniform rule throughout the Church until the 1930s.[23]

PROVIDING LESSON MANUALS

The Committee's primary assignment was to direct the selecting, writing, editing, printing, and distributing of yearly theology lessons appropriate to the various quorums. This was a huge task, particularly during the first two years when ten new lesson manuals had to be written. Due to summer adjournments and other problems, many classes failed to complete their first two manuals, so 1911 was designated a "catch-up" year and no new lessons were distributed. Subsequently, the Committee found two means of freeing itself from extensive annual writing assignments. First, among Aaronic Priesthood quorums, previously used manuals were re-issued every two years. Then, starting in 1914, all Melchizedek Priesthood quorums were instructed to study the same annual lessons.

Sometimes leading Church writers, James E. Talmage and Orson F. Whitney among them, were requested to write manuals on specific themes, receiving a few hundred dollars to defray writing costs. In other cases, books already published were selected. As a result, such outstanding works as Talmage's *Jesus the Christ,* John A. Widstoe's *A Rational Theology*, Joseph Fielding Smith's *Essentials in Church History,* and Joseph F. Smith's *Gospel Doctrine* were popularized among the Saints as priesthood manuals.[24]

All assigned manuals were screened by a reading committee who referred questionable statements to the Council of the Twelve. It was made clear to the quorums, however, that the lesson books represented opinions of the authors and were *not* to be considered as authoritative statements of Church doctrine. Enough copies of these yearly lessons were

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[23]GPC, 15 February 1910 and 6 December 1912.
[24]GPC, 8 December 1922.

ordered for between twenty and thirty percent of a ward's priesthood membership. Each weekly lesson was designed to teach both theory and practice, to

> not only . . . inculcate the wisdom and necessity of learning all the instructions and principles given in the revelations of God in good books and in nature, but summons the priesthood with persuasive voice to *act* upon the truths learned and believed.[25]

CORRELATION OF CHURCH TEACHING

In order to prevent unnecessary duplication of lesson materials of the priesthood quorums and the auxiliaries, the First Presidency in 1914 established a Correlation Committee. And as more and more priesthood classes came to be held during auxiliary class time, the problem of correlation became complex. There was serious disagreement, for example, as to what lessons should be used by boys whose priesthood class work was part of Sunday School or of Sunday evening YMMIA.

David O. McKay, a recognized leader of the General Priesthood Committee, became spokesman in the Correlation Committee for a radical solution to this problem in 1920. His plan, which was given serious consideration by the General Authorities, would have required that all teaching of the auxiliaries—Relief Society, Primary, and the MIA—and of the priesthood be conducted in the same Sabbath meeting, thereby creating literally a "Church Sunday School Day." After opening exercises in the Sunday morning meeting, priesthood classes would be held for (1) high priests (2) seventies and elders, (3) priests and teachers, and (4) deacons. There would be one class for mothers; young ladies' senior and junior classes; two Primary classes, and a Kindergarten. Thus only one weekly Church lesson would be written for each group, and this would mean fewer manuals to be authored and fewer good teachers to be called. Girls and women would pursue the same courses of study prescribed for boys and men of corresponding ages. Regular auxiliary and priesthood meetings would then be devoted to practical duties and activities. This "tight correlation" plan was studied for two years and tested on a trial basis in five wards. But in 1922 the First

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[25]*Era* 12:499 (April 1909).

Presidency decided against it, concluding that the "existing quorums and associations are competent to plan for and execute the activities of each," although for a brief period in the late 1920s the priesthood classes were held Churchwide on an experimental basis as part of Sunday School.[26]

REDIRECTING THE YMMIA WORK

The early Mutuals had devoted much effort to providing theological instruction for Church members because "the quorums of the priesthood were not sufficiently active." But when the Committee undertook to provide systematic priesthood manuals, an important YMMIA function was pre-empted. Although this led Brigham H. Roberts of the YMMIA general board to rejoice that "the Priesthood had been awakened and took possession of its proper field of activity," this change generally created a widespread feeling that the YMMIA organizations had "now filled their mission, and are now ready to pass away." Instead, however, the YMMIA officers redirected that auxiliary into such non-theological areas as "musical, dramatic and other like entertainments and festivities," and to scouting, field sports, athletic tournaments, excursions, and dances.[27]

PROBLEMS OF SMALLER WARDS

Separate classes and lessons for all six priesthood offices proved impractical for most smaller wards. Bishop Nibley noted early in 1912 that in many outlying wards "there were so few holding the Priesthood that he thought it would be best to consolidate the classes."[28] A priesthood census revealed that 177 wards had fewer than four seventies, including forty-six which had none. Nearly 350 wards had fewer than seven priests, including seventy-one wards where there were none. In 225 wards there were fewer than six teachers, including sixty-seven wards which had none. On the average, only eleven priesthood holders attended weekly meetings in more than half of the wards in the Church. To expect these to separate

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[26]GPC, 2 September and 8 December 1922.

[27]"Mutual Work," *Era* 12:247 (January 1909); Heber J. Grant, "The Place of the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Association in the Church," *Era,* 15:875 (August 1912); also, Brigham H. Roberts, "Sphere of YMMIA Activities," *Era,* 16:187-188 (January 1913).

[28]GPC, 5 March 1912.

into six classes for lessons was unrealistic. Consequently, some consolidation was allowed. Teachers and priests met together in some wards. All three Melchizedek Priesthood quorums, starting in 1914, were provided the same lesson manual, thereby making it easy for these men to have joint classes when circumstances warranted it.[29]

TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

In addition to lack of numbers, many priesthood meetings suffered because of the lack of efficient teachers. It was realized that "young men are so accustomed to good teachers in the schools that they will not long retain interest in a class where they have an indifferent or ill-informed man to teach them."[30] In some areas bishops and other ward officers felt they should be the priesthood instructors. But the Committee cautioned that such men were not called to leadership positions on the basis of teaching abilities, and that only capable teachers should direct quorum lessons. Yet trained teachers were scarce. Stake presidents reported in 1910 that in many wards little or nothing was being done to train and prepare priesthood or auxiliary teachers.[31]

In attacking this problem, the Committee periodically published teaching advice in the *Era.* Also, manuals on teaching methods were distributed. Most stakes held monthly priesthood meetings where lessons were previewed and teaching problems were discussed. But despite such efforts, the Saints were informed in 1915 that "great chaos" still existed Churchwide in methods of teacher supervision. A new approach, weekly ward training classes to develop teachers for all Church organizations, was tried five years later.[32]

ENROLLMENT AND PRIESTHOOD FRATERNITY

Weekly meetings, lesson manuals, and teacher development were but the means by which greater priesthood activity was sought. In order to evaluate the success of these programs, the Committee established a new system of record keeping and reporting. Simultaneously, the Presiding Bishopric cooper-

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[29]GPC, 26 March 1912; also *Era* 17:692-693 (May 1914).
[30]*Era* 12:498 (April 1909).
[31]GPC, 13 December 1910.
[32]Issues of the *Era* in 1912 contain monthly teaching suggestions; GPC 25 March 1915; Presiding Bishopric, Circular Letter, 28 December 1920.

ated by launching a campaign to "purge and correct" all ward membership records.[33]

Accuracy in record keeping was hampered by the practice, still prevalent by 1911, of "insisting on a recommend from the quorum where the person formerly was enrolled" before relocated members could be considered enrolled members of priesthood quorums. Thus, in 1912 there were 13,308 priesthood members not enrolled in any quorums out of 77,114 total priesthood holders, despite special enrollment drives.[34] The discrepancy between the real and rollbook count of priesthood holders is demonstrated by the records of some of the Utah stakes that year.[35]

Stake	Priesthood Holders	Priesthood Enrolled
Alpine	2,346	1,579
Box Elder	1,392	498
Liberty	1,707	680
Tooele	762	53

But when the Presiding Bishopric instructed bishops in June, 1914, that any priesthood bearer in their wards should be enrolled in proper priesthood classes "regardless of whether he has been received as a member of the quorum which has jurisdiction in your ward," the enrollment confusion gradually subsided. Two years later Quorum recommends were discontinued.[36]

Contributing to enrollment delinquencies and to priesthood inactivity was the lack of comradeship felt by quorum members. In 1911 the *Era* reported that "the cultivation of the spirit of fraternity has been neglected in most quorums."[37] To counter this, special missionaries were sent out to contact all ward and stake members to encourage priesthood participation, and by 1921 stake missionary work among members and nonmembers had become a permanent program in most stakes in the Church. Priesthood support for the MIA recreational and scouting activities also was increased, and local leaders were urged to develop programs to keep youth off the streets, to

[33]Presiding Bishopric, Circular Letter, 1 January 1910.
[34]GPC, 5 December 1911 and 6 August 1912.
[35]GPC, 5 December 1911.
[36]Presiding Bishopric, Circular Letter, 25 June 1914, and 9 March 1916.
[37]*Era* 14:652 (May 1911).

support saloon closing campaigns, and to work with juvenile courts.[38] During this period, fraternal orders and exclusive clubs had some appeal among the Saints, and their fraternal aspects were commended to the Church as attributes the quorums should develop. But because scores of brethren had disobeyed Church counsel in order to join fraternities where they could obtain inexpensive life insurance, the Committee spent much energy in devising a comparable priesthood life insurance program. "Insurance at exact cost is certainly not the United Order," its report advised, "but it is a preparatory step in the right direction." Numerous problems, however, prevented the adoption of this insurance plan.[39]

REVIVING THE LESSER PRIESTHOOD

Neglect by local authorities and indifference by many boys were two factors responsible for what the *Improvement Era* called an "alarming situation" among Aaronic Priesthood boys.[40] Although there were as many boys between the ages of fifteen and eighteen in 1912 as between twelve and fifteen, there were but 9,300 teachers compared to 20,255 deacons. The *Era* reported that year that

> neither the priesthood quorums nor the Sunday School, nor any of the other organizations of the Church are taking care of a certain lot of our young people. There are at least forty percent of them [boys and girls] who are not attending any of our organizations, between the ages of fourteen and seventeen.[41]

A primary cause of this situation was a pervasive lack of dignity and importance accorded the callings of teacher and priest. The immaturity of ordained boys was widely criticized. One Committee member, for example, urged that the ordination age for deacons be raised to fifteen, for "as a rule boys were too young to have this honor conferred upon them." Presiding Bishop Nibley proposed that boys prove themselves on missions before being given the Melchizedek Priesthood and temple ordinances. In numerous wards Aaronic Priesthood boys were not allowed to take charge of the sacrament, and

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[38]GPC, 28 March 1911.
[39]GPC, 28 March 1911.
[40]*Era* 15:656-657 (May 1912).
[41]*Ibid.;* also Grant, "The Place of the Young Men's Mutual . . .," *Era* 15:877 (August 1912).

instructions regarding passing the sacrament were addressed in a 1910 *Era* article to elders, not to holders of the lesser priesthood. The custom still continued in some wards not to advance a deacon in the priesthood until there was reason to ordain him an elder. The committee learned that, contrary to scripture, only 108 bishops out of 713 personally presided over their own priests groups in 1912. Also, it was admitted by Church officials that ordained priests and teachers were too young to be the backbone of ward teaching, so in their places "acting teachers" were called from among the elders, seventies, and high priests.[42]

A vigorous campaign to make the teachers and priests quorums of importance in the wards was launched by the Committee. Ordinations at the recommended ages were urged unless there was "good reason" to disregard the rule. In the first year of the campaign, the number of bishops personally presiding over their priests rose from 30 to nearly 500. This "great awakening" continued until the proper organization of priests quorums was announced to the Church in 1915, at which time 6,000 out of 8,830 priests were enrolled.[43] A year later, specific Aaronic Priesthood duties, based on actual ward practices, were identified and circulated for the aid of bishops. They included the following:[44]

Deacons

Collect fast offerings
Messenger for bishops
Pass sacrament
Prepare fuel for widows and old people
Care for the poor
Pass out notices
Pump organ at meetings
Keep Church property in good condition
Assist in caring for cemeteries
Keep order in meeting house
Maintain meeting house grounds
Assist in Primary work
Assist in religion class work
Act as ushers
Boy Scout work
Attend the doors
Distribute special notices

Teachers

Assist in ward teaching
Assist with sacrament
Instructors for boy scouts
Take charge of meetings, furnish speakers, singing, etc.

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[42]GPC, 5 May and 10 December 1909, 6 August and 3 September 1912, and 2 April 1912; *Era* 13:570 (April 1910); and *Era* 15:657 (May 1912).

[43]*Era,* 16:736-738 (May 1913); also GPC, 2 September 1913, and 25 March 1915.

[44]GPC, 1 June 1916.

Collect ward funds
Assist in renovating meeting houses
Cutting wood for poor
Choir members
Clerk in branch
Officers in auxiliary organizations
Notify priesthood quorums of meetings

Priests

Administer the sacrament
Pass the sacrament
Assist in ward teaching
Sunday School officers and teachers
Mutual officers and teachers
Perform baptisms
Ward choristers
Messengers for bishopric
Hold cottage meetings
Assist the elders
Missionary work in the ward
Read scriptures at ward meetings
Supervise the fast offering collecting
Help bishop with care of tithes
Help bishop with wayward boys
Take part in meetings
Haul gravel and make cement walks around meeting house
Help with teams to level public squares
Active in guiding amusements

MAINTAINING AND IMPROVING THE NEW PROGRAM

"Let us impress upon you," the Committee urged in 1913, "that nearly 18,000 men meeting weekly for study and contemplation must inevitably result in general good in the Church," and evidence of such results was not hard to find.[45] Weekly attendance at priesthood meetings, aided by the recent organization of priests quorums, had risen by that year to the twenty percent level, a sign to the Committee that "we are moving upward."[46] Sacrament meeting attendance likewise was improving. Notable too was increased service by Melchizedek Priesthood bearers, 20,495 of whom were then ward officers and instructors.[47] An "unusual interest" in ward teaching also had been aroused. It was found, for example, that as more men were given ward teaching assignments and the size of districts was reduced, a proportional increase in monthly visits was produced. In 1911, two ward teachers typically were assigned to visit twenty families, and Churchwide only twenty percent of all families were visited. Two years later the typical district size was down to nine families and the visiting rate doubled to thirty-nine percent. Between 1909 and 1914, home

[45] *Era* 16:736-737 (May 1913).
[46] *Ibid.*
[47] *Ibid.*, 738.

teaching visits increased fivefold, and by 1915 over half of Church families, or fifty-four percent were receiving monthly visits. Six years later the Church home teaching average had increased to seventy percent.[48] In addition to this "far reaching increase in Priesthood activity," the reform movement had produced Churchwide an equally significant "realization of the importance of Priesthood quorums as compared with auxiliary organizations."[49]

Subsequently, the Committee sought not only to increase the effectiveness of its programs and to extend such to previously "unreformed" wards, but also to prevent backsliding among the "reformed" wards—a herculean task during the World War I years. Church attendance and activity declined, particularly during summer months, as Mormon farmers sought to increase their production in response to growing wartime markets.

Declines were most notable in Aaronic Priesthood work. Priests quorums were depleted by the military so that remaining priests had to meet with teachers quorums. In many wards by 1917 a "loose and indifferent state" plagued lesser priesthood quorums and there developed again a need for "a suitable and proper method of organizing and supervising the Lesser Priesthood of each ward and training the boys in their duties and responsibilities."[50] Individually, bishops responded by devising unique activities for their boys. These ranged from taking deacons along on the bishop's annual house to house visits, to assigning priests as special teachers to the widows, aged, and poor, to having teachers go along with older men to conduct fuel surveys and Red Cross, War Savings Bond, and Thrift campaigns among the Saints. But despite such efforts, the post-war years brought Church leaders face to face with "a woeful lack of interest on the part of those holding the Lesser Priesthood in their Church activities," as well as with the task of beginning again to organize and ordain priests.[51]

A project of major importance to the Committee during

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[48]*Era,* 17:692 (May 1914); GPC, 29 September 1914 and 25 March 1915; also Meeting of the First Presidency and the Presiding Bishopric, 11 August 1921, Presiding Bishopric Miscellaneous Box 1, HDC.

[49]*Era* 17:692-693 (May 1914).

[50]GPC, 5 April 1917.

[51]GPC, 3 and 10 October 1918, 1 November 1917, 21 June 1921; also, Presiding Bishopric, Circular Letter, 14 June 1918.

the war years was the compilation of President Joseph F. Smith's sermons and writings just prior to his death in 1918. His accidental remark that "he was leaving no literature or book in his memory," prompted six friends to compile the book, *Gospel Doctrine,* which was then edited and published by the Committee as a three-year course of study for Melchizedek Priesthood quorums, starting in 1919.[52] Other priesthood reform activities during these years included an effort to separate adult Aaronic Priesthood members into groups with their own officers, so as not "to mix up the old men, with bad habits, with young boys," and the new weekly teacher training program noted above. For the second time the Committee investigated in detail and supported the priesthood insurance idea, which was once again rejected by the First Presidency. Finally, the "Church Sunday School Day" correlation plan, mentioned above, was the Committee's last major project before its release by President Heber J. Grant in December, 1922.[53]

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MOVEMENT

Overall this reform movement was of immeasurable and lasting importance to priesthood work in this dispensation. Specific results, which became foundation stones for many priesthood programs today include the following:

Aaronic Priesthood

1. Definite age groupings established for each office.
2. Separate adult Aaronic work proposed.
3. Specific duties identified for deacons, teachers, priests.
4. Priests quorums' importance recognized.
5. Bishops finally assumed presidency over lesser priesthood.

Ward and Quorum Functions

1. Regular weekly, year round, ward priesthood classes made the rule.
2. Bishops became presiding high priests over all ward priesthood work.

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[52]GPC, 3 October 1918.
[53]GPC, 12 December 1911, 1 November 1917 and 4 November 1920.

3. Priesthood enrolled in proper quorums.
4. Systematic ward and quorum records introduced.
5. Effective stake relations with local priesthood established.
6. Increased local priesthood service as ward officers, ward teachers, etc.
7. Stake missionary work commenced.

Church Headquarters

1. Systematic record and report procedures developed.
2. Communication with wards and stakes greatly improved.
3. Centralized direction of local priesthood work undertaken.
4. YMMIA redirected into recreational and cultural activities.
5. Priesthood work better coordinated with auxiliaries.

Lessons

1. Annual, systematic courses of study provided all quorums.
2. Important Church books thereby made known to members.
3. Teacher training work pioneered.
4. All Church teaching better coordinated.

Finally, there is a direct relationship between this reform movement and present Church correlation work. Elder Harold B. Lee discussed the connection when he announced the new priesthood correlation plan in 1961. After noting periodic surveys which the Church has taken of its ever-changing needs, he said:

> Within the memories of many of the present General Authorities, there have been surveys of this kind, or re-examinations about twenty years apart. One of the first comprehensive studies was undertaken under the general chairmanship of President David O. McKay, who was then the chairman of the general priesthood committee of the Church, and this was about forty years ago. To me it is a significant thing that this problem of proper correlation seems to have been in President McKay's own mind through

> all of this time and perhaps as long as he has been one of the General Authorities.[54]

Within the past few years the Church has seen a number of steps taken in the direction first outlined by President Joseph F. Smith and the General Priesthood Committee more than sixty years ago. The teacher training program, for example, once conducted by the Sunday School, is now under the control and direction of the priesthood. Relief Society budgets recently became subject to ward bishops. YMMIA officers now are the same men who direct Aaronic Priesthood work in each ward, and are now priesthood activity arms. Auxiliary contacts with the homes are handled by the priesthood home teachers. Although there is still room for improvement, the priesthood now appears to be doing what President Joseph F. Smith hoped it would when he forcefully entreated the priesthood in 1908 to assume its rightful role in the functionings of the Church.

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[54] *Conference Reports,* 30 September 1961.