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Being Equal in Earthly and Heavenly Power: The Idea of Stewardship in the United Order

A. Don Sorensen

This essay is about a central feature of what Mormons have come to call the United Order. It is a feature that is seen within Latter-day Saint scripture as being fundamental both to the temporal and eternal purposes of that order. In fact, Mormon scriptures describe this feature as being modeled after the order of heaven for the express purpose of preparing members for eternal life. The feature to which I am referring concerns the peculiar system of power that should characterize the organization of man’s temporal affairs. The relations of power in the United Order are to be uniquely nonhierarchical and nonauthoritarian, so that no man rules over another even in a benevolent way. Modern scripture refers to these relations as a system of “equal power.” This essay presents an analysis of this peculiar system in light of its eternal purposes and the order of heaven after which it is modeled.

Proceeding from the viewpoint of the individual steward whose divine dignity and eternal potential as a person find expression in how power should be organized on earth as it is in heaven, we first consider the idea of stewardship in connection with certain abstract doctrines and principles having to do with man’s temporal and eternal status as an agent. Then we examine how these doctrines and principles achieve concrete expression in the power structure of temporal organization.

STEWARDSHIP AND MAN’S REVEALED STATUS AS AN AGENT

In many latter-day revelations the Lord explains why and how the Saints should organize themselves because His purposes cannot be separated from his means. The hows are uniquely designed to complement the whys. It is in this scriptural context of hows and whys that stewardship plays its role. To be a steward in the scrip-

A. Don Sorensen, associate professor of government at BYU, thanks the Curriculum Council and especially John Gardner for their assistance on this article.
natural sense is to occupy a position in the type of temporal organization that prepares a man for his role as an agent in eternal life. First we shall consider that end—the why—and then (in the next two sections) we shall see that the way in which the Saints are commanded to organize themselves is particularly designed to help them realize the end.

The Stewardship Promise

Consider the following scripture, which pertains to the organization of the Saints for the "regulation of their temporal affairs." The Lord says:

... It must needs be that there be an organization of my people ... for a permanent and everlasting establishment and order unto my church, to advance the cause, which ye have espoused, to the salvation of man, and to the glory of your Father who is in heaven. ... (D&C 78:3-4)

Then he tells the Saints what this new order will prepare them for—provided, of course, that they obey the requirements being laid down.

For if you will that I give unto you a place in the celestial world, you must prepare yourselves by doing the things which I have commanded you and required of you. (D&C 78:7)

The Lord then commands the Saints to organize themselves "by a bond or everlasting covenant" (D&C 78:11) and provides additional details concerning the reason for this and other commandments of organization:

Behold, this is the preparation wherewith I prepare you ... that [among other things] you may come up unto the crown prepared for you, and be made rulers over many kingdoms. ...

(D&C 78:13-15)

Then the Lord promises: "And he that is a faithful and wise steward shall inherit all things" (D&C 78:22). This promise of "all things" includes being a ruler over many kingdoms, as mentioned above, for, as he says elsewhere: "And this shall be my seal and blessing upon you—a faithful and wise steward in the midst of mine house, a ruler in my kingdom" (D&C 101:61).

Let us note several general conclusions: First, the Lord requires his people to organize themselves in a special way for conducting their temporal affairs. He says more than once that "it must needs be done in mine own way" (D&C 104:16). Second, he says that
the commandments of organization (along with other commands) were given to prepare the Saints for a place in the celestial world, a point which his servants have always emphasized. For example, George Q. Cannon said:

The organization of society that exists in the heavens must exist on the earth; the same condition of society, so far as it is applicable to mortal beings, must exist here.¹

And according to Lorenzo Snow:

The system of union . . . which God has taken so much pains to reveal and make manifest, has been, and is, for the purpose of uniting the Latter-day Saints . . . and preparing them for exaltation in his celestial kingdom, and also . . . preparing them here on this earth to live together as brethren. . .²

Finally, he promises that those who serve as wise and faithful stewards in the revealed order of temporal affairs will "inherit all things" and be made "rulers over many kingdoms." Hereafter this promise will be called the stewardship promise.

The Temporal and Eternal Status of Agency

No doubt what was just written about the how and whys of temporal organizations is familiar to many. But, even at the risk of stressing the obvious, we need to make several further points about the stewardship promise to set the stage for what follows. First, let us note one important part of what that promise comprehends. We read that those who inherit the celestial kingdom will be "equal in the bonds of heavenly things" (D&C 78:5). Now being equal in heavenly things includes being equal in power, for as the scriptures say, those who dwell in the presence of the Father are made "equal in power, and in might, and in dominion" (D&C 76:95). What is more, these positions of equality in the celestial world are positions of godhood in which each heir has "all power." In the words of the scriptures: "Then shall they be gods, because they have all power. . ." (D&C 132:20). Finally, it is in part by sharing equally all power that we become one with the Lord, "clothed upon," as he said, "even as I am, to be with me, that we maye be one" (D&C 29:13).

This, then, is part of what the stewardship promise comprehends.

²JD, 19:342.

102
For convenience of reference we propose to call this celestial possibility man's eternal status as an agent, because it pertains to the power of agency, to the characteristics and attributes of godhood, and to the life of God, whose name is "Eternal."³

The revealed way of organizing temporal affairs has been designed partly to prepare us for that eternal status. But, as we shall see, part of the genius of that mode of organization lies in the way it gives concrete expression to man's eternal status as an agent in its embryonic form. It enables man to act and not to be acted upon, to be an agent unto himself, after the likeness of his celestial status. We shall refer to this embryonic status as man's temporal status as an agent, because it pertains to time and mortality as well as to the position of man in the ordering of temporal affairs.

We move now from a consideration of stewardship in relation to abstract doctrines and principles of eternal life to a consideration of stewardship in everyday life. This appears to be the Lord's way with us—to make the abstract operational, to make everyday life here relevant in terms of eternal life. As we do this we shall proceed on the assumption that the Saints must be "united according to the union required by the law of the celestial kingdom . . ." because, as the Lord says, "Zion cannot be built up unless it is by the principles of the law of the celestial kingdom; otherwise I cannot receive her unto myself" (D&C 105:4-5). As we shall see, it is in the idea of stewardship that certain of these "principles" of "celestial law" combine to give form to man's temporal status with the promise of eternal status if he is wise and faithful. This is what distinguishes the idea of stewardship in latter-day scripture.

THE STEWARDSHIP STRUCTURE OF AUTHORITY

We have seen that the commandments pertaining to organizations in which stewardship is a key idea aim at preparing man to take his place in the celestial world and to have all power equal with others. "If we want to get there, we must begin here, and learn the order that is to be there."⁴ It would be surprising, then, if the revealed forms of organization did not reflect in their structures of authority the preparatory role they are meant to play. We would expect those structures to afford man unique opportunities for progressing toward eternal status. And this is what we do find.

³See Moses 7:35; D&C 20:7, 28, 77, 79; and D&C 79:6.
⁴Orson Pratt in JD, 2:102.
However, anything approaching an adequate analysis of man’s status as an agent in the ordering of everyday affairs would require that we distinguish and compare the positions of man as an agent in various sectors of society—in church, state, and economy. In the cities of Zion as in the present cities of the world, man’s status as an agent would be a function of his status in each of these three interconnected areas of life. It would be interesting to examine scripture and the word of prophets on the status of human agency in these areas. We have much to learn about these matters. But the best we can do in this essay is to examine the structure of authority in what may be called a stewardship unit, e.g., a business unit, an agricultural unit, or a university unit.

Let’s begin our consideration of the stewardship structure of authority with a quotation from the Prophet Joseph. Addressing the matter of consecration, he rejects the authoritarian and (by implication) democratic structures and emphasizes an essential feature of the stewardship model.

The matter of consecration must be done by the mutual consent of both parties; for to give the Bishop power to say how much every man shall have, and he be obliged to comply with the Bishop’s judgment, is giving the Bishop more power than a king has; and upon the other hand, to let every man say how much he needs, and the Bishop be obliged to comply with his judgment, is to throw Zion into confusion, and make a slave of the Bishop. The fact is, there must be a balance or equilibrium of power, between the Bishop and the people, and thus harmony and good will may be preserved among you.⁵

The Prophet indicates that “harmony and good will may be preserved” when authority is shared. We believe that the Prophet, who understood these matters well, was thinking here of the “harmony” or “oneness” that the Lord commands us to attain. The reward for having achieved the oneness while on earth is, according to the Lord, “to be with me, that we may be one” (D&C 29:13).⁶

Let us look more closely at this structure of power by examining some key scriptures from latter-day revelations. First, let’s describe an outline of these powers (Figure 1 may help clarify this description) and then discuss what the scriptures call “equal power” in the light of this outline.

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⁶See also D&C 35:2; D&C 50:26-29; D&C 43; D&C 44; D&C 76:54-57; D&C 84:35-39; D&C 132:20.
Figure 1
The Structure of Power of a Stewardship Unit

1. Settle important disputes which arise in the various stewardship units
2. Ordain the presiding officer of the stewardship units under the council's direction
3. Help administer unit resources

Other Stewardship Units

High Council & Its Presiding Officer

Presiding Officer

1. Help give general direction as presiding officer to the stewardship unit
2. Help form individual stewardships
3. Receive an accounting from each steward as to his stewardship performance
4. Help determine the uses of certain resources

Unit Membership

1. Counsel and consent of membership in general direction of stewardship unit
2. Voice and consent in uses of unit resources
3. Voice and consent in the calling of a presiding officer

Individual Steward

1. Participate in forming his own stewardship
2. Decide how to carry out his own stewardship, which includes the right to employ needed available resources
3. Participate as an equal in unit affairs
The Powers of the Unit Membership as a Body

1. All things are to be done according to the "counsel" and "consent" of the unit (D&C 104:21, 36). It is significant that the powers of counsel and consent are given here. It is elementary to note that the power of consent insures the power of counsel, for unless the latter is taken seriously, the former may not be forthcoming. The two powers are mutually supporting. Together they enable the membership to direct the affairs of the overall unit. And the membership shall be held accountable by the Lord for that direction. Each member shares in this collective stewardship.

2. The membership has the following general powers over the use of resources.

   a. No part of the general treasury can be used except "by the voice and common consent" of the unit (D&C 104:71). This important power over resources is a key power in the operation of any organization. If an individual steward is found to be "unfaithful" or "unwise," the "council of the order" may withhold the resources that he seeks (D&C 104:74-76).

   b. A second treasury, which "shall belong to you all with one accord" and "shall be called the sacred treasury of the Lord," can be used "only by the voice of the order, or by commandment" (D&C 104:60-66). Unlike any powers mentioned so far, this power over the sacred treasury is specifically limited by the provision that this treasury may be subject to "commandment" as well as to "the voice of the order."

   c. "And in case the treasurer is found an unfaithful and an unwise steward, he shall be subject to the council and voice of the order, and shall be removed out of his place, and another shall be appointed in his stead" (D&C 104:77). Just as the power of consent insures the power of counsel, so here the unit's power as a council over the treasurer insures its power over the general treasury as well as its broader power to help determine the general direction of the unit.

3. Any presiding officer is ordained to his office, and any new member is accepted in accord with the consent or vote of the unit membership (D&C 41:9; 20:65; 26:2; 28:13). However,
the unit may be commanded to accept a new member by the Lord (D&C 92).

The Powers of the Presiding Officer

1. The presiding officer helps give general direction of the stewardship unit with respect to temporal things. He shares this power with the unit membership as noted earlier. (See D&C, Sections 107, 41 and 42.)

2. He helps determine the nature of each man’s individual stewardship appointment (D&C 51:4).

3. Consistent with his powers as a common judge (D&C 107: 72-74), he is empowered to receive accountings from each steward so as to determine whether the steward has been wise and faithful in his stewardship (See D&C 72).

4. He helps manage the affairs of the Lord’s storehouse and shares in the power of determining the use of certain of its resources (D&C 42:33-36).

The Powers of the Individual Steward

1. He participates in deciding what his stewardship will be. In many situations the center of initiative and decision resides in the steward while the presiding officer retains the power of counsel and consent. On other occasions the center of decision and initiative may reside in the presiding officer and the steward has the power of counsel and consent. In all cases the agency of each is respected.

2. He decides how to carry out his stewardship. This point and the scriptures related to it will receive further elaboration as we proceed. One scriptural reference will do here. It is indicated above that the uses of the general treasury are subject to the counsel and consent of the unit’s membership. But after saying this the Lord goes on to indicate what this power consists of. And what he says shows at once the limitations on this power and the corresponding right of the individual steward to decide how to carry out his stewardship and to make claims on the available treasury which cannot be turned down. Thus: “And this shall be the voice and consent of the order—that any man among you say to the treasurer: I have need of this to help me in my stewardship—if it be five talents {dollars], or if it be
ten talents [dollars], or twenty, or fifty, or a hundred, the treasurer shall give unto him the same which he requires to help him in his stewardship . . . so long as he is in full fellowship, and is faithful and wise in his stewardship, this shall be his token unto the treasurer that the treasurer shall not withhold' (D&C 104:72-75).

3. Has equal voice with all other members in giving counsel and consent in the running of the unit (D&C 104:21, 36).

The Powers of the Unit Council

1. In what is referred to as the "Constitution of the High Council" we read the following:

The high council was appointed by revelation for the purpose of settling important difficulties which might arise in the church, which could not be settled by the church or the bishop's council to the satisfaction of the parties. (D&C 102:2)

Either party in a dispute may request the high council to settle a difference.

The high priests, when abroad, have power to call and organize a council after the manner of the foregoing, to settle difficulties, when the parties or either of them shall request it. (D&C 102:24)

In this connection the Prophet Joseph says that when a bishop and an individual steward cannot reach agreement concerning an important matter of stewardship, "the case must be laid before a council of twelve high priests. . . ."

2. The scriptures read that:

Every president of the high priesthood (or presiding elder), bishop, high councilor, and high priest, is to be ordained by the direction of a high council or general conference. (D&C 20:67)

3. And again we read:

Therefore, the residue shall be kept in my storehouse, to administer to the poor and the needy, as shall be appointed by the high council of the church, and the bishop and his council. (D&C 42:34)

\[^7\text{HC, } 1:365.\]
THE REVEALED STATUS OF AGENCY AND THE STEWARDSHIP STRUCTURE OF AUTHORITY

Being Equal in Earthly Things

With the stewardship structure of authority before us now, we can indicate in specific terms how that structure gives concrete expression to the otherwise abstract doctrines pertaining to man’s status as an agent and prepares him to be one in power and purpose in eternity. Consider again the scripture quoted at the beginning of this study. The Lord is saying through the Prophet Joseph that the time has come for establishing “an organization of my people” which will be “a permanent and everlasting establishment and order unto my church.” Then he goes on to say why he wants the Saints to organize themselves in a certain way:

. . . to advance the cause, which ye have espoused, to the salvation of man, and to the glory of your Father, who is in heaven;

That ye may be equal in the bonds of heavenly things, yea, and earthly things also, for the obtaining of heavenly things.

For if ye are not equal in earthly things ye cannot be equal in obtaining heavenly things;

For if you will that I give unto you a place in the celestial world, you must prepare yourselves by doing the things which I have commanded you and required of you.

And now, verily thus saith the Lord, it is expedient that all things be done unto my glory, by you who are joined together in this order. (D&C 78:4-8)

Notice first that the goals of organization are the salvation of man and the glory of God (which includes bringing about the salvation of man). Attaining these goals should be the ultimate end for all that is done through the organization. By requiring that all things be done for these reasons the Lord is requiring members to be one in purpose here as they will be one in purpose in eternity.

It is important to mention at this point that every stewardship order will have temporal as well as eternal goals. This is true of a business, a university, or an agricultural unit. Thus, in another scripture the Lord commands that “an everlasting order” be established, not only “for the salvation of men,” but also “to provide for my saints, that the poor shall be exalted, in that the rich are made low” (D&C 104:1, 16).

The Lord also says that if the Saints want to prepare themselves for a place in the celestial kingdom they must be “equal in earthly things” so that they may be “equal in the bonds of heavenly things.”

109
But what does it mean to be equal in earthly things and in heavenly things? To be equal in heavenly things is to be equal in those things which pertain to salvation or the highest place in the celestial kingdom. And in the celestial glory “there is a perfect equality” in which “all the ransomed are equal in authority, in strength, in opportunities, and in possessions.” As we saw earlier, to be equal in heavenly things is to be equal with the Lord in power and dominion, to be clothed upon as he is, to be one with him in bringing about the immortality and eternal life of man. To be equal in this way, as we know, is the promise of stewardship. And it is in this sense of equality in heavenly things that we may “prepare” ourselves for “a place in the celestial world.” Our schooling in equality here is preparatory for a place of equality hereafter.

The type of equality that characterizes the stewardship mode of organization can be conveniently discussed under what we may call class, status, and power. We shall be concerned mainly with the aspect of power.

Consider first, then, the allocation of material opportunities and rewards as indicators of class. Concerning material opportunities the scriptures read:

And you are to be equal, or in other words, you are to have equal claims on the properties, for the benefit of managing the concerns of your stewardships, every man according to his wants and needs, inasmuch as his wants are just. (D&C 82:17)

This is not to say that each steward is to claim an equal amount, “for the man that takes charge of a great manufacturing establishment would require more funds than he who has a small farm.” Claims can and should be treated equally though the amounts of claims need not be equal.

Not only are members to have equal material opportunity for managing their stewardships, they are to have equal material benefits from their cooperative efforts as well. The scriptures read:

Nevertheless, in your temporal things you shall be equal, and this not grudgingly, otherwise the abundance of the manifestations of the Spirit shall be withheld. (D&C 70:14)

Again we read: “But it is not given that one man should possess that which is above another, wherefore the world lieth in sin” (D&C 49:20).


9Orson Pratt in JD, 11:32.
The members are also to be equal in things of social status as well as things of social class. By "social status" we have in mind the esteem, deference or prestige connected with one's position in a social order. Status in this sense should not be confused with man's status as an agent discussed in this paper. On the matter of esteem and deference the Lord says:

And let every man esteem his brother as himself, and practise virtue and holiness before me.
And again I say unto you, let every man esteem his brother as himself.

For what man among you having twelve sons, and is no respecter of them, and they serve him obediently, and he saith unto the one: Be thou clothed in robes and sit thou here; and to the other: Be thou clothed in rags and sit thou there—and lookest upon his sons and saith I am just?
Behold, this I have given unto you as a parable, and it is even as I am. I say unto you, be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine. (D&C 38:24-27)

Accordingly, in the Lord's social order, as we would expect, the "man who makes mortar . . . is just as honorable as the man who takes charge of a large establishment . . ."

Being Joint Heirs Equal in Power

Last of all consider power itself. We have noted again and again that those who attain eternal life shall be "equal in power" (D&C 76:95). Those who attain this glory are "one" with the Lord not only in purpose but also in power. This is part of what it means to be "equal in the bonds of heavenly things" (D&C 78:5). Does the stewardship mode of organization reflect this aspect of equality too? Does its structure of authority make men equal in temporal power in preparation for equality in eternal power? The answer is that the stewardship structure does equalize power in a certain sense of equality and in a certain sense of power. To see this let's take a closer look at the stewardship structure, beginning with the idea of power.

Many ideas of power exist, but if we are to understand power in a stewardship structure it may be profitable to begin with a definition of priesthood. Priesthood is typically defined as the power of God delegated to man on earth by which man can act in all things for the salvation of the human family. This is a broader

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10Ibid.
notion of power (or authority) than one commonly finds in contemporary definitions of the term which typically denote the idea of one or more persons having the right to determine the actions of one or more other persons in intended ways. The core idea of priesthood power is not the right of someone to direct the actions of someone else; rather, it is the divine right to act in accomplishing the purposes of deity. If we wanted to render the second sense of power in terms of man’s revealed status as an agent, we could define it as individual agency enlarged and authorized by God whereby he accomplishes his purposes in man. Through faithfulness this authorized ability is enlarged until man has all power and equal power according to the oath of the priesthood (D&C 84:38; 78:22).

With this lead, let’s examine the nature and distribution of power with respect to earthly things in preparation for heavenly things. To do this it will be helpful to think of a stewardship unit as a set of interrelated positions aimed at achieving certain goals, some temporal and some eternal but all divine. Having a stewardship involves having position and direction as an agent within such a structure. Each position within a stewardship unit is designed to give concrete expression to man’s temporal status as an agent in preparation for his eternal status as an agent.

Consider again several scriptures pertaining to this matter as far as earthly things are concerned. The Lord says that each is to have “equal claim” on the unit’s resources “for the benefit of managing the concerns of your stewardship, every man according to his wants and his needs” so long as his wants and needs are “just” (D&C 82:17). It is important to notice that the “wants and needs” mentioned here are those connected with managing a stewardship, not simply those wants and needs of the consumer. Notice also that each steward makes a claim on the unit’s resources according to “his” wants and needs, in other words according to his plans and calculations for carrying out his stewardship. It is on the basis of his stewardship needs as he calculates them that each steward says to the treasurer: “I have need of this to help me in my stewardship,” and if he is “faithful and wise in his stewardship, this shall be his token unto the treasurer that the treasurer shall not withhold” (D&C 104:72-75). Again, the locus of decision and action is within each steward himself, and his token unto the treasurer carries with it the authority of his position as a self-directed being within the stewardship unit. There are important limits affecting each steward (as we shall see), but each is to be an agent unto himself within
those limits. Each is to act, not be acted upon, in fulfilling his stewardship. This state of self-direction, as we know, represents man’s temporal status as an agent and is after the likeness of heavenly things. Finally, we should notice that a steward’s claim must be “just.” It is not necessary in this paper to analyze the idea of justice. But in the quotation before us at least the following idea is included in saying that the claim of every steward is just. It presumes that (1) all claims have been adjusted to available resources and (2) no claim is treated as privileged.

We saw above that power in the priesthood sense is man’s right to act for God in all things pertaining to the salvation of the human family. Applying this meaning of power to the stewardship structure, we can say that power is the authorized ability of each steward to help accomplish the divine ends (some temporal and some eternal) of the stewardship unit. It is the right of action connected to each position within the stewardship structure. And it carries with it the promise of joint heirship in the celestial world.

In what sense is this form of power equal within a stewardship unit? It is obvious that power is not equal in the sense that each person has the same kind of stewardship, for some will be tanners and others teachers and still others farmers. It is also true—though slightly less obvious—that the scope of each stewardship would differ from every other: some will have large farms and some will have small farms, some small and some large businesses. For God gives to one, one talent; to another he gives two; and to still another, five. And then he commands them to make use of those talents (Matthew 24:14). Even in heavenly things perhaps we cannot expect joint heirs to be equal in the scope of stewardship: “A person may have the management of only one world, or of two, or of three, or of as many as there are particles of dust that compose our globe. . . .”

In what sense is power equal in a stewardship unit? In at least two senses: each steward is equal to every other steward in his powers of individual stewardship and in the powers of joint stewardship. We shall explain the former sense first.

We have seen that each steward is the center of initiative and decision regarding his stewardship. Having this position as an agent may be variously described as being an agent unto himself, having the power to act and not be acted upon, being a self-directed

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21Orson Pratt in JD, 2:102.
agent, and having the power of self-governance. If we will consider what the Prophet Joseph called the balance or equilibrium of powers in the stewardship order, we will see how each steward is equal to every other steward in power as far as individual stewardships are concerned. Within the structure of balanced powers every steward has identical rights (and is subject to identical limitations) in the exercise of self-direction. To verify this let us examine the relation of power between the membership and each steward and between each steward and the presiding officer.

The scriptures say that the unit's resources shall be subject to "the voice and the common consent" of the membership (D&C 104:71). This should have a salutary effect on the enterprises of each steward in that if he would submit his plans to the candid decision of [the] Order, many an enterprising man would be saved from foolish ventures and from ruin, and the wise and prudent would receive the necessary encouragement and financial aid, to make their undertakings a success for the benefit of the whole.\(^\text{13}\)

But then the Lord explains that "the voice and common consent" of the order constitute power whereby the membership may balance each steward's power over the common treasury:

And there shall not any part of it be used, or taken out of the treasury, only by the voice and common consent of the order.

And this shall be the voice and common consent of the order—that any man among you say to the treasurer: I have need of this to help me in my stewardship—

If it be five talents [dollars], or if it be ten talents [dollars], or twenty, or fifty, or a hundred, the treasurer shall give unto him the sum which he requires to help him in his stewardship—

Until he be found a transgressor, and it is manifest before the council of the order plainly that he is an unfaithful and an unwise steward.

But so long as he is in full fellowship, and is faithful and wise in his stewardship, this shall be his token unto the treasurer that the treasurer shall not withhold. (D&C 104:71-75)

However, if any steward is "found to be a transgressor," if it is "manifest before the council of the order plainly" that he is unwise or unfaithful, then "the treasurer shall be subject unto the council and voice of the order" (D&C 104:76), and the treasurer may very well be instructed by the order to reduce or withhold the resources

\(^\text{13}\)Erastus Snow in JD, 17:78.
requested by such a steward. There are no privileges enjoyed by any steward as far as any of these matters are concerned.

If a steward is wise and faithful, his just claims (D&C 82:17) cannot be turned down. If this were not so, the membership could become the center of initiative and decision with respect to the individual member’s stewardship. On the other hand, if a steward is unwise or unfaithful, then the membership may instruct the treasurer not to honor that steward’s claim as it stands. Unless this were possible, an unwise or unfaithful steward could assume power to direct the unit or could usurp another steward’s power. Thus, every stewardship is protected from the membership as a whole and the membership in turn is protected against unjust stewards.

Let us consider how this equilibrium of power is maintained between the individual steward and the presiding officer. Let us assume that a serious disagreement regarding a stewardship has arisen between a presiding officer and the steward himself. (Such disagreements should occur very rarely in the everyday operations of the unit. If they occur often, it may be that a steward or presiding officer is being unwise or unfaithful and should be judged accordingly.) It is instructive to recall what the Prophet Joseph said about such disputes and to keep in mind the relationship between a presiding officer and a member as indicated in Figure 1.

The Prophet says that “there must be an equilibrium of power between the bishop and the people,” for if each steward were “obliged to comply with his [the bishop’s] judgment,” the bishop would have “more power than a king has,” but if the bishop were obliged to comply with each steward’s judgment, this would “throw Zion into confusion, and make a slave of the Bishop.” Having said this, the Prophet outlines a procedure “in case the two parties cannot come to a mutual agreement.” He writes, “the Bishop is to have nothing to do” with the matter and “the case must be laid before a council of twelve High Priests. . . .”14 This last remark fits Section 102 of the Doctrine and Covenants, which sets down the primary function of the High Council: to settle “important difficulties which might arise in the church, which could not be settled by the church or the bishop’s council to the satisfaction of the parties” (D&C 102:2). The Council may assume jurisdiction “when the parties or either of them shall request it” (D&C 102:24).

Again we see that the powers of stewardship are equalized by a

14HC, 1:364-65.
system of mutual and equal limitations. Each steward is protected from being, as it were, ruled over by a king. Yet the presiding officer is likewise safeguarded from being a slave to any steward. And all members are preserved from the consequences of any member having more power than is consistent with their union. If their views in a stewardship discussion become irreconcilable, either may appeal to the high council for a decision. Thus, the stewardship and the presiding officer are ultimately equal.

More generally speaking, a presiding officer is a steward much like any other: he is subject to the same laws of stewardship as are all others, equal with them in esteem and things of class, required to give an account of himself, subject to being removed from his stewardship if he is unwise or unfaithful, and in general limited by a balance of power between him, the membership, and each steward. The presiding officer is in no sense a king or ruler. In fact, it was while giving instructions to a presiding officer over temporal affairs, Bishop Edward Partridge to be specific, that the Lord warned, "Let no man think he is ruler. . ." (D&C 58:20). Smith and Sjodahl comment as follows on this passage: "In the kingdom of God, Jesus Christ is Ruler. Judges and counselors are but his servants. There is no 'hierarchy' in the Church." 15

To repeat, the first sense of equal power comes to this: every steward has the same rights and is subject to the same limitations in the exercise of self-direction.

Before passing to the next point, notice the crucial role played by the high council in maintaining the equilibrium of power. By settling serious disagreements or, much more importantly, simply by being prepared to do so, the council helps insure the successful working of a stewardship unit, enabling that unit to operate through the exercise of equalized power without gravitating toward an authoritarian system or declining into anarchy when faced with difficulties that cannot be settled otherwise. And it takes wise men, as we say, to perform this role in such a way that the stewardship structure of authority is preserved and strengthened.

What is the second sense in which power is equal in a stewardship order? The second, which is simpler to present, is that every steward has an equal voice in the membership's power of counsel and a single vote in its power of consent. This means that he is a

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15Smith and Sjodahl, Doctrine and Covenants Commentary, p. 339.

116
joint steward as well as an individual steward. His stewardship is to help determine the overall direction of the unit as well as to perform individual tasks within it. This joint aspect of stewardship is an important aspect indeed; in ways in which individual tasks do not, it prepares each steward for his eternal status. In eternal life being "one" with others and the Lord is a joint as well as an individual stewardship. As the scriptures read, if we are faithful and wise we shall become "heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17). In the kingdom of darkness there is no joint stewardship, for Satan seeks to "reign over" (2 Nephi 2:29) man, not to make him a joint heir. Preparation for this sort of kingdom would, of course, be quite different. A different structure of authority would be required—one that is hierarchic and authoritarian wherein some rule over others. In such a structure man's eternal status as agent and the oneness based on it are frustrated.