Hiram Page: An Historical and Sociological Analysis of an Early Mormon Prototype

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HIRAM PAGE: AN HISTORICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL
ANALYSIS OF AN EARLY MORMON PROTOTYPE

A Thesis
Presented to the
Department of History
Brigham Young University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

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by
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April 1987
This thesis by Bruce G. Stewart is accepted in its present form by the Department of History of Brigham Young University as satisfying the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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19 March 1987
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The history of Joseph Smith and the rise of Mormonism has demonstrated a proclivity towards bias and polemics. The fourteen-year-old Joseph found immediate antipathy to the telling of events surrounding his "First Vision" experience. He recorded:

Some few days after I had this vision, I happened to be in company with one of the Methodist preachers, who was very active in the...religious excitement; and, conversing with him on the subject of religion, I took occasion to give him an account of the vision which I had had. I was greatly surprised at his behavior; he treated my communication not only lightly, but with great contempt, saying it was all of the devil, that there were no such things as visions or revelations in these days; that all such things had ceased with the apostles, and that there would never be any more of them. I soon found...that my telling the story had excited a great deal of prejudice against me among the professors of religion, and was the cause of great persecution, which continued to increase.... 1

This antagonistic response was the precursor of the tension that has persisted to the present time.

Contemporaries and historians have left such a legacy of confusion that students approaching a study of Joseph Smith and the Church he organized find themselves wading through a morass of contradictory opinions and information. This confusion makes an appreciation and understanding of
Mormonism illusive at best.

Those opposed to Joseph Smith and his claims of divine revelation have not been willing to admit that he may have had a genuine religious experience. For them, Joseph Smith was deluded, a fraud, or even mentally deranged. Defenders of the faith have been as much at fault by attempting to portray Mormonism as arising within a cultural vacuum. They desire to extract the events and protagonists of Joseph Smith's story from the social milieu of nineteenth-century America. Interpretations such as these are untenable. As early as 1903 the problems in Mormon historiography became evident. James B. Halsey, writing for a national literary magazine, noted: "At present it is hard to find anything between extravagant eulogy from its devotees and sympathizers on the one hand, and fierce denunciation and abuse from religious despisers and Gentile prejudice on the other." 2

An understanding of the attraction that Mormonism had for early nineteenth-century Americans suffers most from the propagandist approach to Mormon history. Salient aspects of human experience and culture that are certain to be indispensable keys need to be addressed. Who was initially attracted to Mormonism? Why were they drawn to a village seer for religious satisfaction? What does this attraction to Joseph's claims say about the state of religion in early America? What did American culture add
to the Mormon experience? And, how were the expectations of this culture satisfied or disappointed by Joseph and Mormonism? Only by addressing these and other relevant questions will we arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the religious climate in post-revolutionary America. More particularly, Mormonism, oft maligned and misunderstood, will become comprehensible as a legitimate response to the social pressures arising as the emerging nation struggled for identity.

Recently, scholars and academicians from the social sciences -- especially sociologists and anthropologists -- have turned their attention towards the social worlds of new religions. A major portion of this research concerns itself with religious phenomenon in developing third world countries. Kenelm Burridge in his book, *New Heaven New Earth: A Study of Millenarian Activities*, explores developing eschatology among such diverse groups as the Maoris, the Polynesians, Africans, and the plains Indians of North America. Bryan R. Wilson's, *Magic and the Millennium*, explores the same sociological theme among tribal and primitive cultures. His study is wide-ranging and unusually diverse in identifying the various religious responses experienced by less-developed people coming in contact with more technically advanced western culture.

Christianity has also fallen under sociological scrutiny. In *Sects and Society*, Wilson turns his
attention towards the Elim Tabernacle, Christian Science, and the Christadelphians in England. Norman Cohn’s *Pursuit of the Millennium*, while being more narrative in style, nevertheless provides valuable information concerning millennial–sect activity from the medieval period. Perhaps the most ambitious is John G. Gager’s analysis of the social world of early Christianity. In *Kingdom and Community*, Gager attempts to apply the patterns of millennial sect development to pristine Christianity. Though the source material is scant, Gager finds enough similarities to suggest that the development of early Christianity resembles the sect response to specific social stimuli.

In each of these treatises a distinction is made between traditional and established religions, whose impetus is world-maintenance, and new religions which emphasize world-construction. The creation of a new-world-view is construed as the re-interpretation of old symbols and the development of new symbols, and the re-definition of the community with emergent rituals and mechanisms that merge to form a new order established in sacred time. The emphasis on sacred time and place finds expression in millennial expectation. The subsequent rise of theology, scripture, and ecclesiastical office within the new order is designed to give eschatological meaning to the community as well to subordinate all other competing
world views. 

The emphasis of these studies is to avoid narrow theological interpretation of the newly emerging sects. The establishment of a theological paradigm, it is argued, neglects social and cultural insights indispensible to comprehensive understanding. Neither is it appropriate to view the new religions as, "oddities, diseases in the body social, or troublesome nuisances." By assuming that specific personal religious experience were genuine — more important, that they contained sufficient power to generate a new belief system — a more complete integration of the rise of new religions within their cultural context may be attained.

The emerging behavioral literature finds several commonalities among the vast numbers of disparate millennial sects. The frequency of similarity among the sects has enabled scholars to suggest a governing paradigm. First, all new religions are directed toward the creation of new worlds. The use of rituals and symbols emerge to remind the community of the new-world-view, which replaces the old existing order. This new way of looking at the world is essentially millennial with its inherent promise of a new heaven on earth. Often the millennial aspect of the movement is expressed in terms of land — either a distant land or an ancestral land — that is an inheritance to the faithful.
Second, millennial movements are historically movements of the disinherited. The movement is for the purpose of counteracting inequities in human dignity as well as crises in finance. These problems are resolved in a series of binary oppositions: poor-rich, good-evil, pious-hypocrite, elect, damned. An ultimate judgment is the final solution.

Third, in each movement the decisive factor is the appearance of a prophet. The prophet stands as the symbolic head and is the primary cause of the movement. He articulates the basic philosophy, neutralizes traditional canons of authority and through the exercise of charisma creates the social relationship.

Fourth, pursuit of the millennium is traditionally a communal venture. An intense preoccupation with the community finds expression in terms of homogeneity, equality, uniformity, and absence of property distinctions. Often accompanying the egalitarian sense is a redefinition of and experimentation with traditional sexual mores.

Fifth, with each new sect there is an initial release of emotional energy as "new rules" are sought to make sense out of a senseless world. This energy, often defined as charisma, is characterized by visions, healings, miracles, prophecy, and revelation.

Sixth, it is inevitable that the faithful will experience a discomfiture of their initial eschatological
expectations. The failure of vision reminds the other-worldly that they are yet in the real world. The sense of failure is softened by two factors. Safety is discovered in the rise of myth and a non-historical sense. This helps to explain the contradictions between reality and the hope of millennial vision -- of what ought to be not what is. And, in response to the failure of the original vision there arises an emphasis on missionary activity. The community obligation to proclaim the gospel to the world rationalizes the discomfiture by suggesting that if more people can be convinced that the belief is true, it certainly must be true.

Finally, the literature holds that each group must legitimize itself by the eventual process of institutionalization and routinization. A cycle is therefore established to be reptitious within the group: Charismatic beginnings (action) followed by consolidation (reaction) followed in turn by eventual revitalization. There follows an endless repetition of the process. Often heresy will be used as a tool to establish the orthodoxy of shared beliefs and values. In fact, heresy becomes necessary to stabilize the organizational structure, so much so that if not present the sect will have to create it.

It is recognized that this model of sect development is in the experimental and theoretical stage.
However, it is believed that any attempt to broaden and deepen the understanding of radical sect development, with its inherent millennial response, will provide not only a clearer picture of motivations, but also a more complete integration of theology and history. The purpose of this thesis, therefore, is to provide a comparative analysis of the nineteenth-century Mormon response to the existing social context in accordance with the experimental sociological paradigm suggested above.

To facilitate this, it is proposed to avoid the Mormon Prophet, Joseph Smith, as the focus of examination. Instead, the meaning of Mormonism will be approached from the perspective of an early convert, Hiram Page. Page, as representative of this group of nineteenth century religious seekers, may provide one of the most significant examples in the dynamics of sect development in the early church.

Page's life and experiences as a Mormon convert are significant for several reasons. First, his association with the New England heritage -- especially Vermont -- is typical of all those attracted to Joseph’s claims in the formative period. Second, Page is a member of the primal group of converts. It has been suggested that the initial band of devotees provides particular validity for the revelatory claims of a prophet and, in fact, make the movement possible. Third, it will be seen that he made a
significant contribution towards shaping and modifying the initial expression of charismatic gifts within the formative months. And, fourth, though Page was a devoted follower of Joseph Smith he, like so many of the original converts, became dissatisfied with the direction the church had taken and left Joseph after making significant commitments and sacrifices.

In this study it will be argued that Hiram Page is a prototype of the primal group of early Mormon converts. Coming out of the millennial milieu of early nineteenth-century America, Page comes to the church with expectations suggested by that culture. His satisfactions and ultimate discontents may suggest motives of those first generation saints. This in turn may provide valuable insight into other Americans who became religious pilgrims during the ferment of the nineteenth-century.

The attempt to understand Mormonism in its social context is not new. Over the years several historians have written with this concept in mind. Perhaps the first such attempt was Thomas F. O'Dea's, The Mormons. O'Dea, though not a Mormon, was sympathetic. He dealt with the whole of Mormonism from its organization to the middle of the twentieth-century. As such, his treatment of Mormon origins is necessarily thin. Klaus Hansen in his, Mormonism and the American Experience, is mainly concerned with accommodation of Mormonism to the larger American
experience. His analysis of plural marriage, racial thought and practice, and the political aspects of the church, though significant topics, do little to suggest motivations of early converts or the attraction that they felt for the Mormon restoration message.

Also, Lawrence Foster has used social analysis to understand the origins and practice of plural marriage among the Mormons, celibacy among the Shakers, and complex marriage relationships among the Oneida Community. In Religion and Sexuality, Foster makes use of Victor Turner's The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure, which emphasizes the rites of passage occurring in transitional moments of a new social movement. These Turner describes as the liminal or no-rules phase of adjustment. He suggests that in the first part of the nineteenth-century just such a condition existed for many Americans, resulting in the various forms of marriage experimentation among millennial movements. Again, the concentration upon plural marriage suggests no satisfactory solution to Mormon origins.

Two additional studies are among the most significant to date. Upon invitation of the Mormon History Association, John Gager in 1981 addressed assembled Mormon historians, placing his previously discussed models on early Christian history in a Mormon context. In this seminal treatise, "Early Mormonism and Early Christianity:
Some Parallels and their Consequences for the Study of New Religions", Gager turned the social models upon Mormon origins for the first time. Brief, but intriguing, Gager's work raised many questions with respect to Mormonism's relationship to other sects.

The best of the new social history with regard to Mormon origins is Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition*. Professor Shipps, also a sympathetic non-Mormon, legitimizes the sociological perspective for Mormon studies. She demonstrates that Mormonism was not just another reformatory protest against Catholicism, but rather stands in respect to Christianity as Christianity stood to Judaism. Perhaps Shipps' most important contribution is her argument that Mormonism can be examined in its social context without assuming a perjorative view of either Joseph Smith or his early followers. It is from this point that this study proceeds.

Of course this examination of Mormon origins will be neither definitive nor comprehensive. The writer hopes that the questions raised will result in further critical response as to the value of social models and their applicability to Mormon origins. In this manner we will surely arrive at a greater appreciation of the value of Mormonism to Latter-day Saints as well as to the religious community as a whole. As a Latter-day Saint, who is
familiar with the uncomplicated faith of many of its believers as well as the exclusivity of Mormon theology and self-perception, I understand a social approach to Mormon history may appear as innovative and perhaps to some as disturbing. However, such methods as I suggest should not be faith destructive. Rather, they should allow us new perspectives and bring a higher level of understanding heretofore unattainable through narrow and restrictive analysis. Gager, himself a faithful Christian, argued that the social analysis of Christianity had failed to still its impact upon mankind. "I can only remind you," he wrote:

that many learned outside observers of the early Christian movement lie silent and forgotten in their Mediterranean graves, while Christianity itself -- no doubt strengthened by what it learned from these observers -- survived to live and laugh another day. *

Presentation of my argument will be organized in four main themes. First, a short biographical sketch will introduce Hiram Page and his association with Joseph Smith and the beginnings of Mormonism. This narrative will not be interpretative, but rather give the reader a sense of Page's involvement in early Mormonism. Second, Page will be placed within the millennial tradition in America. He will be seen as a seeker and a primitivist who, disenchanted with the failure of America to realize the promise of its destiny, became a religious pilgrim. In this chapter we shall examine his involvement in the folk religious practices and his subsequent attraction to
Mormonism. Third, Page played a major role in the beginnings of institutionalization in the early Mormonism. The second general conference of the church becomes the major focus as Hiram embroils himself in one of Mormonism's first constitutional crises. As such he helps to set a precedent for future religious experience among the faithful. The church not only begins a new course spiritually, but also initiates a series of moves westward beginning with this conference. And fourth, Hiram's estrangement from Joseph Smith will be examined as prototypal of the apostasy process within the early church. Suggestions will be made as to the successes and failures of Mormonism to satisfy the millennial expectations of many of the early Saints who came into the church but remained faithful only through the first decade.

Two notes of explanation will be helpful to the reader as the argument unfolds. First, it should not be assumed that Hiram Page is prototypal of all early Mormon converts. Page and his associates, while having much in common with other Saints, are part of the original band of followers. Their uniqueness lies in the fact that these men and women came to the Restoration message in its incubational expression. No missionary effort or formal organization attracted their attention, rather, they were drawn together by the spontaneity of their common experiences and needs. More importantly, they experienced
the extraordinary nature of the prolegomenous events of Mormonism and bore testimony of their truthfulness first hand. Others, later Saints, looked to them for the confirmatory evidence of God's work.

Second, the religious climate of nineteenth-century America had a complexity that is difficult for the twentieth-century mind. Accustomed to rather clear distinctions between traditional and non-traditional Christian religions, the modern mind stumbles at the lack of such definition in the post-Revolutionary era. We must understand that folk religion -- the free experimentation with arcane and even magical practices -- was not considered to be unusual within the Christian context of the times. Any attempt to separate Christian from non-Christian practices according to contemporary perceptions will be misleading and inadequate. The primitive mind made no such distinction. For many early Americans magical practices were an acceptable expression of traditional Christianity. For our purposes the term traditional religion will be applied to nineteenth-century America to loosely define Catholicism and the proliferation of sometimes radical evangelical sects. The term folk religion will be used to suggest the entire body of beliefs dealing with nature, elemental spirits, and occult practices that cut across and circumscribed nineteenth-century religion.
In order to retain the original flavor of the remarks and observations, all quotations will be presented in their original form, without change in spelling or punctuation.

The completion of any paper leaves the writer in debt to many individuals. Sincere appreciation is expressed to Dr. Ronald W. Walker and Dr. David J. Whittaker, who willingly shared their time in reading the initial drafts of this thesis. Their suggestions as to style and source material were invaluable. Thanks must also be extended to the archivists and librarians at the LDS Church Historical Department and the University of Utah Special Collections who answered my questions and helped locate needed materials. Also, my gratitude and love is expressed to Lynnette, Scott, Kelli, and Daniel who gave up precious family time so that I could spend the hours needed in the research and writing of this thesis project.
Notes to Chapter I

1. Joseph Smith’s full account of his First Vision is found in, Brigham H. Roberts, ed., History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 7 Vols. (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Co., 1974), Vol. 1, pp. 2-8. Usually referred to as the Documentary History of the Church, it will hereafter be cited as DHC. The official version has been canonized by the Latter-day Saints and is contained in the Pearl of Great Price, Joseph Smith -- History 1:5-26. Hereafter cited as JSH.


5. All studies of millenarian activity propose, with minor variation, the same model. Because Gager deals with early Christianity and it is, of course, the core of all Christian movements, I have followed his outline structure in presenting the ideal pattern. For Related Studies within a Christian context see Robert R. Wilson, Genealogy and History in the Biblical World (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); also Wilson, Prophecy and Society (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980). These two studies deal with the antecedents of Christianity within a sociological framework.

CHAPTER II

HIRAM PAGE AND THE MORMON EXPERIENCE, 1832-1838

Hiram Page was born in 1800 in the state of Vermont at an unknown location. 1 Significantly, in addition to Page many of Mormonism's early converts had resided in the Green Mountain state including the Smith family, Oliver Cowdery, Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and such disciples as the Knights, the Stowells, and the Carters. There is no evidence that Page was acquainted with these families prior to his contact with Joseph Smith's restoration message, but their common Vermont experiences certainly provided a touchstone for their future relationships.

Turn of the century Vermont was a malestrom of ideologies, particularly for those living west of the Green Mountains. To reside east of this natural formation was to tie one closely with the traditional Puritanism of New Hampshire. Economically, socially, and intellectually the population tended to reflect the inherited New England tradition. To reside west of the mountains was to be in touch with what some have called the "Vermont Way." This was "Ethan Allen country," which inferred a reluctance to be subject to authority and a tendency toward egalitarian
extremism. This region was, in fact, a breeding ground of many of the radical notions that began to be promulgated within the new nation. 

Lack of information concerning the location of Page's place of birth makes it difficult to determine what social and intellectual forces may have shaped his early attitudes. However, at a very young age he began the study of medicine and traveled extensively in the practice of his chosen profession. The fact that his travels included Vermont, New York, and Canada would suggest a general awareness of the prevailing attitudes held by "Vermonters" as well as the more traditional republican values of New England.

There are indications that during his early years Hiram became dissatisfied with traditional religion. Most of the early Mormon converts previously belonged to established churches, and most belonged to the churches of their parents. However, Laurence M. Yorgason notes that, in comparison with most Americans, this group demonstrated a marked increase in the rejection of established religion from parents to children -- seventeen to thirty-one percent. Evidence suggests this alienation from established Christianity was manifest in Hiram's case. We will see in later chapters that he accepted the folk culture of his day. He was a believer in the reality of
the occult, and was somewhat accomplished in the practice of the arcane arts. During much of his life, Page possessed a revelatory stone through which he sought divine communication. The possession and use of such a device was often evidence of the estrangement that resulted when both the enthusiastic revivalists as well as the more static religions were not able to respond to deeply felt spiritual needs.

At some time in his early adulthood, most likely in his early twenties, Page left Vermont and moved to New York where he located in Seneca County. Upon his arrival, he made acquaintance with the family of Peter and Mary Whitmer. The Whitmers were to become lifelong friends and trusted associates. Catherine Whitmer, their daughter, eventually became the object of his attention, and on 10 November 1825 Hiram made the eighteen year old his bride. The couple resided with the Whitmers on their farm in Fayette which was located seven miles southeast of Geneva and situated between Lake Cayuga and Seneca Lake. Three years later their first child, a son named John, was born. However, marriage and family were not to be the only changes for Hiram. Momentous events were taking place that would subsequently alter his life. In near-by Palmyra a young teenage boy, Joseph Smith, was preparing to announce that the day of revelation was not past. God had spoken once again to man on earth, and he, as God's seer,
was about to open the last dispensation and begin preparations designed to usher in the millennial day.

For five years prior to Hiram’s marriage to Catherine the restoration message had been fermenting in New York. In 1820 Joseph received the first of many visions that became the vitality of the Latter-day Saint faith. At the age of fourteen the religious confusion and natural curiosity of youth propelled the young man to a secluded grove of trees where upon he voiced, in prayerful petition, his youthful concerns. Joseph later stated:

After I had retired to the place I had previously designed to go, having looked around me, and finding myself alone, I knelt down and began to offer up the desires of my heart to God. I had scarcely done so, when immediately I was seized upon by some power which entirely overcame me, and had such an astonishing influence over me as to bind my tongue so that I could not speak. Thick darkness gathered around me, and it seemed to me for a time as if I were doomed to sudden destruction. But, exerting all my powers to call upon God to deliver me out of the power of this enemy which had seized upon me…I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me. It no sooner appeared than I found myself delivered from the enemy which held me bound. When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other -- This is My Beloved Son. Here Him! 

Joseph indicated that his object in prayer had been to discover which of all the competing religious philosphies was correct. The response was that he should join none for all were anathema. All had incurred the wrath of the Lord for hypocrisy.
In the earliest recorded recollection of his vision -- an account written in 1832 -- Joseph remembered not so much the message concerning the general state of religion, but rather the personal satisfaction of being found accepted by the two celestial personages. This 1832 recital more closely approximates the significance and power that Joseph's vision held for his generation. Perhaps more than the later version of his experience, which became canonized by Latter-day Saints, the message of his account is clearly that man can approach a heretofore unknown God and receive revelation in answer to honest petition. It was a message that strongly compelled Hiram. 7

Page was only twenty years old when Joseph's vision occurred. If he recorded the recollections of his own confusion during these early times, they have not survived. We may suppose that, like Joseph, he was filled with uncertainties concerning the spiritual dimensions of his life. The revivalistic fires of the Second Great Awakening, then sweeping through New York, were aimed directly at youthful questioning. Page and his contemporaries typically wondered deeply about their own personal salvation. They entertained doubts concerning the value of traditional religion and its ability to provide the means necessary to achieve God's kingdom. The effect of this awakening upon them is largely incomprehensible to
the modern mind. It shook established traditions and institutions to their foundations. People, becoming isolated and unsettled from familiar patterns of life, searched their souls to find meaning of the confusion. One historian has indicated that its twentieth-century equivalent would be the civil rights demonstrations, the campus disturbances, and the urban riots of the 1960's all happening simultaneously. Hiram and countless others became pilgrims in their own land.

Joseph's experience voiced their questions and offered solutions for their concerns. It provided God's reality and allowed for the attainment of priceless grace. Not least of all, it sacralized the life of Joseph Smith for all who would believe. In the context of millennial studies, Joseph, through the power of his experiences, assumed the role of charismatic leader. *Charisma* refers to a mantle worn by a prophet-leader. It is the inherent power in a vision. It is the magnetism -- in this sense, divinely inspired -- which draws from others an allegiance. It allows the prophet-leader to preach, teach, and be subject to no earthly authority. Often it is charisma that provides legitimacy for the movement.

The reality of Joseph's charismatic role matured slowly and, because of his association with the Whitmers during these years, Hiram learned of the young Prophet's work. Joseph struggled with an extended silence from the
heavens. His contemplative and sensitive nature seems to have agonized over the natural foibles of youth. He grew to manhood through the economic struggles of his family in the New York farming district. Finally, he sought a reconfirmation of his calling. The experiences of 21 September 1823 would forever alter the simple life he had known. Joseph, in his history, recalled:

...I often felt condemned for my weaknesses and imperfections; when, on the evening of the above-mentioned twenty-first of September, after I had retired to my bed for the night, I betook myself to prayer and supplication to Almighty God for forgiveness of all my sins and follies, and also for a manifestation to me, that I might know of my state and standing before him; for I had full confidence in obtaining a divine manifestation, as I previously had one. While I was thus in the act of calling upon God, I discovered a light appearing in my room, which continued to increase until the room was lighter than at noonday, when immediately a personage appeared at my bedside, standing in the air, for his feet did not touch the floor....He called me by name, and said unto me that he was a messenger sent from the presence of God to me, and that his name was Moroni; that God had a work for me to do; and that my name should be had for good and evil among all nations, kindred, and tongues, or that it should be both good and evil spoken of among all people. 10

The work spoken of was to become known as the Book of Mormon. From 1823 until 1830 Joseph would dedicate his life to its publication. Joseph identified the source of the book as a number of "gold plates" upon which ancient American prophets had written the history of their people. Joseph called the Book of Mormon a translation of these writings accomplished through the power of God. He bore testimony throughout his life of the truthfulness of its
origin and the correctness of the translation. Much of the translation was done at the Whitmer farm giving Hiram an opportunity to have first hand information concerning Joseph's work.

To make the new scripture stand independent of any personal attacks on himself, Joseph called upon three men to bear testimony of the reality of the Angel of God as well as the plates. Those witnesses would declare to the world:

Be it known unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people...that we, through the grace of God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, have seen the plates which contain this record.... And we also know that they have been translated by the gift and power of God, for his voice hath declared it unto us; wherefore we know of a surety that the work is true. And we also testify that we have seen the engravings which are upon the plates; and they have been shown unto us by the power of God, and not of man. And we declare with words of soberness, that an angel of God came down from heaven, and he brought and laid before our eyes, that we beheld and saw the plates, and the engravings thereon; and we know that it is by the grace of God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, that we beheld and bear record that these things are true....

This declaration is signed by Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris, and David Whitmer.

David Whitmer, Catherine's brother, for a time acted as scribe while Joseph translated the plates. It is no doubt that his help was deeply appreciated by the young Prophet, and his subsequent belief in the truthfulness of Joseph's claims contributed to his selection as one of the witnesses of these extraordinary claims. Though Page could have heard of the visions of the young prophet and the
rumors of golden plates during his itinerancy as a doctor, more likely his introduction to Mormonism came from David. Given David's intimate association with Joseph and the unusual nature of his claims, Hiram most certainly became aware of the visionary stirrings of the young prophet not long after making Catherine's acquaintance. Joseph did not receive possession of the ancient record until September, 1827. This places Page among the first to have personal contact with the ground-work of Mormonism.

It is impossible to know what aspects of Mormonism compelled Hiram's allegiance. He left no written account of the personal attractions he felt for Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon, or for the specific doctrinal innovations of early Mormonism. However, it is possible to construct a partial scenario.

William E. McLellin -- also an early convert to Mormonism, as well as a school teacher and physician, and an intimate of Hiram's through the years of their later estrangement from Joseph -- spoke of his own conversion and the appeal of Mormonism in context of post-revolution awakenings and confusions. In an 1835 letter to his brother Samuel, William recalls the arrival of two preachers in his neighborhood -- one being David Whitmer, Hiram's brother-in-law. He remembers their message as being:

...that these were the last days, and that God had sent forth the book of Mormon to sho the times of the
fulfillment of the ancient prophecies when the Saviour shall come to destroy iniquity off the face of the earth, and reign with his saints in Millennial Rest. One of these men was a witness to the book and had seen an angel which declared its truth (his name was David Whitmer).

William then demonstrates that the conversion process was more than an emotional impulse, for he continues:

I examined the book, the people, the preachers, and the old scriptures, and from the evidences I had which I had before me I was bound to believe the book of Mormon to be a divine revelation, and the people to be Christians. Consequently I joined them. 12

McClellin’s careful search through the scriptures to provide evidence validating the Book of Mormon was typical of Hiram’s generation. Salvation was a quest to re-discover the power of primitive Christianity. The close examination of the Christian canon -- particularly the New Testament -- led to a great awareness of scriptural content. They emphasized faith, repentance, baptism by immersion, and the laying on of hands for the Holy Ghost. Hiram was likely a seeker in this sort. He certainly placed high priority on revelation, authority, and the exercise of spiritual gifts. 13

That this pursuit was taken seriously is evident from the early career of another Mormon convert from the western New York area. Parley P. Pratt joined the Church at about the same time as did Hiram Page. His autobiography reveals him to be typical of nineteenth-century seekers of salvation and spiritual satisfaction.
In 1826 Pratt took leave of his friends and family and started west. His resolve was to separate himself from the "civilized world." He was discouraged having "met with little else but disappointment, sorrow and unrewarded toil; and where sectarian divisions disgusted and ignorance perplexed me...." Whatever answers he might find as he sought peace, Pratt believed, were to be found among the "solitudes of the Great West, among the natives of the forest." 14

Finding himself alone without friends or money he designed to winter in solitude. Procuring an axe and a few other necessities, he retired into the virgin forest, and built himself a shelter. At the age of nineteen he struggled to find himself. He lived off the land during the months of isolation. The storms raged and wild animals howled. "But," says Pratt, "in my little cabin the fire blazed pleasantly, and the Holy Scriptures and a few other books occupied my hours of solitude." 15

As a result of this season of intensive spiritual concern and preparation he became aware of the essential doctrines and authority called for by New Testament precedent. In 1830 he felt compelled "in an extraordinary manner" to intensify his studies. Parley relates:

My prayers were soon answered, even beyond my expectations; the prophecies of the holy prophets were opened to my view; I began to understand the things which were coming on the earth -- the restoration of Israel, the coming of the Messiah, and the glory that should follow. I was so astonished at the darkness of
myself and mankind on these subjects that I could exclaim with the prophet: surely, "darkness covers the earth, and gross darkness the people." 16

So intense were the stirrings of the spirit in Pratt that he was moved to labor among his fellows to enlighten their understandings.

Hiram’s struggles and questions were probably similar to these and other early Saints. He must have been attracted to the Prophet Joseph for very specific reasons, including the imminent approach of the Kingdom of God and the subsequent millennial glory. He was aware of a scriptural test in determining the validity of a new religious voice. The need to ascertain a foundation of authority and power was also clear. Joseph Smith was able to meet these needs for Page and all those drawn to Mormonism. Hiram and his associates felt that Joseph’s work was a "new dispensation or commission, in fulfillment of prophecy, and for the restoration of Israel, and to prepare the way before the second coming of the Lord." 17

Certainly, we will see from his existing letters and doctrinal epistles how significant millenarian ideas and proper authority were to him throughout his life.

In addition to the common experience of conversion, Hiram had the opportunity to be intimate with those most involved in the unfolding of the Mormon Kingdom. What stories would he have heard from David, Oliver Cowdery, and members of the Smith family itself? The Prophet’s mother
records that even before the translation process, Joseph
would often keep the family up into the night with
entertaining tales of the dress and appearance of the
Nephites and Lamanites -- the main protagonists of the book
-- and also descriptions of the mode of life and even their
battles. 19

Hiram was in a position to be familiar with first
hand accounts of many of the angelic visitations young
Joseph reported. As recorded in Latter-day Saint scripture
accounts, Page likely knew of the appearance of John the
Baptist relative to the restoration of the Aaronic or
lesser priesthood, the manifestation of Peter, James, and
John ordaining Joseph and Oliver to the higher or
Melchizedek priesthood, as well as reports of Adam,
Gabriel, Raphael, and "divers angels, from...Adam down to
the present time." 17

One supposes the effect on Hiram was dramatic. He
apparently demonstrated sufficient belief in Joseph's
experience that he was selected to be among eight other men
privileged to look upon the golden plates from which the
Book of Mormon was translated with their own eyes. His
testimony is also published with each Book of Mormon:

Be it known unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and
people, unto whom this work shall come: That Joseph
Smith, Jun., the translator of this work, has shown
unto us the plates of which hath been spoken, which
have the appearance of gold; and as many of the leaves
as the said Smith has translated we did handle with our
hands; and we also saw the engravings theron, all of
which has the appearance of ancient work, and of
curious workmanship. And this we bear record with words of soberness, that the said Smith has shown unto us, for we have seen and hefted, and know of a surety that the said Smith has got the plates of which we have spoken. And we give our names unto the world, to witness unto the world that which we have seen. And we lie not, God bearing witness of it. 20

This statement is signed by those who must have been great believers and great friends -- Christian, Jacob, Peter, and John Whitmer; Hyrum, Samuel, and Joseph Smith, Sen.; and Hiram Page.

Because of the kinship as well as friendship, this testimony has been criticized by some. 21 However, it was sufficiently significant to Page and the others that the magnetism of the book and its message remained with them throughout the remainder of their lives. Even though disenchantment with Joseph Smith eventually separated them from mainstream Mormonism, we shall see that a belief in the reality of these experiences kept the Book of Mormon as an integral part of their religious faith.

On April 6, 1830, Hiram and Catherine gathered at her father’s home with a handful of believers to organize formally "The Church of Christ." Having been legally incorporated, official ordinance work began. There were a number of baptisms and several ordinations to priesthood offices in the fledgling church. Hiram experienced an outpouring of the Holy Ghost and witnessed the gift of prophecy as it was poured out upon some. There was a happy and peaceful feeling as they realized that the church was
organized according to commandment and revelation, and was based upon the order of the New Testament church. 22

For reasons unknown, Hiram and Catherine did not receive baptism at this first meeting. However, five days later on 11 April 1830, a second meeting was convened at the home of Catherine's parents. Following a sermon by Oliver Cowdery, Hiram, Catherine, and four of Catherine's brothers and sisters were baptized. One week later, the Whitmer parents followed their children into the kingdom by accepting baptism in Seneca Lake at the hand of Cowdery. Hiram was not in all likelihood a passive member. At the 9 June 1830 conference he received ordination to office of teacher in the Aaronic Priesthood. This "license," as it was called, inferred a missionary responsibility. It is most probable that in the next few months he fulfilled this obligation, though there is no record of his service extant. 23

The Page family played an active role in the affairs of the new church, for Hiram had the apparent trust and friendship of the Prophet Joseph. He was selected along with Oliver Cowdery, Joseph Knight, and Josiah Stoal to go to Canada and sell the copyright for the Book of Mormon. The church was experiencing financial difficulty and Joseph received a revelation indicating that were to sell the copyright for eight-thousand dollars which would serve to lighten the burden. Gathering these men together,
Joseph blessed them for their journey northward. We shall later see that this episode caused more than a little trauma for Page. Upon arriving in Canada, they did not obtain the promised copyright. In Kingston, the city to which Joseph sent them, no one could be found who was authorized by the Canadian government to purchase copyrights. Being directed to York, they still were not able to secure the promised eight-thousand dollars. Dejected and confused, the men returned to upstate New York.

At the time this disappointment was temporarily put aside. Hiram, Catherine, and the Whitmer family continued as active participants in the affairs of the church. The records indicate that Page was in attendance at the 26 September 1830 General Conference. This conference is so pivotal in the growth of the church, and Page’s role so prominent, that it will be discussed in detail in a later chapter.

Upstate New York was not to be the headquarters of the young church for long. In November of that year a Campbellite preacher named Sidney Rigdon received baptism in Ohio at the hand of missionaries on their way to the western lands and the "borders of the Lamanites." 24 A substantial number of his congregation joined Rigdon in accepting Mormonism. In December, 1830 Rigdon traveled to New York to meet the Prophet. It became evident that there
was a more fruitful field for harvesting converts in Ohio than New York had been, and in consequence Joseph received a series of revelations directing the Saints to move west. 25

Hiram began to settle his affairs during the remaining winter months, and in the first week of May, 1831, as soon as spring sufficiently opened the water for travel, he, Catherine, and three year old John, began their journey to Ohio. Along with a group eighty other Saints, they hired a boat from a local Methodist preacher, and gathered at the Smith home prior to embarkment. Their friends and neighbors came to see them off and prayed for their safe journey. 26

The eighty souls were divided into two groups, one headed by Thomas B. Marsh and the other headed by Lucy Mack Smith. Hiram and Catherine traveled in Lucy’s company which was comprised of thirty adults and twenty children. The trip to Buffalo seems to have been uneventful. There were the usual problems of traveling in large groups -- shortages of supplies, grumblings of adults, mischievous children, and the like. While stopped for canal repair, Hiram had the opportunity of preaching a sermon with Elder Solomon Humphrey to a small neighborhood gathering of about one hundred interested listeners. Their efforts must have been successful for they were requested to return the next day. However, with the repairs completed they resumed
their journey.

Hiram and friends reached Buffalo on the fifth day of traveling where they met by another group of New York Saints, the Colesville Branch, and were later joined by the Marsh contingent. Word of Mormonism had not yet penetrated to this part of New York, and the arrival of a large group of traveling Saints caused quite a stir.

Upon reaching Buffalo they discovered that ice had clogged the canal — not an unusual occurrence in the spring of the year — which detained them for some time. Hiram seems to have had the confidence of the Prophet’s mother, for he was dispatched to secure a boat for the continued passage. Later he was responsible for finding accommodations in Buffalo for the women and sick children as they waited for the ice to thaw.

Worthy of note is Lucy’s account of their unusual escape from the frozen Buffalo wharf. She records:

I said, "Now, brethren and sisters, if you will all...raise your desires to heaven, that the ice may be broken up, and we be set at liberty, as sure as the Lord lives, it will be done." At that instant a noise was heard, like bursting thunder. The captain cried, "Every man to his post." The ice parted, leaving barely a passage for the boat, and so narrow that as the boat passed through the buckets of the waterwheel were torn off with a crash, which, joined to the word of command from the captain, the hoarse answering of the sailors, the noise of the ice, and the cries and confusion of the spectators, presented a scene truly terrible. We had barely passed through the avenue when the ice closed together again, and the Colesville brethren were left in Buffalo, unable to follow us. 27

It must have been a rather hair-raising adventure, for the
people on shore shouted that they saw the boat, "nine inches deeper than ever it was before," and were convinced it would sink. Hiram and Catherine feared more than most, for Catherine was pregnant with their second child -- a girl they would name Elizabeth. However, the moment was lightened as the party reached Fairport. The news of their departure had traveled fast, and there the Pages were able to read their own death notices in the local paper. 28

Hiram arrived in Kirtland, Ohio and settled his family in nearby Thompson -- sixteen miles away. They were soon joined by members of the Colesville Branch. However, his stay in the new headquarters was not to be overlong. After attending the 3 June 1831 general conference, Page and his family was on the move again, this time to settle permanently in Missouri.

There is some confusion as to their departure date. Most records indicate that Hiram left for Missouri in 1832. However, their land was acquired in Thompson from Lemon Copely. Copely soon became disaffected from the church and made life miserable for the Saints. In consequence, a revelation was received containing instructions for them to relocate. The "borders of the Lamanites" was to be their new home. 29 The Colesville Saints left for Missouri on 28 June 1831, and it would seem logical that Hiram and his family accompanied them at that time. However, with Catherine pregnant and so soon after their harrowing
journey from New York, Hiram might have waited for the birth of their child before leaving. It is also unclear if this move was instigated by the church, or if the Pages left of their own choice.

Their journey to Missouri was uneventful. After loading their wagons, they started for the Ohio River. The large numbers of Mormons traveling westward excited curiosity among the local inhabitants, and large groups of people often gathered to watch their progress. Arriving at the Ohio River, they housed in hotels and boarding houses at Big Beaver, Ohio while waiting passage. From Big Beaver steamboat passage was procurred to Cincinnati. At the Missouri River, they loaded onto flat boats which carried them to the ferry landing at the mouth of the Big Blue in Jackson County, Missouri. Traveling a few more miles inland on foot, the family arrived at Independence. The Mormon groups were known among the river boat captains for their peaceable manner of travel and abstinence from gambling and drinking.

For Hiram, his arrival in Jackson County must have caused great joy. Joseph, by revelation, had recently identified this very location as the city of the New Jerusalem and the gathering place of the Saints in preparation for the approaching millennial glory. On 2 August 1831, the Colesville Branch assisted Joseph, who had recently arrived in western Missouri for a brief visit, in
ceremoniously laying the logs for the first house in Zion.

Page may have been present for this occasion. If so, it was certainly momentous for him. Hiram had envisioned a personal role in bringing to pass the coming of the Kingdom of God. With zeal he had dedicated himself to the work and to the realization of his dream of building the latter day Zion. From the day of his baptism, Hiram's loyalty to the church that embodied this grand design was unswerving. His diligence and level of commitment are evident in the vote of confidence that was transmitted on his behalf to the Bishop of Zion from the Church leadership in Ohio. Hiram -- together with Joseph Smith, Sr., Hiram Smith, Peter Whitmer, Christian Whitmer, Jacob Whitmer, and David Whitmer -- was commended for faithfulness and for administering to the temporal needs for the families of the brethren engaged in preparing the Prophet's revelations for publication. He was "recommended to the Bishop in Zion as being worthy of inheritances among the people of the Lord according to the laws of the Church." 32

Hiram settled a few miles from Independence in what became known as the Whitmer settlement, on land that was purchased for $1.25 an acre. For thousands of years the processes of nature had been at work in this region. Rich, mineral-bearing soils had washed down from the mountains and added to the decaying vegetation accumulating in the Missouri River bottoms. The result was a dark, rich,
fertile soil. The harvest of 1832 was beyond anyone's expectation and was seen as a sure sign of God's favor upon his people.

As Hiram began to make a new life for his family, Joseph's vision of the city of the New Jerusalem unfolded. A design of the physical layout for the city was provided and a site for a temple to administer the spiritual needs of the approaching millennial glory was dedicated. The pattern of a unique economic system -- to be known as the Law of Consecration and Stewardship -- was revealed. In accordance with the Prophet's revelations, the past, present, and future of Missouri were sacralized. Hiram, Catherine, and their young family worked side by side with their friends to make their dreams come true. Their joy at being Saints involved in God's millennial work, however, was short lived. The vision of Zion that was the core of their happiness was already creating consternation among the old settlers of Missouri.

The Saints brought not only their dreams to Missouri, but also the seeds of their ultimate failure. There was an inevitable clash of cultures as these New Englanders from the East began to arrive. Generally better educated and sophisticated than the initial settlers, they were viewed with suspicion by their neighbors. The interface between the established settlers and the Saints, with their cohesive loyalty, created severe economic an
political dislocations in Jackson County. 

Feelings were further put on edge by the religious zeal of the Saints’ millennial expectations. The Mormon arrivals quickly and loudly proclaimed Missouri to be theirs by proclamation of their God. This offended even the more moderate parties in the state. That resentment was deeply felt is evidenced by the participation of some of the most influential political and religious leaders of the state in the ensuing religious persecution.

In July, 1833, rumors of an anti-Mormon manifesto created by a group of citizens began to be circulated. Called by some a "secret constitution," this manifesto reflected all of the religious, political, and economic concerns generated by the influx of Saints. On 20 July, a committee of prominent, long-time citizens made several demands of the Saints, including: (1) In the future, no Mormon should move to or settle in the State of Missouri; (2) Mormons then residing in the state must sell their property, close their business, and remove themselves; (3) the church printing establishment should be closed and printing discontinued; (4) the Mormon leaders must accept and implement these demands; (5) and finally, those failing to comply with these demands were promised severe retribution.

These demands demonstrate how far removed the Missouri settlers were from coming to terms with the
Saints. There was a complete lack of understanding of the tie between the millennial expectations of the Saints and the land of their new Zion. Hiram, in contrast, had anticipated this work for many years. It made him a participant in the work of God and an integral part of the cosmos. He envisioned himself as a laboring to fulfill a hope that Saints in all ages had prayed for. Neither he nor any of the Missouri Mormons could simply pack up and leave and forsake the vision they had acquired.

After a few days, the old settlers, convinced that the Mormons were not going to adhere to their demands, began the violence that would periodically exist for the next five years. Word arrived at the Whitmer settlement, where Hiram and his young family resided, that the settlement at Independence had been suddenly attacked by an armed mob of men. Anxiety increased as the Pages learned that the mob had ransacked the home of W. W. Phelps and had thrown the Church printing press out of the second story of the building. The entire structure was demolished and many of the church's papers and revelations, that Phelps was attempting to publish, were burned. Phelps and his family had been warned of the impending destruction and were able to flee to safety. However, two of his young sons, neglected and forgotten in the panic, were buried beneath the rubbish of the building. Fortunately the violence left them uninjured.
The mob, having promised to hold the Mormon leaders responsible, apprehended Edward Partridge, who was the Bishop of the Church in Missouri, and Charles Allen. Dragged to the public square, the men were offered the choice of leaving the state or denying their faith in Joseph Smith and their testimonies of the Book of Mormon. Allowed to speak Bishop Partridge stated the sentiments of Hiram and his fellow Saints:

I told them that the Saints had suffered persecution in all ages of the world; that I had done nothing which ought to offend anyone; that if they abused me, they would abuse an innocent person; that I was willing to suffer for the sake of Christ; but, to leave the country, I was not then willing to consent to it.

Partridge and Allen were then stripped and tarred and feathered, which Partridge, "bore...with so much resignation and meekness, that it appeared to astound the multitude, who permitted me to retire in silence...." 37

On 23 July, five hundred men rode into Independence proclaiming:

We will rid Jackson county of the "Mormons," peaceably if we can, forcibly if we must. If they will not go without, we will whip and kill the men; we will destroy their children, and ravish their women. 38

Hiram and the Saints in the outlying areas learned that the threat of violence had been so great that Bishop Partridge and five other men -- John Corrill, John Whitmer, W. W. Phelps, A. S. Gilbert, and Isaac Morely -- had offered to give their lives to protect the settlement. Most likely, this did little to calm the fears of the Page family as
they anticipated what might befall their quiet community.

The fears that resulted from the circulation of stories concerning the beatings and destruction in Independence were justified. Late in the month of October, 1833, about fifty armed men rode against the Whitmer settlement, and Hiram, his family, and his neighbors were swept into the malestrom. At midnight, using the darkness as a cover, the mob went from house to house thrusting poles in the doors and windows. Thirteen houses were torn down, and several more were burned. The raiders turned hogs and horses into the fields, tearing down and burning fences in the process. They sacked the stores in the settlement and scattered the merchandise in the streets in total mockery of the law.

The men of the settlement were unceremoniously rousted from their homes. George Bebee, with a pistol pointed at his breast, was beaten so severely that friends hiding in the woods could hear the blows. Hiram tried to avoid like treatment by subterfuge. His cabin was assaulted by forty men and all the windows and doors were simultaneously broken. Hurriedly dressing in Catherine's clothes, he disguised himself hoping that the darkness would protect him. Catherine, five-year-old John, and two-year-old Elizabeth were lined up outside the cabin with rifles pointed their way. The men called that if Page did
not come out his family would be shot. Hiram emerged carrying their youngest child — Philander, who had been born a year before — in his arms.

The disguise did not work. General Wilson, leader of the mob, told his men that the woman was "too d--d tall." At his command, Page was stripped and discovered. The ruffians proceeded to beat Hiram unmercifully. Sixty or seventy times the hickory withes fell upon his back as his wife and children looked on in horror. So severe were his injuries they feared for his life. One correspondent wrote that the "enemy had suddenly come upon the brethren...and nearly whipped [Hiram] to death." Some of the men carried the scars of these beatings for the rest of their lives. Perhaps such treatment contributed to Hiram's relatively youthful demise at the age of only fifty-two.

On 2 November, Hiram and three other men — including Parley P. Pratt, who had also received a vicious blow to the head — were dispatched to Lexington to seek legal assistance from the Circuit Judge. They set out on horseback. The roving mobs of Missourians were everywhere and necessitated secrecy. To assist them in their journey, the travelers procured the services of a friendly non-Mormon who had sufficient knowledge of the backroads to enable them to avoid their enemies.

Traveling at night, it soon became so excessively
dark that members of the party were unable to see those in their own group. The guide had to dismount several times as they felt they way along the path. They stopped, hoping for a little light, but the rain began and soon became a torrent that continued all through the night. The men were soon drenched, but fearing discovery by the Missourians, they pushed on without food or shelter for forty miles. At dawn they found themselves at the home of a friend who took them in to rest and eat.

Arriving at their destination, they laid their grievances before an Esquire Silvers, the circuit judge. The gentleman refused to issue a warrant, and instead advised them to "fight and kill the outlaws whenever they came upon us." The four men returned to their lodgings empty handed. In view of the wounds and the beatings they had endured, as well as the rigorous journey which had left them drenched and without sleep for three days, their endurance is remarkable and is a testimony to their hardiness and conviction.

On 6 November, they received a writ against the ringleaders of the mob from Judge John F. Ryland. It seems he wished to aid the Saints. Ryland requested the proper information that would allow him to take legal action and indicated his willingness to travel to Jackson County at any time to enforce the law. That Page had a prominent role in the negotiations is noted by Ryland. "I wish to
know," the judge wrote on 24 November 1833, "whether Joshua Lewis and Hiram Page handed the writ to the sheriff of Jackson County, that I made and issued on their affidavit against some of the ringleaders of the mob in Jackson County, dated the sixth of this month." 42

Page's journey homeward was as difficult as the initial venture. Traveling as a stranger he heard rumors that the "Mormons have riz [risen] and killed six men." 43 Filled with anxiety over such rumors apparently implicating them in murder, Hiram and his group became even more cautious. They sneaked through thickets of hazel and grapevine which slowed their progress almost to a halt. Suddenly they saw groups of armed men headed in their direction. In despair they sent their mounts on a run toward the woods. For a half-mile they raced through the timber, when suddenly they burst into an opening. There, huddled in their tents, was a group of exiled Saints.

Hiram soon learned the reasons for the rumors of Mormon murder. While he was away, the aggravations became so great that armed forces of both sides met near the Big Blue River. The presence of the hostile forces precipitated an armed engagement. One Mormon and three Missourians lost their lives in the action, with several wounded. In a memorial to the Missouri Legislature, Mormons later described the result of the conflict:

The next day, parites [parties] of the mob, from sixty to seventy, headed by priests, went from house to
house, threatening women and children with death if they were not off [their land] before they returned. This [so] alarmed them that they fled in different directions, some took shelter in the woods, while others wandered on the prairies until their feet bled. In the meantime the weather being cold, their sufferings in other respects were very great. The Mormons made their escape to Clay County as fast as they possibly could, where the people received them kindly and administered their wants. After the Society had left Jackson County, their buildings amounting to about two hundred, were either burned or otherwise destroyed; and much of their crops, as well as furniture, stock, etc. which if properly estimated would make a large sum, for which they have not yet received any renumeration.

This turmoil -- known as the Battle of the Big Blue -- occurred 4 November 1833. The Page family endured it without husband and father, and Hiram, upon his return, was forced to search them out in Clay County. Even his mission for legal injunction against the mob seemed to be a failure. Newell Knight remembered that even though the writ had been obtained it proved of no avail. Conditions had deteriorated so badly that all Page could now do was protect his family.

In this distress, Hiram, his family, and friends attempted to find shelter within Clay County. The Pages eventually settled in a small frontier village, Fishing River, that was rising between the Big Fishing and Little Fishing Rivers. These streams, which are fed by seven smaller streams, flow around higher and gently undulating ground -- the elevated ground between covering the distance of little over a mile. This was to be his home for the next several years. From November, 1833 until the next
spring Hiram labored to provide for his family, and his sense of religious distress over the failure to build Zion was sublimated by the struggle to survive the winter.

With spring came word that Joseph Smith and an armed encampment of approximately two-hundred men, known as Zion's Camp, were on their way from church headquarters in Kirtland, to provide succor. In Kirtland, Joseph had received a revelation that indicated Zion was to be redeemed, "with power" if necessary. Missouri Governor Daniel Dunklin had assured Joseph that he would secure the land for the Saints and return them to their homes. However, he did not have sufficient power to hold off the mob should they attempt to dispossess them again. Therefore, if Joseph could muster sufficient strength for their protection, he, as governor, would not oppose a Mormon military presence to protect the Saints. The Governor was of the opinion that an armed force would meet with little resistance by the local citizens.

The arrival of the impending expedition created more than a little excitement for the Saints in Missouri. Page certainly must have waited at the Fishing River settlement in anxious expectation. The arrival of the army from Ohio under the direction of the Prophet of God certified that the Saints were surely under the protection of their God. They had struggled in faith against what seemed overwhelming odds to begin the preparations for
redemption of the earth. Their enemies had prohibited the endeavor, and it is possible that Hiram looked for a just retribution for past suffering. God would surely make His will known and overthrow the disruptive persecutors.

Word of the approaching army also quickly spread to the Missouri mob. Dunklin had underestimated the antagonism of the old settlers. Arrangements were made to draw sixty men from Ray County, seventy more from Clay County, and two hundred more from Jackson County to rendezvous for the complete destruction of the Mormon army. The place of the prospective battle was designed to be Fishing River — where Page was located with his family.

Page and his brethren at the settlement must have been aware of the movement of the mob. Joseph, himself, became aware of their presence as he and his men approached from the East. The day of Zion Camp’s arrival at Fishing River — 19 June — the Mormons were stopped early in the morning by a colored servant. Greatly agitated, she informed them that, “there was a company of men lying wait here, who were calculating to kill you this morning as you pass through.” 47 Forewarned and wary, they arrived late that evening and encamped on the high ground between the two rivers. What occurred in the course of that evening most assuredly confirmed for Hiram the operation of God’s will in the forthcoming redemption of Zion.

Five armed men rode into the camp and proclaimed
the Mormons should "see hell before morning." Shortly after their departure, wind, thunder, and rising clouds from a seemingly cloudless sky signaled an approaching storm. Only forty of the Richmond mob had crossed the ferry point when a squall set in over the river and prohibited any more crossings. Then rain and hail began to fall in a most ferocious manner frustrating the malicious designs of the Missourians. Instead of making war the mob crawled under their wagons and took protection in fallen and hollow trees. Lightning flashed across the scene. With the Saints secure in their homes, Joseph's army took refuge in a log Baptist meetinghouse. During the storm it was reported that one of the mob was killed by lightning, another had his hand torn off while trying hold his horse through the logs of a corn crib, and that the Big and Little Fishing Rivers rose forty and thirty feet respectfully in thirty minutes. Joseph declared God to be in the storm, and the mobbers were reported to say, "if that was the way God fought for the Mormons, they might as well go about their business." 

The situation was deteriorating quickly. The presence of two hostile forces within the state and the threat of losing control of the matter, prompted Governor Dunklin to make a politically expedient decision. Dunklin withdrew his support of the Mormon effort. This left Joseph with no legal foundation or legitimacy for his
intended action, and accordingly there was nothing to do but to disband the camp. To make matters worse, on 24 June, an outbreak of cholera afflicted both the men from Ohio as well as the local Saints.

For four days the deadly disease ravaged the settlement and the encampment. Hiram seems to have avoided contracting the sickness. Joseph, hearing that Jesse and George A. Smith, two of his cousins who were part of the company, were sick sent Page to the west part of the county to bring them to the main camp "at all hazards." When he arrived at their location, he found that Jesse Smith was racked with pain. George had watched over and attended him for the last thirty hours, but the following morning became sick himself. Quickly George was mounted on a "hard riding horse." He and Hiram rode in haste the fifteen miles to Joseph where George received immediate attention and care. Hiram performed this errand for the Prophet and no doubt considered it evidence of his good standing.

Moreover, his confidence in his Church, the Prophet, and God was bolstered at the dispersing of the mob, but his hopes were soon dashed by an unexpected revelation which Joseph received at Fishing River.

The Saints of Jackson County had earlier been chastened for lack of purity and diligence in building the city of the New Jeruselem. On 11 January 1833, the Prophet wrote a letter to W. W. Phelps and indicated that the
brethren in Missouri had indulged in "feelings towards us which are not according to the requirements of the new covenant...." It continued:

...if Zion will not purify herself, so as to be approved of in all things, in his sight, he will seek another people; for his work will go on until Israel is gathered, and they who will not hear his voice, must expect to feel his wrath. Let me say unto you,, seek to purify yourselves, and also all the inhabitants of ZION, lest the Lord's anger be kindled to fierceness. Repent, repent, is the voice of God to Zion.... I say to you...hear, the warning voice of God, lest Zion fall, and the Lord swear in his wrath the inhabitants of Zion shall not enter into his rest....

While the disapproval of their Prophet caused certain dismay among those who had taken the responsibility of building the millennial city, they were strengthened through the persecutions they endured. The Saints counted themselves equal in stature with the Christian martyrs who had suffered in all ages. But, what occurred in Joseph's new revelation was devastating.

Upon dispersal of Zion's camp, Joseph asked for and received additional information concerning the failure of the Saints to build their Zion at the divinely revealed location. Inquiring of the Lord, he was instructed:

Verily I say unto you who have assembled yourselves together that you may learn my will concerning the redemption of mine afflicted people:

Behold, I say unto you, were it not for the transgressions of my people...they might have been redeemed even now;

But behold, they have not learned to be obedient to the things which I required at their hands, but are full of all manner of evil, and do not impart of their substance as becometh saints, to the poor and afflicted among them,
And are not united according to the union required by the law of the Celestial Kingdom....;
Therefore, in consequence of the transgressions of my people, it is expedient in me that mine Elders should wait for a little season for the redemption of Zion,
That they themselves may be prepared, and that my people may be taught more perfectly, and have experience, and know more perfectly concerning their duty, and the things which I require at their hands.  

Hiram had willing suffered as much as any man for his dream of the approaching kingdom. Reflection upon the persecutions he and his family endured and the crumbled dreams of the latter day Zion devastated him. To then be called a disobedient transgressor was too much. He never got over this disappointment.

Hiram's later writings reveal the evolution of his frustrations with what he viewed to be Joseph's failures in Missouri. For the present, however, he continued as an active participant in the church at the Fishing River settlement. Perhaps his alienation was temporarily softened by the selection of his Brother-in-law, David Whitmer, who had also been chastized by Joseph Smith in July 1834, to be President of the church in Missouri. With David acting for Joseph, the Page family was in the inner circles of church leadership and Hiram served as a trusted associate.

Hiram was commissioned by Whitmer to visit and instruct the various branches in Clay County to instruct them on the operations of spiritual gifts within the church. On 31 July, the new presidency and council in
Missouri sat to transact business. After instruction and counsel, Nathan West brought charges against the Colesville Branch. The specific accusations involved Samuel Brown. Brown had been "teaching contrary to counsel...." He was also charged with:

...encouraging the brethren in practicing gifts (speaking in tongues,) in ordaining Sylvester Hulet a High Priest (without counsel) in a clandestine manner; asserting that he had obtained a witness of the Lord, which was a command to perform the same on receiving the gift of tongues, which gift he had never before received....

Brown stated that he had possessed the gift for more than a year. He also tried to convince West not to reveal the operations of the gift and the subsequent ordination to the Missouri Presidency through fear of censure. 

Because Hiram had previously been commissioned to instruct in these very matters, he and several others were called upon to witness the truth of the events transpiring within the Colesville and other Branches. Their testimonies confirmed the charges raised by West, and Brown lost his license to perform ordinances for a time.

This decision did not alleviate the problems. Within the week there were more allegations of the same nature -- this time in the Hulet Branch. On 6 August, accusations were made by one Charles English that members of the branch were exercising extraordinary gifts outside the supervision of church leadership. English charged "that the Hulet Branch believed that they received the word
of the Lord by the gift of tongues, and would not proceed to their temporal business without receiving the word of the Lord." Continuing, he stated:

Sylvester Hulet would speak, and Sally Crandall interpret. Said they would not receive the teachings of ordained members, even Brother Joseph Smith, Jun., himself, unless it agreed with their gifts. Said they received the word of the Lord while they were in Jackson county, that they were to be persecuted by their brethren in Clay county, and now it had come. Also said that the heads of the Church would have to come down and receive the gifts as they did. Said that they, the Hulet Branch, had come up to their privileges more than the rest of the Church. They thought they were right; but if they could be convinced that they were wrong, they would retract.  

One of the curious aspects of this incident was that Sally Crandall stated that she could see and know men's hearts. Philo Dibble agreed with Crandall, and further testified that she had seen the hearts of King Follet and Hiram Page "and they were not right."  

It is difficult to understand the nature of this charge on the limited information available. It may be that the accusation arose from the fact that, once again, Hiram was called to offer testimony against the maverick practices of the Hulet Branch and had thus incurred their wrath. However, it is also a possibility that he had begun to demonstrate his dissatisfaction with Joseph and the turn of events in Jackson County. Page may have been vocal enough in his disappointments that it was becoming recognized among the local membership. Clearly in the next several years, Page's frustrations grew. In time, the
disillusions of his extended family and friends were added to his own.

The situation in Clay County began to deteriorate. Old animosities surfaced once again from an anti-Mormon mass meeting held in the Liberty courthouse. This meeting, held July of 1836, charged the Saints with exciting prejudice because of their religious practices, eastern customs, and attitudes toward slavery. Predictably, they were asked to leave the county in order to avert the bloodshed. It was also decided to petition the state legislature for the organization of a new county that could be a haven for the Mormon settlers. As a result, two new counties were formed, with Caldwell County designed for the exclusive use of the Saints.

That same summer a site was chosen in the new county, which became known as Far West. The settlement quickly became one of the Mormon's most important. Hiram and his relatives were among Far West's first settlers. Page obtained one hundred and twenty acres of land and once again began to build a new life.

In the spring of 1838, he was joined by Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon, who arrived at the settlement with their families. What must have been anticipated with eagerness -- to have the Prophet of God in their midst -- soon became a source of conflict. John Whitmer stated that as soon as Joseph and Sidney arrived they began to enforce
a new organizational plan which, according to Whitmer, "caused dissensions and difficulties, threatenings, and even murders."

The problem seems to have started with accusations that Whitmer and Phelps, when purchasing the land that became Far West, made unauthorized use of church funds for their own benefit. Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, along with several others were also soon implicated. A close examination of church council minutes shows that this disagreement soon escalated to major proportions. The men were charged with corresponding with dissenters and enemies of the Prophet in Ohio. They were accused of willfully violating the church's Word of Wisdom revelation that suggested members abstain from tobacco, alcohol, coffee, and tea. The church, their accusers intimated, had suffered much embarrassment and many setbacks because of their actions. Feelings became so bitter that it resulted in the mass excommunication of the Whitmers and their friends at Far West in 1838. Hiram was not listed as one of the accused. However, Andrew Jensen, in a later biographical sketch, suggested that Page was, in fact, a party to the land schemes and dealings of the Whitmers, a likely circumstance because of his family ties to the Whitmers.

If John Whitmer's story can be trusted, life became very difficult for the family after their excommunication.
John recorded that the leadership of the church "had threatened to kill us, if we did not make restitutions to them." Oliver, David, John, and Lyman Johnson went to Clay County to obtain legal counsel in an attempt to vindicate themselves. Whitmer then noted that on their way home they became exceedingly distressed to meet the families of Cowdery and Johnson, "whom they had driven from their homes, and robbed them of all their goods, save clothing, [and] bedding...."  

Proclaiming their innocence, but fearing for their lives and those of their families, they withdrew from the association of the Saints at Far West. Hiram, Catherine, and their family -- now consisting of five children from ages ten to one year -- returned to Clay County with the rest of Catherine's family, where Hiram settled near Excelsior Springs.  

As a result of these events, Hiram became estranged from mainstream Mormonism. Though there is no evidence of excommunication or withdrawal of his license, after 1838 there is no record of Page's association with the main body of the church. Hiram continued residence in the Richmond area until his death in 1852. Catherine gave birth to four more children, the last being born in the year that Hiram died. Page, it seems, continued to wait expectantly for God to manifest Himself to accomplish the coming of the Kingdom. His patience as well as his disappointments are
left to the later chapters of this study.
Notes for Chapter II

1. Andrew Jensen, Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia (Salt Lake City: Andrew Jensen History Company, 1936) Vol. 1 p. 277. For years most of the known biographical information concerning Hiram Page has been collected by Jensen, and is contained within this reference. Only recently has additional information become available.


4. For the available genealogical information on the Page family, see, Mary Cleora Dear, Two Hundred Thirty-Eight Years of the Whitmer Family, 1737-1976 (Richmond, Missouri: Beck Printing Co., 1976), pp. 43-47.

5. DHC 1:5. See also, JSH 1:15-17


10. DHC 1:10-14

11. DHC 1:52-56. This testimony has appeared on the Frontispiece of every edition of the Book of Mormon.

12. William E. McClellin to Samuel McClellin, 4 August 1835, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Historical Department, Salt Lake City, Utah. Hereafter cited as LDS Church Archives.

13. Ibid. Primitivism appears to have played a significant role in the development of the American religious character in the early part of the nineteenth-century. The definition has not been debated, but there has been slight differences in contribution towards the early Mormon experience among scholars. See, Mario De Pillias, "The Quest for Religious Authority and the Rise of Mormonism," Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought 1 (Spring 1966): 68-88. Also, Marvin S. Hill, "The Role of Christian Primitivism in the Origin and Development of the Mormon Kingdom, 1830-1840" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1968).


15. Ibid., p. 28. The other books were Alexander MacKenzie’s narrative of his travels and explorations of the Northwest, and the Lewis and Clark journals.

16. Ibid., p. 33.

17. Ibid., p. 38.


20. DHC 1:57-58.

21. Mark Twain once noted that he "could not feel more satisfied and at rest if the entire Whitmer family had testified." Quoted in Fawn Brodie, No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), p. 79.
22. DHC 1:78-79.


24. These missionaries were sent by revelation immediately following the 26 September Conference. See, DHC 1:109-110. Also, A Book of Commandments for the Government of the Church of Christ, Organized According to Law, on the 6th of April, 1830, chp. 30. This is the earliest publication of Joseph’s revelations, and is now DC 28. Hereafter cited as Book of Commandments.

25. See DHC 1:139-143. Also Book of Commandments 39;40, now DC 37;38.

26. The best account of this journey is Smith’s, Biographical Sketches, pp. 172-184.

27. Ibid., p. 181.

28. Ibid.

29. DHC 1:167-169. Also, Book of Commandments 52;56, now DC 49;54.

30. While not knowing exactly when Page left for Missouri, his journey was certainly similar to those undertaken at this time. This description of their journey is based on an account found in Emily M. Austin, Mormonism: or, Life Among the Mormons (Madison: J.J. Cantwell Book and Job Printer, 1882), pp. 63-65.

31. DHC 1:190-199. The identification of the American continent as the location of the scriptural Zion is of major importance in the early Church. It may very well be the most significant factor in understanding the magnetism of early Mormonism. For Hiram Page it is the crucible of his Church experience. This will be developed in detail later as we examine the origins of Hiram’s millennial mind-set and the causes of his eventual apostasy.

32. Far West Record, p. 31.

33. DHC 1:357-368. For the scriptural background
and philosophical foundation of the Law of Consecration, see, Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of the Latter
Day Saints: Carefully Selected from the Revelations of
God (Kirtland, Ohio: F. G. Williams, 1835) sections
97;98;102. Hereafter cited as DC, 1835 ed. Now
DC 101-104;105.

34. An editorial published by W. W. Phelps in July, 1833 entitled Free People of Color, seems to be the
catalyst of the persecutions that follow. See The
Evening and Morning Star (Independence, Missouri: W. W.
cited as Evening and Morning Star.

35. DHC 1:374-376.

36. Ibid., p. 398.

37. DHC 1:390-391. Partridge’s daughter Eliza
recorded her memories of this terrifying ordeal: "...a
number of armed men came to our house in the afternoon and
took my Father to the Public square where they administered
to him a coat of tar and feathers and raised a whip with
the intention of whipping him but a friend to humanity
interfered and prevented it. I well remember how my Father
looked we (the children) were very much frightened, my
Mother was weak having a babe (a boy named for his Father)
but three weeks old. The Brethren were very kind and
assisted my Father to rid himself of the tar, but the
clothes he had on were ruined." Journal of Eliza Maria
Partridge Lyman, photocopy, University of Utah Special
Collections, Salt Lake City, Utah.

38. Evening and Morning Star 2 (December 1833):114.
Also, Brigham H. Roberts, Comprehensive History of the
Church, 6 Vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1930),
1:337.

39. Ibid.

40. See, DHC 3:437-438. 4:394-395. Evening and
Morning Star 2: (December 1833):119.

41. The account of this trip is located in Pratt,
Autobiography, pp. 97-99. The four men were Hiram Page,
Joshua Lewis, Thomas B. Marsh, and Parley P. Pratt.

42. DHC 1:446.


45. Newell K. Knight, *Journal of Newell Knight* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1887), p. 82.


49. Ibid., p. 103.

50. Ibid., p. 105.

51. Ibid., p. 120.


54. *Far West Record*, p. 79. In the early days of the Church spiritual enthusiasm accompanied millennial expectations. One of the spiritual gifts most experienced was the gift of tongues. Both members as well as leaders enjoyed these manifestations, but as with all religious enthusiasm, excesses began to be observed. As early as 1833 Joseph counseled caution in these matters. See, Joseph Fielding Smith, ed., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1938), pp. 25,229.

55. Ibid., p. 89.

56. Ibid., p. 90.

57. "List of the residents of the south quarter of Far West, Missouri," Teachers Quorum Minutes for 1838, Far West Missouri. Minutes in LDS Archives.

XX. Copies of Whitmer's history are located in the LDS Archives.

59. The developing controversy can be followed by a close examination of the Church council minutes. See, Far West Record, esp. pp. 103, 107 110, 135, 139, 146-150.


61. Whitmer, Chapter XX. Whitmer also stated that Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon "watched our houses, and abused our families, and threatened them, if they were not gone by morning, they would be drove out, and threatened our lives, if they ever saw us in Far West." It is doubtful if Joseph was involved in this harassment, but others certainly might have instigated it. Sidney Rigdon is often associated with a para-military group of marauders called the Danites. They may have instigated such proceedings.
CHAPTER III

THE MILLENNIAL TRADITION IN AMERICA:
HIRAM PAGE AND THE EARLY MORMON RESPONSE

The rise of Mormonism did not occur within a vacuum, neither did Mormon converts come to the early church without the peculiar dispositions of their age. The entire American experience played a major role in shaping both the objectives of the church and the expectations of its adherents. Hiram Page and his fellow Saints were drawn to Mormonism and Joseph Smith for very specific reasons. Had Joseph Smith not been able to satisfy their spiritual needs, it is unlikely the church would have remained a viable organization. Hiram’s conversion and subsequent loyalty occurred when Joseph verbalized his spiritual longings and provided the means to satisfy them. Of all the predilections of the age, no idea captured the imagination of Page and his contemporaries more than the role their new nation was destined to play in bringing to pass the great millennial day.

Millennialism is one of the most enduring concepts in the history of mankind. Succeeding generations have dreamed of that blessed time of uninterrupted peace
and joy. This imagined golded age acquired increased significance within the Christian context. The Biblical scriptures speak not only of an idyllic time, but of the binding of Satan and the return of Christ to dwell with men. God's people will inherit the earth, and there will be glory and rest for the righteous.

Throughout its history, the land of America has been associated with millennial expectations. The histories of Troy, Athens, Rome, and the Celts weave mythic millennial themes around blessed islands lying westward awaiting discovery. From the earliest ventures of man upon the oceans in voyages of discovery, there was a yearning for a new Eden -- a place of peace and a land of laughter. The voyage of Columbus and subsequent discovery of the New World within the Christian context gave new impetus to the earlier traditions. Reflecting on Biblical promises, the new world became a land of regeneration -- a new Canaan. It was unspoiled and preserved by God that He might realize His purposes and sanctify His creations. In the New World Christianity would find its fullest millennial expression. ¹

The earliest colonization incentives and efforts were replete with these implications. Edward Hayes, who participated in and wrote the narrative of Sir Humfrey Gilbert's expeditions to the Newfoundland coast, noted the relationship of the New World and the awaited millennial
God’s word and religion...from the beginning hath moved from the east towards, and at last unto, the west, where it is like to end, unless the same begin again where it did in the east, which were to expect a like world again. But we are assured of the contrary by the prophecy of Christ, whereby we gather that after His word is preached throughout the world shall be the end.  

Samuel Purchas, in his monumental Haklutyus Posthumus, envisioned not only the approaching end, but the role of the western parts of the earth. In his commentary on Malachi 4:2, he states that, "thus hath God given opportunity by Navigation into all parts, that in the Sun-set and Evening of the World, the Sunne of righteousnesse might arise out of our West to illuminate the East...."  

With the popularizing of these ideas the myth became reality. Whereas Horace, Homer, Virgil, and Geoffery had dreamed of the abstract, Reformation Christians grasped the discovery of the New World and created a land that would play the prominent role in their millennial expectations. The land was to be the site of God’s final work, and the message of redemption would proceed forth from the wilderness. No other region in the New World would have greater influence on the promotion and Americanization of these concepts than New England. 

In the early stages of colonization the philosophical foundation for the effort was somewhat confused. Notwithstanding the millennial voices, there
were other notions of equal significance. Contemporary Englishmen secularized the millennial themes through _imperialism_. For them, the greatest blessing they could bestow upon benighted and underprivileged nations was English culture and enlightenment. Also, the realities of economic pressure fostered _mercantilism_. England would provide enlightened management and culture, colonies in turn would reciprocate by being the source of raw materials and trade goods that would enrich the coffers at home.

However, as strong as the quest for empire was in England, the spiritual voices could not be stilled. In 1630, John White in *The Planters Plea*, called for the colonization of what was already being called New England. While the economic factors influencing White’s plea are evident, the suggestion of a divine destiny is unmistakably clear. He stated that, "Colonies...have their warrant from God’s direction and command.... That withal they include a direction or command was never, as I conceive, doubted by any." White then echoed the earlier conceptions of the progress of Christ’s gospel from East to West. He took great pains to portray the spread of Christianity to the "Westerne parts of the world" as the culmination of God’s course in the "last age." Then touching the central nerve of the Puritan Elect he observed that God "hath hitherto suffered the neglect of many parts of the world, and hidden them from the eyes of former ages; for ends best known to
himself...." Now, however, they are specially "discovered and made knowne to us." Implicit and understated, this theology of the New World remained in the background of colonization rationale for ten years. For the non-separating Puritans of Massachusetts Bay Colony this theology was the underlying rationale in their experiment to build the Puritan City on the Hill.

The writings, sermons, and letters of those connected with the Massachusetts experiment contain a certain tension between the economic realities and spiritual motivations. In his tract On the Lawfulness of Removing Out of England, John Winthrop demonstrated the economic pressures that made colonization attractive. He stated, "The rent-taker lives on sweet morsels; but the rent-payer eats a dry cust often with watery eyes: and it is nothing to say what some one of a hundred hath...." He wrote to his own children: "My means heere are so shortened (now my 3 eldest soones are come of age) as I shall not be able to continue in this place and imployment where I now am...." And yet, the religious concerns and the deep faith of the early Puritan leadership would not be repressed. Hope for a haven provided by God is evident in Winthrop's private correspondence with his wife. On 15 May 1629, he wrote to Margaret:

...be of good Comfort, the hardest that can come shall be a meanes to mortifie this bodye of Corruption, which is a thousand tymes more dangerous to us then any outward tribulation, and to bring us into neerer
communion with out Lo: Jes: Christ, and more Assurance of his kingdome. If the Lord seeth it welbe good for us; he will provide a shelter and a hidinge place for us and ours as a Zoar for Lott, Sarephah for his prophet....

This tension -- the Biblical injunction and hope for Zion and the establishment of the city of the New Jeruselem, coupled with the practicalities of economics and allegiance to country and crown -- created for first generation New England colonists a certain ambiguity and caused confusion in their understanding of purpose and mission. It allowed Winthrop to state, on the very eve of colonization, that they were to be a "Citty upon a Hill" by nature of the covenant they had entered into with God. Alternately, when asked if separation and utopianism were their desired goals, he responded, "wee are not of those that dreame of perfection in this world....wee leave it [England] not therefore, as loathing that milk wherewith we were nourished there, but blessing God for the parentage and education, as members of the same body shall alwayes rejoice in her good."  

This ambiguity, while disconcerting, produced a healthy, moderate colony in New England during the first decade of English settlement. Indicative of the intellectual climate was the handling of the millennial radicalism that arose. Both extremes of millennial eschatology -- Anne Hutchinson and Thomas Lechford -- were rejected by the colony leaders. Their withdrawal from the
community reinforced the moderate aims of the experiment and discouraged others from proselyting a radical eschatology. * 

As the first decade of Plantation history ended, however, little did the moderate leadership know how tenuous was the stability they had achieved. A series of crises convulsed through Massachusetts in the next ten years that permanently altered the colony's perception of their original mission. The millennial radicalism that was successfully contained to this point became the response to the resulting confusion. Out of this radicalism many came to hold a new view of America.

These crises were not successive in occurrence, each allowing the colonists to recover before confronting the next. Rather, they simultaneously combined to demand a reordering of thought that altered the very core of the Puritan mission. On the homefront, the colony faced an ever increasing heresy from within. In addition, the political and religious leaders could not stem the tide of settlers departing for the inviting availability of unlimited land elsewhere, nor could they halt the resulting decentralization of their colony. Most important of all, Charles I was removed from the throne, the English Puritans came to power, and all of England embraced the Puritan cause and ideals. Suddenly, the integrity of the Massachusetts experiment became suspect. The triumph of
English Puritanism made it unlikely that anyone would be looking to the "Citty on the Hill" for example or leadership. The colonists were faced with the proposition of having to justify everything they had done for the last ten years. The alternative was to pack up and return home. As the they began to search for explanations, matters were further complicated when a millennial radicalism arose in England that quickly spread to the colonies.

This movement, called the Fifth Monarchists, was named after Daniel’s allusion to the last kingdom -- the kingdom of God -- on earth. Adherents to this movement found great significance in the mystical date, 1666, as the time of the final triumph and ultimate defeat of the Anti-Christ. Influential writers and leaders of this movement, such as Hanserd Knollys and William Aspinwall, spent much time in New England in the early Forties. On Aquidneck Island, in near-by Rhode Island, there even arose an experimental community which espoused the new ideals. Contact with the Fifth Monarchists did much to fuel millennial excitement among those Americans searching for a way to provide philosophical and religious viability for the community. Religious rationalization became the favorite theme of the ecclesiastical leadership. For them, a whole new perception of the meaning of America began to evolve.

This readjustment of the philosophical meaning of
the colony found expression in the ecclesiastical histories that began to appear. These treatises were written in the midst of concerns the leadership felt over the loss of purpose for the colony. The writings also reflected the presence of radical millennial thought. From these perspectives the influential clergy specifically addressed themselves to the relevant role of America in Puritan eschatology.

Edward Johnson's *Wonder Working Providence of Sions Saviour in New England*, is a typical example of the synthesizing that began. Johnson accepted the prevailing scriptural literalism concerning the destruction of the Anti-Christ and the battles which the righteous must wage in defence of truth. There were numerous passages in his work dealing with the justification of the congregational form of government as the true order of Christ and the rationale behind the Puritan's intolerance toward what was viewed as heretical, papist doctrines. The Covenant theme was also of major importance to Johnson, as he reasoned that not only must individuals work out their own relationships to Christ under the covenant bond, but individual churches must forge a spiritual union and discover Divine grace.

In addition to these common themes, however, Johnson's work demonstrated a sense of the failing American Puritan mission. Certainly, his writing was pre-occupied
by an attempt to justify New England Puritanism. For example, Johnson went to great lengths to demonstrate that the American elect were a people chosen, prepared, and commissioned by God. "Then judge all you (whom the Lord Christ hath given a discerning spirit)," wrote Johnson, "whether these poore New England People, be not the forerunners of Christs Army,"

and the marvelous providences which you shall now heare, be not the very finger of God, and whether the Lord hath not sent this people to Preach in the wilderness, and to proclaim to all Nations, the neere approach of the most wonderfull workes that ever the Sonnes of men saw. Will not you believe that a Nation can be borne in a day? here is a worke come very neare it; but if you will believe you shall see far greater things than these....

What are these "far greater things?" When asked to define the whole purpose of the settlement in America, Johnson provided the response for every Puritan:

I am now prest for the service of our Lord Christ, to re-build the most glorious Edifice of Mount Sion in a Wilderness, and as John Baptist, I must cry prepare yee the way of the Lord, make his paths strait, for behold hee is comming againe, hee is comming to destroy Anti-Christ and give the whore double to drinke the very dregs of his wrath.  

The land having been prepared by God for this very moment and people, the commission was given, and:

so they came over this boysterous billow-boyling Ocean, a few poor scattered stones newly raked out of the heap of rubbish, and thou Lord Christ hast now so far exalted them as to lay them sure in thy Sion, a building, to be the wonder of the world, orderely are they placed in five and forty seven Churches.... what success their prayers have had, let all (that love and long to behold the beauty of Christ shining on and in his beloved Bride)...congregate together at the Throne of the Lord....
This new interpretation of the mission of New England certainly did not go unchallenged, but it had sufficient power to achieve eventual acceptance. Cotton Mather later buttressed his position by writing that Columbus was acted upon "by a most vehement and wonderful impulse" to provide America for the specific purpose of demonstrating God's Zion to all the world. And further, that the "feeble attempts made in the American hemisphere" were "to anticipate the state of the New-Jeruselem, as far as the the unavoidable vanity of human affairs and influence of Satan upon them would allow...." Quoting Nathaniel Mather, Cotton suggested:

Amongst all that have suffered for and searched into these truths, they of New-England justly deserve and will have a name and a glory, as long as the earth shall have any remembrance of an English nation. After-ages will honour them for that great and high adventure of theirs in transporting themselves, their wives and little ones, upon the rude waves of the vast ocean into a remote, desolate and howling wilderness, and there encountering by faith and patience with a world of temptations and straights [sic] and pressing wants and difficulties, and this upon no other inducements but that they might meet with him whom their souls loved, in the midst of his golden candlesticks, and see him, as they have there seen him in his sanctuary.

In the pre-Revolution years this unique theology of America, as the location where God would show forth His Zion and fulfill the scriptural prophecies, found its fullest expression in the thought of Jonathan Edwards. Edwards revolutionized millennial eschatology for all of his contemporaries. Finding that prevailing notions of the
expected millennium painted a dark and depressing outlook for the future of God's people, he searched for a systematic theology that would allow for the coming of glory, while at the same time give solace and hope to God's expectant children. Scripturally, this new vision centered around the opening of the vials as described in John's Revelation and the death of the two prophets in Jerusalem. In terms of basic philosophy, it dealt with the nature of the millennium experience. Whereas Edwards' mentors and associates understood the opening of the vials and the death of the prophets to be in the future, Edwards came to view them as already accomplished. Such a distinction had far reaching implications for millennial thought.

If the opening of the vials and the deaths of the prophets were to be expected in the future, then the millennial era was yet to be realized. Thus, the Second Coming of Christ would inaugurate the era of great peace and joy. This awaited glory would be preceded by the terrible calamities of God, and the saints could only wait for judgment and hope for survival. This became known as pre-millennialism. Edwards, on the other hand, looked for the coming of the Savior at the conclusion of the thousand years. He argued that the vials had already been poured and the prophets slain. This being the case, the judgments were past and the millennium had begun -- the appearance of the glorified Christ would thus culminate the awaited day
of Rest. Edwards' post-millennialism contended that the work of the saints was not to await the judgments, but rather to perfect and prepare themselves and the earth to receive Him. No concept was more easily adapted to the millennial visions of the emerging nation than this. Edwards became the most outspoken of all Puritan divines concerning the role of America in God's plan. 16

Reflecting on the prophecies of Isaiah concerning the coming of Zion and the building of the city of the New Jerusalem, Edwards remarked, "...I cannot think that anything else can be here intended but America." 17 Those ministers employed in the sacred work of the gospel in the new land were "appointed, as co-workers with Christ." They were the "ambassadors and instruments" into whose hands were committed the "sacred oracles, holy ordinances, and all his appointed means of grace." Edwards reflected that, "We who are employed in the sacred work of the Gospel ministry, are the watchmen over the city, to whom God committed the keys of the gates of Zion...." 18 Moreover, it was rumored that he taught not only that the millennium had begun, but that it had commenced in Northampton -- as a result of his own ministry. Said he, "we are evidently a people blessed of the Lord! For here, in this corner of the world, God dwells and manifests his glory." 19

Edward's teachings and drive initiated what has become known as the Great Awakening. With the introduction
of post-millennialism, New England's chiliastic fervor spread across the incipient nation. The philosophical foundation of the Awakening was the coming of the kingdom as shown forth in God's work in America. Through the stirring of souls this idea was brought into the present and placed in the psyche of Americans for generations to come. For one historian it became "the great common element in our [American] faith and that by reference to it one might be able to understand not only the unity beneath the diversity of American religion but also the effect of Christianity on culture." For the people who experienced it themselves, the Awakening meant that they were a nation of the elect, a new Israel. They were bound to God through covenant to play the redemptive role in the world. The responsibility of hastening the coming of the Savior by leading the unenlightened multitudes into the millennium lay heavily upon them.

Alan Heimert's seminal article "The Great Awakening as a Watershed," noted several far-reaching implications of this new millennial expectation. First, with the concept of post-millennialism it became possible to view the fulfillment of prophesied glory not so much as a work of Divine fiat, but rather as a result of natural causes and hard work by those assigned to the redemptive mission. This interpretation gave a sense of attainability to the millennium that could be faced immediately. It also
suggested that honest, virtuous, and righteous men could hasten the day of their visitation. Second, a new vitality for millennial thought was achieved by removing millennialism from formal and restrictive theology. For those caught up in the fires of the revival, it became not merely an intellectual discussion but an object of intense emotional pre-occupation. Men began to look for the realization of their dreams year to year which intensified and multiplied the prevailing chiliastic fervor. Finally, prior to this time Calvinistic grace had been a matter of individual conversion. After the Awakening, however, the attainment of this Grace was organized into a strategy for attainment of the Kingdom. It was preached not just to individuals but to the developing nation as a whole. Many Americans began to feel that the kingdom would only come in power when power was in the body of the people. The marriage of republican values and formal eschatology, momentous in its implication, found realization in the Revolution of 1776. 

Importantly, this revolution occurred within thirty years of the first stirrings of revival in New England. Much of its philosophical justification came from the strivings to realize God's kingdom on earth. But once in motion, the War for Independence heightened religious feeling. For example, it had dramatic impact on those who harbored sentiments with regard to the approaching kingdom.
of Christ. Its successful conclusion seemed to bolster the realization that Americans were the possessors of Divine grace and responsibility. For many, it was a clear indication that the period of Glory and Rest so anxiously awaited had arrived. Now, as the main protagonists in this heavenly drama, Americans had only to purify themselves to accomplish the grand design.

In the The Sacred Cause of Liberty, Nathan Hatch commented on the marriage of republican and spiritual ideals that was apparently unique in the history of nations:

Clergymen in the era of the American [Revolution] ...were able to rebuild the underpinnings of their own sense of mission and destiny through a rewriting of the history of Israel and a projection of the first substantively new eschatology since the Reformation. By reading republican liberty and political forms into the experience of the promonarchical Hebrews, Americans could affirm no less intensely that the society of which they were a part had been divinely chosen. They remained the antitype of Israel by their strenuous imitation of that civil and religious liberty for which Moses, Joshua, and Gideon had struggled. Having thus sustained religious vocabularies by a secular model of politics, New Englanders actually had more reason to affirm their collective election than at any time in their history. Whereas their forefathers had never fully obeyed the covenantal terms of pure and vital religion, these citizens of the United States had compelling evidence that the standards of republicanism emerging in America went far beyond what could be expected from men in a fallen world. Once they had redefined what were acceptable standards, these Americans found that contemporary experience confirmed as never before their status as the "New American Israel." 22

Post-revolutionary Americans threw themselves into the work of individual and community perfection. Ultraism
became a national pastime. Temperance and anti-slavery movements, educational, prison, and female moral reform, missionary societies, every form of radical enthusiasm made its way upon the scene. Sanctification of the individual and the nation was deemed vital and of immediate concern to the realization of millenial destiny. Republican values and millennial eschatology merged so naturally that the primary agent became the American republic.

However, what was thought to be the approach of the end of the world accompanied by Glory and Rest, turned out to be merely a period of transition in America. Upon this realization, the disillusionment was devastating. Instead of the millennium and perfection, the beginning of a modern, capitalist, competitive, urban, society was ushered in. It is this discomfiture of the millennial vision and the rite of passage to the modern nation-state that turned many of Hiram Pages' generation into religious pilgrims.

Many factors contributed to this disillusionment. Perry Miller suggested four areas of concern that promoted the ensuing cultural crisis. First, from 1790 onwards, "the Protestant clergy preached so extravagant a Christian utopianism that with the end of the War [Revolutionary War] they could only term what confronted them a demoralization beyond anything they had ever imagined." Second, because of the social chaos represented by the French Revolution, fear struck the hearts of observers of the political scene.
The precedent established in France seemed to suggest that the fragmentation of American society into the various political factions would sweep them into the malestrom of internal conflict. Third, the churches perceived that in the unqualified success of the Revolution the nation had become complacent in their spiritual duties. And, fourth, this perception was compounded by the opening of what Miller calls "the terrifying west." Americans became unchurched as they spread into the more uncivilized areas where the Atlantic coast churches had not been organized or established. The threat that the large numbers of unconverted souls wandering in the wilderness might plunge the nation into barbarism was keenly felt. 23

In addition, the churches themselves fell into disfavor. The marriage of republican values and Christian eschatology was discovered to be a chimera -- a marriage of convenience only. Whereas the Evangelicals and the Deists had joined forces to make possible the fight for independence, animosities now arose that created a tension that continued to exist far into the nineteenth-century. Influenced by an increasing secular republicanism, many Americans began to fear any institution that might be exclusionary or offer privilege. This led to the immediate call for disestablishment of the churches. The rise of the Age of Reason resulted in difficult questions concerning the validity of religious beliefs and the veracity of
scriptural miracles. And, the millennial vision, itself, was secularized to such an extent that it lost contact with its original spiritual roots. All of these factors came to be focused in a moment of time. It may very well be that scholars will never appreciate the dynamics of the moment. Never since this era have Americans experienced a time when there was so much unbridled pessimism. Never has there been such concern that America was failing in its allotted course.

The resulting confusion which occurred in the post-revolutionary period created a time of transition for Hiram Page and other Americans. Because of the cultural forces at work within the nation, society experienced what behavioralists have termed a rite of passage. Mircea Eliade, in his book Rites and Symbols of Initiation, recognizes the importance of this transformation process. He concludes:

Initiation represents one of the most significant spiritual phenomena in the history of humanity. It is an act that involves not only the religious life of the individual, in the modern meaning of the word "religion"; it involves the entire life. It is through initiation that...man becomes what he is and what he should be -- a being open to the life of the spirit, hence one who participates in the culture into which he was born. ...the...initiation represents above all the revelation of the sacred -- and...the sacred means not only everything that we now understand by religion, but also the whole body of the tribe's mythological and cultural traditions. 24

Through this process, Eliade observes, individuals are introduced to spiritual values, and that this allows them
to assume their "mode of being in its entirety." He states that the "ceremony involves the tribe as a whole. A new generation is instructed...and...the entire community is regenerated." William McLoughlin suggests that this period in the early history of the new United States is not only essential in any attempt to understand why Hiram Page and others of his generation became religious pilgrims and seekers, but also to view the development of our later social system in its proper perspective. He notes for students of this period that, just as no anthropologist would consider that he had come to grips with any so-called primitive tribe in Africa and Polynesia until he thoroughly understood its religious rituals and enculturation process for the young, so no American historian can ever understand his social system until he understands the function ...[this transitional period] has played, and is still playing, in these aspects of our culture."  

This rite of passage, and its impact upon religion and society, has been recognized by others as well. Kenelm Burridge proposes a scenario that may suggest possible answers to explain why, in times such as post-Revolution America, a serious confusion and dislocation might occur: 

...in all transition rites there is a phase when those passing from one status to another, from one set of determinitive rules to another, are impliedly and temporarily subject to no rules at all. The transient is separated off, placed apart until he can be inducted into a new set of rules. And this suspension of the human condition, a situation of "no rules," appears as a necessary stage in the progression from "old rules"
to "new rules." 27

This time, when certain individuals within the society are isolated, prepares the initiates for reception of the new and soon-to-be articulated formulas. It reduces them to chaos from which they may be remade and regenerated. This is precisely what occurred in the ferment and aftershocks of the American Revolution. Burridge notes this process is even more pronounced when not only the individual but an entire society itself is in transition. Then, with no voice to announce authoritatively new assumptions, the change to new rules, "can only be experimental, approximately formulated." This may account for the proliferation of radical millennial sects that occurred with in the burgeoning nation. 28

The cultural transformation occurring in early nineteenth-century society did not traumatize all Americans. Most were able to adjust with minimal discomfiture. However, the process created a class of people designated by Bryan Wilson as "marginal men." Those who are marginal find it difficult to adjust to the new situation. They are unable to "benefit from, or even to accept, culturally prescribed norms." According to Wilson, "Those who are marginal by virtue of affliction to which they have not adjusted are those with ailments, bereavements, and spirit preoccupations, or who seek reassurance about their prospects." The maladjustment cuts
across social strata. The afflicted are drawn together in search of specific solutions to their inability to cope. Wilson notes that solutions are often found in thaumaturgical solace. 

We suggested in chapter two that Hiram Page was a seeker. Likely he was on the fringe of society and felt the need for reassurance, solace, and the conferment of his worth. It may have been this aspect of his life that set him on the backroads of Vermont and New York as he pursued a career in medicine. Coupled with his inability to adjust to post-revolutionary America, his interest in medicine no doubt was a major factor in the attraction he felt for the folk beliefs and occult practices prevalent in this chaotic region.

Page was apparently not university trained in medicine. Though the family and neighborhood traditions indicate that as a young man he was a doctor, on the 1850 census he listed himself as holding no land assets and his occupation as that of farmer. Young men who were not university trained, were apprenticed to learn their craft from established general practitioners. Healing and medicine of the day had their philosophical foundation in the practices of bleeding, herbs, nature-healing, and folk remedies.

The multitudinous almanacs of the day became an important source of information. With their emphasis on
astral calculations and the perpetuation of the nature remedies the doctor was drawn into the spectrum of the folk ways. One historian noted:

While Americans seemed somewhat less vulnerable to complicated forms of quackery, their circumstances tempted them in the direction of nature-healing. The bookish cure-alls of the Doctors of Physick were sometimes replaced by the environmental cure-alls sensationally advertised in promotional literature: The New England air, the Virginia water, the Georgia climate. Where Nature was so generous, men easily expected too much of her.³¹

The fact that from colonial times knowledge of medicine was transferred not by trained physicians but by ministers, forged a strong link between the practice of medicine and the practice of religion. This was so much the case that it has been observed that, "the general practitioner himself had become more closely assimilated into the still larger class of persons concerned with the political and religious welfare of the community."³²

All of these factors certainly contributed to the affinity Page felt for the folk culture of his day. They also contributed to the discovery of a curious stone. Possibly discovered prior to his association with Joseph Smith and Mormonism, this stone was believed to be possessed of seeric qualities. To be sure, Hiram appears to have been somewhat accomplished in its use. In some of the earliest histories of Mormonism Page is referred to as a "revelator." He is also mentioned as a believer, and maybe a participant, in the money digging activities so
prevalent in the neighborhoods of his travels. All this ties him to the arcane practices of many "marginal" Americans of his day. As we shall see, the recognition of stone as a Divine gift, and Page's willingness to use it as a revelatory instrument, was soon to play an important role in the formative period of the early Church. Until recently, historians, especially those critical of Mormonism, have not been willing to give serious consideration to the arcane practices originating in popular or folk belief. Most assume that such practices are diametrically opposed to everything Christianity represents -- at best a perversion of true Christology. The occult is rejected as being nothing more than a sign that a period of profound apostasy has occurred. The very mention of magic conjures in the minds of many images of demons, devils, witches, curses, and spells of malevolent sorcerers. However, it has recently been demonstrated that from early medieval times some practitioners of the occult arts had potent attachments to orthodox religion. In fact, Wilson argues that, within Christendom, whenever the need for religious solace and for mental and spiritual healing has existed, "wonder-working, and even simulated wonder-working, fulfilling recreational as well as religious functions, has been common place outside as well as within, religious traditions. 

Rejecting any association with hellish and Satanic
designs, the practitioners of the white arts or "white magic" -- differentiated from the more sinister thaumaturgy commonly known as "black magic" -- sought to find the fullest expression of the spiritual potential in man. The ancient practice of alchemy sought not only the conversion of base metals into a more pure element, but hoped it would lead to purification of the flesh -- the base element of human nature. Prayer, purification of the soul, and the use of revelatory instruments designed to discover ultimate truth and to reveal, "what God still hid." In the minds of many, this quest for spiritual insight was not disassociated from the more traditional forms of worship. Even seeric instruments used in the revelatory process were justified by scriptural precedent and associated with the ancient patriarchs of the Old Testament. Jon Butler notes:

"...religion means the resort to superhuman powers, sometimes beings, to determine the course of human events. In daily life each particular religion formulates an understanding about the nature of those powers and provides techniques its adherents can use to gain their support, protection, or aid in mastering life's certainties. ...institutionalized Christianity obviously fits such a view of religion. But so, too, do numerous magical and occult arts -- such as astrology, divination, and witchcraft.... Thus, magic and Christianity in colonial America were not generically different entities but were subsets of the same phenomenon -- religion. They posited a resort to superhuman powers and they offered techniques for invoking those powers to control human events."

These practices held a certain appeal for those seeking seemingly unattainable verification of the reality
of spiritual phenomenon. The educated and sophisticated clergy of the pre-revolution awakening directly challenged the veracity of such practices. But, the Calvinism of this period so closely paralleled the techniques and ideas of the occult that mutual indentification was inevitable. The work of the mysteries were invoked to locate buried treasure and to find lost objects. The proliferation of almanacs instructed when to enter business, the best time for marriage, the proper season for conception, when to plant, when to embark on voyages of land or sea. Every decision could be astrally calculated and projected for success. As we have seen, the health of the body was thought to have a definite coorelation to the movement of the stars:

The earth was thought to be a microcosm of the heavens, whose stars revealed the transcendent course of life. Horoscopes uncovered the individual’s relationship to the controlling forces of the universe. Using this or similar knowledge gained through divination, perceptive persons could utilize remedies made of astrally correct herbs and waters that would bring them into a positive, harmonious relationship with the universe and heal their afflictions.

The enormity of the no-rules confusion weighed upon the minds of the people. The obsessive search for confirmation that the spiritual aspects of American life and purpose had not ended, consequently left many yearning for manifestations of a spiritual reality. The inability of the established churches to answer the profound concerns left those of a more introspective nature wandering through
a morass of despair. Page and his fellow pilgrims hoped to make sense of their world, but in the meantime they retreated into the vitality of their folk beliefs. While still considered to be nothing more than a return to barbarism by "enlightened" minds, such beliefs nevertheless bolstered their failing dreams and kept the fires of the spirit alive in their hearts.

Page's association with these beliefs and practices may have forged his acquaintance with the Whitmers. If, perchance, these practices and beliefs were not the genesis of this association with the family, they certainly served to cement the feelings of kinship he felt after making Catherine's acquaintance. A contemporary observer of the scene -- Reverend Diedrich Willers -- provided some unique insight into the religious beliefs and practices of Page and the Whitmer family.

Shortly after his arrival in Fayette, New York, 5 April 1822, Willers received the Whitmers as communicants. With the subsequent rise of Mormonism and the loss of some of his congregation to them, Willers became understandably jaundiced about the new movement. Nevertheless, his insights provide a window to the souls of these early Mormon converts. He noted, for instance, that even before the arrival of Joseph Smith in Fayette, David Whitmer had visionary stirrings. Moreover, he claimed to have seen an angel. According to Willers, this was the main point of
contact between the young prophet and the Whitmer family:

In the month of July [in 1829], Joseph Smith made his appearance in Seneca County, in the neighborhood of Waterloo, about 6 miles from my hometown. There a certain David Whitmer claimed to have seen an angel of the Lord, so Smith proceeded to his house, in order to complete the translation of the above work [the Book of Mormon] himself. According to the reports, only there could he work — where men who had association with the other world also reside. This is the eleventh place where he had worked on the translation of his work and where men saw angels. *1

Willers also noted he had personal acquaintance with the Whitmer family and Page. He viewed their spiritual tendencies negatively:

I am acquainted with the Whitmers. During the past 9 years, they were followers of the Methodists, Reformers, Presbyterians, Mennonites, and Baptists, and are unstable, spineless men; moreover, they are gullible to the highest degree and even believe in witches. Hiram Page is likewise full of superstition.... *2

Discounting his caustic attitude, nevertheless Willer’s comments help define a pattern for the developing Mormon convert. He was often a dreamer, visionary, seer, or a seeker. Typically he was responsive to things of the spirit.

The experiences of Page and the Whitmers were not unusual for early Mormons. Oliver Cowdery had roots in the very areas of Vermont that had previously been home to the Smiths and their relatives. It is very likely that Cowdery’s initial contact with the Smith family in New York was through marriage and family connections from Vermont.

While in Vermont, Rutland County, Oliver’s father may have
been an associate of Mr. Nathaniel Wood. Wood resided in Middleton Springs and was said to hold many radical religious views. Having been rejected and excommunicated by the local Congregational church, Wood discovered he could use the hazel stick as a revelatory instrument. This rod was consulted in order to determine the proper decisions with regard to healing and medicines and in rather mundane affairs. But, Wood was also a spiritual man. He believed that his followers were the modern Israelites and enjoyed a providential relationship with the Almighty. As a result, many of his uses for the hazel stick were religious and of the spirit. There were many so-called "Rodsmen" who practiced this craft, and while there were many motivations -- treasure hunting, discovery of precious metals, the "witching" of underground water, etc. -- Wood seems to have found great religious and revelatory power from this source. 43

The senior Cowdery's involvement with these matters is strongly suggested by his son's interest in the seeric qualities of the hazel stick or "rod." Oliver, it seems, became somewhat accomplished as a practitioner of the art. As Joseph and he were working on the Book of Mormon translation, Joseph's methods struck a note of familiarity. He requested the privilege of using his own "Rod of Nature" in an attempt to translate the characters engraven upon the plates. The attempt was ratified by a revelation of
Joseph, thus signifying Divine approval of such implements, but Oliver found that the process required more seeric talent than he possessed and consequently was unsuccessful in his attempt. Their were other visionaries among the early converts. Heber C. Kimball had a dream at the age of nine as he laid on his bed of "those things that I have since passed through." He and another early convert from Vermont, Brigham Young, had a joint vision soon after the Mormon elders had visited them. They had been gathering wood for Brigham’s brother Phineas, "and pondering upon those things which had been told us by the Elders," when "the glory of God shone upon us, and we saw the gathering of the saints to Zion and the glory that would rest upon them; and many more things connected with that great event, such as the sufferings and persecutions...."  

Early Mormonism lay at the epicenter of this chaos and confusion. Both New York and Vermont convulsed under the revivalism of the Second Great Awakening. The number of millenarian sects and the amount of radical millennial enthusiasm that had roots in this area attest the chaotic condition. The Smiths themselves are representative of how difficult it had become to find one’s way.  

While long standing congregationalists, the Smiths found the concepts of Election and principles of Grace untenable. As the young prophet grew up, his family
sporadically participated in the religions of their ancestors. Joseph’s maternal grandfather, Solomon Mack, had never been a formally religious. He did not fain association with any established religion, though he did experience a conversion of sorts in his later life. Joseph’s mother, though a believer, was not raised in a conventional religious home environment. Unchurched, she was most likely typical of many Americans during this time.

Joseph’s paternal grandfather, Asael, rebelled at the belief structure of Calvinism and became a Universalist. He made his feelings plainly known to his children, as illustrated by Lucy’s account of his throwing Thomas Paine’s *The Age of Reason* at Joseph’s father and suggesting he read it, when Joseph, Sr. was attending Methodist meetings. Joseph’s father, in turn, was deeply religious, but had little association with organized religion. His dreams, chronicled by his wife, reflect his personal isolation and dissatisfaction with religious matters.

Even in the immediate family there was a lack of unity as to what was the proper course. Joseph’s mother recognized the need of baptism yet remained unchurched. She contrived to receive this ordinance without professing particular association. After reading and studying the Bible for seventeen years, she finally concluded in 1820 to become a Presbyterian. Joseph’s brothers Hyrum and Samuel,
and his sister Sophronia also joined the denomination. Joseph, himself, declared he was "somewhat partial to the Methodist Sect, and I desired to be united with them."

Further reflection, however, made the young man realize the apparent hopelessness of the situation.

So great were the confusion and strife among the different denominations, that it was impossible for a person young as I was, and so unacquainted with men and things, to come to any certain conclusion who was right and who was wrong. My mind at times was greatly excited, the cry and tumult were so great and incessant. The Presbyterians were most decided against the Baptists and Methodists, and used all the powers of both reason and sophistry to prove their errors, or, at least, to make the people think they were in error. On the other hand, the Baptists and Methodists in their turn were equally zealous in endeavoring to establish their own tenets and disprove all others. In the midst of this war of words and tumult of opinions, I often said to myself: What is to be done? ^48

This confusion compelled Joseph to retire to a quiet grove of trees near the Smith home. His First Vision convinced Joseph that God was not to be found in the current religious environment. When his private religious quest resulted in the revelation of gold plates -- coming forth as treasure hidden in the ground, and containing the religious heritage of the New World -- his family did not hesitate to demonstrate complete faith in what Joseph reported. His struggle was familiar to them. His questions were their questions, and their own involvement in the folk culture prepared them for unqualified belief in the extraordinary. Subsequent events increased Joseph's stature as a visionary in his own house, and the reputation
of the Palmyra prophet spread far and wide in the surrounding area. Just as the Smiths, it was a voice for which many longed and searched. Hiram, himself, truly found a kindred spirit in Joseph as a fellow seer. In 1822, while digging a well in company with a few friends, his father, and brother Alvin, Joseph also came into possession of a certain stone. The stone was discovered approximately twenty feet below the surface and was described as being about the size of a chicken egg, only more flat, and somewhat chocolate in color. Willard Chase said that it was singular in appearance and excited great excitement among those in the group. He said that, "as we were examining it, Joseph put it into his hat, and then his face into the top of his hat.... The next morning he came to me, and wished to obtain the stone, alleging that he could see it...." A stone discovered while digging in the earth and pronounced to possess seeric qualities, or to provide its user with "second sight" was not thought to be uncommon in the context of the rejuvenation of the arcane and somewhat mystical folk beliefs. Certain objects had long been associated with prophetic gifts, predictions, and medium qualities pertaining to the things of the spirit. Old Testament precedent seems to indicate that seership, with its accompanying implements, is a natural and necessary prerequisite to the assumption of the prophetic role.
Notwithstanding the struggle the modern mind has with such supernatural phenomenon, the power and magnetism these gifts clearly played an important role in the context of the times.

Joseph’s newly discovered stone played an integral role in his spiritual development. Early accounts of Joseph’s working with the stone indicate that it was somewhat of a novelty. But, with subsequent visionary experiences the stone was given solemn, religious significance and purpose. It became the pivot upon which the authoritative statement of Mormonism’s soon-to-be articulated world-view would turn. The Book of Mormon, translated through the medium of the stone, was offered as proof of Joseph’s revelatory powers. It represented the authoritative premise of the new Church, and for early Latter-day Saints, the Book of Mormon and the young Seer’s stone developed a unique and comprehensive interdependence.

The stone became such an important part of the restoration that it was quickly identified with the seeric implements of the ancient Patriarchs. In an early account of Joseph’s visions, his mother refers to the stone as the Urim and Thummim:

That of which I spoke, which Joseph termed a key, was indeed, nothing more nor less than the Urim and Thummim, and it was by this that the angel showed him many things which he saw in vision; by which also he could ascertain, at any time, the approach of danger, either to himself or the Record, and on account of which he always kept the Urim and Thummim about his person. 52
Joseph, himself, would later state that, "if it had not been for the stone, he would not have obtained the book [Book of Mormon]." The stone also became the means of obtaining the actual Urim and Thummim, which Joseph said was buried with the ancient record. So similar were these tools of the prophetic trade that early members of the Church viewed them as equal in stature and value. Urim and Thummim became a generic term for all such objects.

All those who sat as scribe for Joseph during the translation phase of the book from the plates of gold indicate that the process was inextricably tied to the stone of the young seer. Elizabeth, the wife of Joseph's main scribe, Oliver Cowdery, stated:

I cheerfully certify that I was familiar with the manner of Joseph Smith's translating the Book of Mormon. He translated the most of it at my father's [David Whitmer] house. And I often sat by and saw and heard him translate and write for hours together. Joseph never had a curtain drawn between him and his scribe while he was translating. He would place the director in his hat, and then place his face in his hat, so as to exclude the light.

In light of these extraordinary happenings Oliver, himself, wondered upon occasion if he and the Prophet were "men in our sober senses." David Whitmer, in awe as were others associated with the events transpiring, confirmed that he was positive "the Book of Mormon was translated by the gift and power of God, and not by the power of man." These marvelous experiences were voiced about by all those who were involved, and immediately the charismatic gifts and
reputation of the Prophet Joseph began to attract more than just a few kindred spirits of like minds. Hiram, living with his family at the Whitmer’s as the translation proceeded, surely knew of the process and the feelings of those involved. To see the work progress in such a familiar manner no doubt secured his faith and trust in the young Prophet’s work.

Given this information, we can begin to construct a partial scenario for the relationships of this primal group of converts that found answers to their deepest concerns through Joseph Smith and the subsequent rise of Mormonism. From the heights of millennial fervor during the colonial era in the New World, nineteenth-century Americans were cast adrift in a sea of turmoil and confusion. The glory of America seemed to have fled in the proliferation of secularism and religious fragmentation. People wondered who they were. They strained to catch a glimpse of the exalted destiny that had once seemed so certain.

For many people, the established religions were inadequate to the spiritual tasks at hand. The “organized” churches were unable to respond to either the number of questions being asked or to the profundity of their content. The masses, in turn, began to extend throughout the continent. Unchurched and confused they wandered from one sect to another, seeking refuge. When all else failed they resorted to the spiritual comfort found in the
thaumaturgic excitement of folk ways -- beliefs that had always provided a sense of spiritual fulfillment. Within the mysterious and the arcane they searched the scriptures for precedent and clues for greater spiritual fulfillment, and awaited a restoration of the primitive purity of Christ's kingdom. Within this context, the Mormon response arose, articulated by a young village seer.

Joseph's experiences were the critical factors for Page and others, for new millennial sects do not arise every time there are "pre-millennial murmurings." Gager states that, "in every case, the decisive factor would appear to be the prophet." The prophet becomes the source of a new redemptive formula. He breaks down the traditional religious authority, and becomes the representation of God's new will and authority. Kenelm Burridge identifies the specific function as being the prime mover:

In the preliminary stages before a movement has cohered, there may be no prophet at all -- just a series of apparently impulsive activities accompanied by inchoate ideas, feelings, and emotions. Only when the inchoate ideas begin to cohere into new assumptions may a prophet emerge to articulate them, show them forth, make them explicit. This is the revelation which, thought of as divinely inspired, provides the basis for the new departure, a new mode of redemption.

For generations the claims of Joseph Smith have been debated. By faithful Latter-day Saints they have been heralded as the authoritative voice in the wilderness -- authority and premises that were given by the angel,
"flying in the midst of heaven." Critics, equally vocal, have labeled Joseph's mission as superstition and nonsense. Whatever our modern opinions are of the veracity of Smith's claims, we must recognize the critical issue for a comprehensive interpretation. The objections to magical practices, seer stones, divination, and the like, unthinkingly transposed upon the spiritual-religious phenomenon which was Mormonism, were, in fact, the very things that made Joseph Smith and his articulation of the situation so attractive to hundreds that were drawn to him. These were fellow pilgrims and wanderers. What Hiram Page recognized in Joseph Smith was a kinship and fellowship in a specific belief structure. That this belief structure was articulated in such a way as to endure for over one hundred fifty years, makes it worthy of more than casual observation and heated polemics.

More importantly, for those drawn to Joseph Smith because of religious kinship, there arose from the mysteries of his spiritual communication a reaffirmation of the vital message of America's divine destiny. God spoke through his young Prophet and the message was as the voice of authority. It confirmed that the spirit had not fled, nor was the millennial vision dead, nor had America been cast aside as a redemptive instrument.

The Book of Mormon declared the New World to be holy soil. Jesus Christ himself had performed a personal
ministry within the confines of its borders. The vision was stated with a clarity that could not be denied:

It [was] a choice land above all other lands, a chosen land of the Lord.... It was the place of the New Jerusalem, which should come down out of heaven, and the holy sanctuary of the Lord. ...a New Jerusalem should be built up upon this land.... And there shall be a new heaven and a new earth; and they shall be like unto the old save the old have passed away, and all things have become new.  

For Hiram Page, this scriptural confirmation of what was already held within his heart, was all that was needed. The God of heaven had spoken in a clear and decisive, albeit familiar, voice. With vigor and faith, he identified himself with the cause that ever after altered his life.
Notes to Chapter III


3. Ibi.

4. John White, "The Planters Plea. or The Grounds of Plantations Examined," in Peter Force, Tracts and Other Papers (New York: Peter Smith, 1947), Vol. 2. As an underpinning to the emerging theological and economic views of the new world, John Foxe’s Book of Martyrs played an important role. Foxe combined nationalistic and religious themes concerning the Reformation’s fight against Catholicism. His "black legends" resulted in not only a prejudorative view of the Catholic church, but also provided impetus and justification for British expansionism. The book became a national epic in England, influenced the ecclesiastical histories written in the New World, and continued as one of the most widely read books in America well into the nineteenth-century. Also, the tensions and modifications concerning the Puritan theology of America is best observed in the Massachusetts Bay Colony for two reasons. First, these Puritan fathers best exemplify the changing nature of interpretation concerning the new world because they considered themselves non-separating Puritans. The separatist group at Plymouth Colony severed ties with their less radical Puritan brothers in England and never intended to return. Massachusetts colonists, on the other hand, initially desired to prove the veracity of the Puritan experiment in the new world and then looked to return home in glory. Second, when their errand failed, Massachusetts Bay Divines became the foremost proponents of the new definition given to America.

Considerations for the Plantation," in Rutman, p. 87.


8. Anne Hutchinson's heresies came to be known as the Antinomian Controversy. It was an attempt to radicalize New England in preparation for its role in the imminent coming of Christ. The issues evolved around personal revelation, the imminence of the destruction and fall of the Anti-Christ, and preparation for Armageddon. There were strong desires on the part of her followers for complete separation from England as a necessary step in preparation for the millennium. Thomas Lechford, in his manuscript Of Prophesie assailed the very essence of church polity. He called for a return to Apostolic government, and offered what many of his contemporaries viewed as dangerous and erroneous opinions based on his personal interpretation of Daniel and Revelation that designed to return New England to the English fold. Fear arose that his ideas would bring santimonious anarchy to the colony. Rejection of both extremes reveals both their uncertainty over the exact ends of their specific experiment in the New World, as well as their determination to present a moderate colony inspite of ever increasing radical chiliastic thought.


12. Ibid., pp. 200-201.


25. Ibid., p. 4.


28. Ibid., pp. 166-167.


pp.28-29. Page's use of the seer stone in the 26 September 1830 conference will be discussed in the next chapter. Also, see Appendix for a picture of Hiram's stone as well as the stone's provenance.


37. Joseph, Moses, Aaron, and many of the Ancients possessed seeric implements. The most common of these was the Urim and Thummim, fashioned to allow the Priest-leaders to communicate on a spiritual plane. The Old Testament is full of allusions to these prophetic tools. See, Genesis chapter 44; Exodus chapters 4, 7, 8, 14, 15-17, 20, 28.


39. Ibid., p. 341. Butler identifies especially the authority figure and the concepts of Grace and Election as being particularly compatible to the more mysterious practices.

40. Ibid., p. 321


42. Ibid., p. 333.

LDS Archives. In a recent article, Richard L. Anderson attempts to disprove that any connection existed between the Woods and the Cowdery's. His argument is that no contemporary source material for the Cowdery-Wood association means there was no association. However, he ignores the fact that Oliver's involvement with these practices strongly suggests the probability of his father's acquaintance with the Woods as the impetus of his possession and use of the "rod of nature." This writer feels that such connections cannot be dismissed as mere coincidence, even though much of the source material appears to be hear-say. Much more work needs to be done in the early Vermont origins of the church. See, Richard L. Anderson, "The Mature Joseph Smith and Treasure Searching," BYU Studies 24 (Fall 1984):487-560.

44. Book of Commandments 7:3. The original version of the revelation reads, "Now this is not all, for you have another gift, which is the gift of working with the Rod: Behold it has told you things: Behold there is no other power save God, that can cause this Rod of Nature to work in your hands. Compare with DC 8:6-7. These things were evidently viewed with some embarassment by later Latter-day Saints. The changes that were made demonstrate the lack of appreciation for these things by the modern mind.


46. Ibid., pp. 18-19.


48. JSH 1:6-10.

49. Contrary to what many twentieth-century
Latter-day Saints believe, it was not Joseph’s First Vision that attracted people to his work. Most nineteenth-century Saints viewed this as a private religious experience. The touchstone of belief among the early Saints was the discovery of the plates and subsequent translation of the Book of Mormon. This was viewed as the impetus of the Restoration and in direct fulfillment of Revelation 14:7. See, James B. Allen, "Emergence of a Fundamental: The Expanding Role of Joseph Smith’s First Vision in Mormon Religious Thought," Journal of Mormon History 7 (1980):43-61.

50. Howe, Mormonism Unvailed, pp. 240-242. The Smith family had long been associated with these practices and believers in the same. The treasure hunting activities of the Smith’s have been well documented, and even considered by most to be a common practice. See, Ronald W. Walker, "The Persisiting Idea of American Treasure Hunting," BYU Studies 24 (Fall 1984):429-460; Ronald W. Walker, "Joseph Smith: The Palmyra Seer," BYU Studies 24 (Fall 1984):461-473; Brigham H. Roberts, A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1930), Vol. 1, pp. 26-27, 81-82. Lucy records that they dabbled in the Faculty of Abrac, the drawing of Magic Circles, and soothsaying, See Bushman, The Beginnings of Mormonism, p. 72. Lucy’s Brother Jason was possessed of the gift of healing and organized a communal society within his ministry, see Smith, Biographical Sketches, pp. 21-23, 52-54. In Pearson H. Corbett, Hyrum Smith: Patriarch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1971), the bibliography contains a listing of many relics belonging to Hyrum that have association with the occult, see pp. 452-453. The visions and dreams of the Smiths have been previously discussed and documented.


53. Howe, Mormonism Unvailed, pp. 246.


55. Oliver Cowdery, Defence in a Rehearsal of My Grounds for Separating Myself from the Latter Day Saints (Norton, Ohio: Pressley’s Job Office, 1839). This Pamphlet by Oliver Cowdery has recently fallen under suspicion. No
Mormon or non-Mormon author knew of its existence during the nineteenth-century. No known copy existed before approximately 1905, and then it was discovered by an anti-Mormon group. See David J. Whittaker, Early Mormon Pamphleteering" (unpublished Ph.D Dissertation, Brigham Young University, 1982); Richard L. Anderson, "The Second Witness of Priesthood Restoration" Improvement Era 82 (September 1968): 15-24. This source is used on precedent established by Richard L. Bushman, Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism, pp. 97, 222. Cowdery’s alleged work parallels so closely materials from other sources relevant to this thesis, that it will be included when it is relevant.


CHAPTER IV

HIRAM PAGE AND THE CONTAINMENT OF CHARISMA

Recent scholarship has demonstrated that if a new religious movement is going to survive, a transition and change in the enthusiastic beginnings must occur. This transition will move the original vision of the loosely organized union to a more traditional, hierarchical formulation. This process of institutionalizing includes the development of a more formalized ideology, firm definition of roles within the movement, and the creation of new values and symbols towards which the excitement and emotions of the "no rules" period can be directed. John Gager observes that "in this transition from one stage to the other lies the key to survival for any religious community."  

The proliferation of sects that arose in response to the millennial impulses of early nineteenth-century America attest the dynamics of the moment. Likewise, the inability of the various sects to maintain the cohesive bonding provided by their early enthusiasm, and the subsequent fragmentation into increasingly diminished societies, demonstrate the significance of the transition
to a more settled condition. With this in mind, an examination of Hiram Page's life during this period is at once typical and instructive. Page, as a religious pilgrim, is not only representative of societal fragmentation, but he is also one of the principals in the institutional process of the early church.

The expression of early Mormonism contained such dynamic and potentially anarchistic forces that the young Church was compelled to meet the process of institutionalization immediately upon organization. Had Joseph Smith not been successful in consolidating his role and initiating the heirarchical structure, the ill-defined authority base would have fragmented and scattered the faithful like so many of their contemporaries in the countless ephemeral sects of the day who found only temporary religious satisfaction. The ultimate question that must be addressed is one of authority. In short, who will govern and who will be governed? How will this relationship be determined? And, to what degree will individuals be required to offer up their agency in deference to religious and spiritual mandates? Thomas O'Dea writes:

The problem of authority is one that every human community must solve in some way, for the co-ordination of social life and its stability depend upon a solution. A religious community faces this in an intensified form; it must solve the problem of religious authority. Since religion is concerned with what is ultimate in the human situation -- with man's orientation to what lies beyond the empirical
here-and-now, beyond the purely human bases of existence -- religious authority takes on a peculiar ultimacy and involves the foundation of all authority. ²

These disruptive forces rose to crisis proportions in the 26 September 1830 General Conference held in Fayette, New York. It was only the second recorded general gathering of the young church, yet because of the enormity of the issues involved and the multidimensional alterations that it made in the evolution of Mormonism, this conference must be viewed as an early watershed. In these mounting tensions, Hiram Page was at the center. ³

Three specific factors brought Joseph and the Church to this juncture. Foremost among these was the very nature of the charismatic origins of the church. The enthusiastic and universal practice of spiritual gifts that existed before formal organization was the critical element of early convert identification. The primal group of disciples came together because each recognized in the other familiar struggles and experiences. These fellow pilgrims looked to Joseph Smith to provide direction.

Gager notes:

A leader is able to magnetize them because he evokes or plays upon some strand of intellectual or emotional predisposition, and because -- more than this -- he purports to offer the realization of certain values in action.... The charismatic leader, more than other kinds of rulers, whose leadership may repose on quite different bases -- patronage, force, constitutional authority, traditional right to rule, etc. -- is singularly dependent upon being accepted by his followers. ⁴
This charismatic foundation for authority can be nothing more than a temporary condition. Its very nature is to open the heavenly realms to individual communication and comfort. So individualistic is this response that within an institutional structure the pluralism so created brings such disharmony that competing voices inhibit a concert of purpose. The challenge of the charismatic leader is to maintain the loyalty extending from these shared values, yet transform the charisma from individual to more centralized canons of authority.

In addition to the problems arising from the free excercise of charisma were the implications of the democratic, republican values of the new nation. In the post-Revolution years any organization that excluded individuals from full participation was viewed with extreme suspicion. Post-Revolutionary Americans fought a long war to establish the rights of men to govern themselves. Congregationalism, egalitarianism, states rights, anti-federalism, were the predilections of the age, and the early converts to Mormonism were steeped in this democratic ideology. In a climate where the common man revelled in the Age of Jackson and cheered the the Bank War and Maysville Road Veto as victories for pluralism and state sovereignty, it was only natural for early converts to feel that the exercise of spiritual gifts should be universally enjoyed rather than
concentrated in the few.

Finally, the publication of the Book of Mormon further complicated the issue. By confirming that American destiny was closely identified with the coming of the Kingdom, the scripture implied a sanction of the nation’s political institutions. Those institutions declared man to be free, and that it was his inalienable right to have a voice in how and by whom he would be governed. Republican and democratic values were a part of a divinely inspired plan through which the millennium would be achieved. The Book of Mormon made very clear statements concerning the role of common consent in matters of authority. "It is not common," the book stated, "that the voice of the people desireth anything contrary to that which is right; but it is common for the lesser part of the people to desire that which is not right; therefore this shall ye observe and make it your law -- to do your business by the voice of the people." 5

The tension that developed between the need for centralized authority and the established tradition of republican democracy was inevitable. The challenge faced by Joseph Smith was to initiate a theocratic, authoritarian, centralized hierarchy in the midst of a spiritual affinity for the free exercise of charisma that had been nurtured through democratic and republican egalitarianism, amplified by the individualism of the
frontier, and given Divine sanction by the authority of the church's own new scripture. It is unlikely that Joseph consciously recognized the magnitude of the problem. He could not have been aware that the satisfactory resolution of the difficulty would later be viewed as a key element in the viability of the new church. Young and inexperienced as Joseph was, his vision in this matter attests to his potential as a leader.

There were early indications that a crisis was imminent. As we have seen, Oliver Cowdery had requested the privilege of translating the ancient record by means of his own revelatory instrument. His disappointment in failing to be successful was salved by instructions encouraging him to prepare himself more carefully. This experience certainly increased Joseph's stature in the opinions of those who were aware of the incident. However, it did nothing to curb the attraction of experimenting with spiritual gifts -- in fact, the revelation received through Joseph seemed to ratify such inclinations. On 6 April 1830 the church was officially organized. Revelatory instructions were given at this time which attempted to outline the proper role of authority and, in particular, define Joseph's role as prophet-leader. The April 1830 revelations instructed the newly baptized members that Joseph was called of God and ordained an apostle to be, "an elder of [the] church." Oliver Cowdery was also said to be
called of God and ordained an apostle and an elder, but in Oliver's case it was noted that he was ordained under Joseph's hand. Thus, there was the suggestion that Joseph held a position of authority pre-eminate to anyone else in the church, but this idea was not explicitly stated. The revelation then noted that the power given to the young prophet to translate the ancient record was not an indiscriminate power enjoyed at will, but that the means had been previously prepared and the power was given to him "from on high." This again inferred that the prophetic powers of Joseph were on a different level from such gifts experienced by other prominent men. However, it soon became obvious that this distinction was not understood by others. The revelation then proceeded to outline specific duties that were commensurate with appointed offices. These duties were not interchangeable, but every man stood in his own unique calling and ordination. These instructions came to be known as the Articles and Covenants of the Church of Christ. They were read and voted on in the subsequent conferences of the church.

A subsequent revelation given in the same month further amplified Joseph's position in the hierarchy. Joseph was to be called a "seer, a translator, a prophet, an apostle of Jesus Christ...." It further stated that the church was to, "give heed unto all his words and commandments which he shall give unto you as he receiveth
them...." But more significant, "his word ye shall receive, as if from my own mouth, in all patience and faith. It seems clear that a definite structural outline was developing, and yet, it was tempered by a confirmation of cherished, republican values. In one part of the revelations it was stated, that the various elders "composing [the] church of Christ [were] to meet in conference...from time to time...to do church business."

This could have suggested to early members that all "elders" were equal in power and authority, and that republican principles were in effect and certified by revelation.

These revelations certainly expressed the desires of Joseph Smith for a more ordered kingdom, but apparently the individual members chose to emphasize the more democratic interpretation. Early in the beginnings of organization Oliver Cowdery had been given license to teach and instruct the church. Notwithstanding the instructions to receive Joseph's words as the word of God, Oliver, feeling confident of his prophetic calling and in his appointment to teach, took it upon himself to correct Joseph where he deemed it necessary.

Shortly after the Articles and Covenants had been approved in the 9 June conference of the church, Oliver moved from his home in Harmony, Pennsylvania, to Fayette, New York. The intention of this move was to enable him to
work closely with Joseph in compiling the previously received revelations. While Joseph was away Oliver, who was temporarily residing with the Whitmers, thought he detected an error in the Articles and Covenants themselves. He wrote a letter to Joseph to alert him of the obvious erratum. As discerned from the official record of the affair, Joseph did not consider revelation from God to be subject to democratic approval:

Whilst thus employed in the work appointed me by my Heavenly Father, I received a letter from Oliver Cowdery, the contents of which gave me both sorrow and uneasiness.... He wrote to inform me that he had discovered an error in one of the commandments.... The...quotation he said was erroneous, and added: "I command you in the name of God to erase those words, that no priesthood be amongst us!"

I immediately wrote to him in reply, in which I asked him by what authority he took upon him to command me to alter or erase, to add to or diminish from, a revelation or commandment from Almighty God.

Soon afterward Joseph visited the Whitmer home only to find the entire household convinced that Oliver was right in his opinion. Joseph writes, "It was not without both labor and perseverance that I could prevail with any of them to reason calmly on the subject." Finally, at length, he was able to convince not only the Whitmer family but Oliver also of their error, "and that the sentence in dispute was in accordance with the rest of the commandment. Thus," remarked Joseph, "was this error rooted out." 10

However, this issue is more complex than Joseph allows in the official historical record. The earliest draft of the Articles and Covenants -- undated and in
Oliver's handwriting -- contains a commandment to Oliver to write the "articles and covenants" of the church. Joseph very often used others to write first drafts of key documents for the church. If Oliver did in fact write the first draft of this important document, it does not seem unusual that he would consider it proper, and even his right, to correct what he viewed as an error in the wording. 11

Joseph's reaction to Oliver's directive, then, becomes more than a conflict over specific wording in the approved scripture. The controversy becomes a struggle for primacy within the developing hierarchical structure, and suggests that Joseph was becoming aware of the centrifugal tendencies of decentralized leadership and the free exercise of charismatic gifts. His success at diffusing the issue did not, however, resolve the problem. What followed severely tested the leadership abilities of the young Prophet.

During the summer months of 1830 Joseph and his family continued to reside in Harmony, Pennsylvania. Contact was maintained with the various branches of the church in New York by visits and correspondence. While the Prophet was on a visiting tour to the Colesville branch, persecution became so great that it was deemed wise to remove the family from near by Harmony, Pennsylvania, to Fayette. David Whitmer offered his home as a refuge for
Joseph, and an old trusted friend, Newell Knight, provided wagon and assistance for the move.

Joseph arrived at the Whitmer home and discovered that the issues involving authority and the exercise of spiritual gifts had reached major proportions. In the months since Oliver's arrival, Hiram Page, by means of his seeric stone, had received a number of instructional revelations for the church. These instructions were written on what Newell Knight described as "rolls of papers." Hiram and his revelations received a high degree of notoriety. Both the Whitmers and Oliver Cowdery were studying them intently, and were believers in what was recorded.

Hiram's interest and attraction to the Book of Mormon statements on the redemptive role of America in the approaching Kingdom of Christ seem to be the genesis of this revelatory contribution. The early Saints found many concepts from the new scripture enlightening, but none more so than this. Research concerning the use of the Book of Mormon in early writings, speeches, and reference guides indicates that the most meaningful message of the Book for these early Saints was the reaffirmation of America as the site of the latter day Zion. The new scripture clearly spoke of the gathering of Israel, the coming of the heavenly city of the New Jerusalem, and the kingdom of Christ on earth. More important, by scriptural authority
it placed the location of the city of the New Jerusalem within the geographic boundaries of the American continent. The Saints gave this much thought. Speculation, no doubt, ran high as to the exact location of this marvelous city. In the absence of Joseph, Hiram took up his stone to seek revelation from God on this matter.

Whatever the answer was, Joseph considered the result to be in error, at variance with scriptural precedent, and a direct challenge to his own prophetic office and calling. Joseph sensed that the emotions of the moment were running high. He, "thought it wisdom not to do much more than to converse with the brethren on the subject," until the general conference scheduled for 26 September should meet. By this means he sought to remove the conflict from a personal matter between Hiram, the Whitmers, Oliver, and himself -- a situation that might result in wounded feelings and estrangement. Rather, he elected to deal with it as a constitutional issue. It would be confronted as a breech of church policy -- policy that was previously established and approved in the Articles and Covenants.

The conference was to be held at the Whitmer's home. At least sixty-two Saints had previously united themselves with Joseph and the church. As the appointed time approached, members of the church began to gather from the distant branches. Upon arrival, they found Joseph to
be deeply disturbed. His attempts at private reconciliation with Page and the believers had not been successful. Newell Knight found him in "great trouble of mind" and the dissension among some of the converts was clearly evident.

In the conference proceedings the conflict was not allowed to escalate to a clash of personalities, nor was it discussed with regard to the comparison of prophetic talent. Joseph presented the matter in simple terms of established procedure and policy. The Articles and Covenants were read aloud to be voted on by the membership. Joseph, consistent with the laws of the church, was sustained by voice of the people to be the one to receive "Revelations & Commandments for the church. There was considerable discussion of the controversy. Hiram and his revelations were investigated with regard to precedents established both in modern revelation and in the New Testament. The examination was accomplished in sincerity and under the tempering influence of prayer. The church membership concurred with Joseph that a breech in established policy had occurred. 13

Joseph received further revelation dictating the course of action to pursue in dealing with the immediate situation. Oliver Cowdery was instructed that it was within his rights as an elder to teach the church. If his teachings were taught by the spirit and in accordance with
the "revelations and commandments which [Joseph] had received, he would be heard by the Church." But, it was established by scriptural authority that, "no one shall be appointed to receive commandments and revelations in this church excepting my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., for he receiveth them as Moses." Further, Oliver was to continue seeking for inspiration and direction, but he was not to "write by way of commandment." He stood in relationship to Joseph as Aaron stood to Moses -- that is, "to declare faithfully the commandments and revelations," which Joseph received, "with power and authority unto the church." It was made clear that Oliver could not take it upon himself to command or correct the head of the church. The impact of these instructions upon the future of the church was far-reaching. In the earlier articles Joseph had been called "a" seer; "a" revelator; "a" prophet. In the new revelation it now became clear that Joseph was to be the seer, revelator, and prophet to the church. 

Hiram fell under condemnation for his temerity. Oliver may have had legitimate cause for feeling justified in directing the church. However, Hiram had only his confidence in the power of revelation, and faith in his own potential to draw upon the power represented by his seer's stone to legitimate his claim. It is obvious that he would not have attempted this if he had not previously experienced some degree of success with the revelatory
process. We must also assume that many believed in his revelations for the same reason.

The situation was diffused when Oliver was instructed to take Hiram aside, and to settle the matter in private. This avoided the negative connotation of official church discipline. Hiram was instructed that the "things which he had written from [the] stone [were] not of [God]." Satan had deceived him. He was counseled that it was not his place to presume any appointment to instruct the general membership in church matters. What he attempted was contrary to implied procedure and was in violation of the church covenants. All things were to be done in order by prayer and by faith, and he was to take responsibility for error of his actions in the settlement of this affair. In other words, he was to apologize for setting himself up as a source of revelation for the church and recognize Joseph as God's prophet. 15

Hiram apparently accepted this rebuke and counsel. Given Page's belief in the stone, as well as in his ability to use it, it is strange that he was so conciliatory. Possibly, it was due to a reticent personality. Or perhaps, Joseph's magnetism and artful diplomacy contributed to rendering Hiram submissive. More likely, Joseph probably assured Hiram that in the immediate future he, himself, would identify the location of the American Zion. Whatever the reasons, in front of the conference
Hiram renounced his stone and all things connected with its use. The spurious revelations were rejected completely and unanimously, much to Joseph’s satisfaction, and order and peace were reestablished. Newell Knight remarked that, "it was wonderful to witness the wisdom that Joseph displayed on this occasion for truly God gave unto him great wisdom and power and the Holy Ghost came upon us and filled us with joy unspeakable."

The commitment of the church to a hierarchical institutional structure was viewed by those in attendance as time for rededication. Faith in their Prophet was strengthened as he demonstrated tact and vision. They partook of the sacrament, handled the business of the church and felt Divine approval of the events of the Conference. Knight stated:

The Conference lasted three days during which time great harmony prevailed and the saints present all manifested a determination to go forward and do all in their power for the spread of the great and glorious principles of truth which had been revealed by our heavenly Father.

Reverberations of this conference did not end upon its conclusion. Hiram Page, and his central role in this early constitutional issue, left a legacy that has echoed and re-echoed to this day. Page, through the assumed privilege of independent prophetic gifts, forced an open discussion of the issues of primacy, institutional development, and the manner and form of revelation in the church. The church emerged from the September, 1830,
General Conference headed in new directions both structurally as well as geographically. 18

The structural pattern that was established contained a healthy tension between institutional procedure and individual exercise of charisma. Any process of institutionalization has as its motivation the preservation of the newly articulated world-view for second generation believers. It seeks to pass on the revolutionary -- in this case restorationist -- gains of the initial enthusiasm, and attempts to consolidate and then transmit a complete belief system. To leave a trail strewn with the fragments of inadequate institutions destroyed upon its own emergence is to demonstrate the structural deficiencies of the new belief system itself. However, there are risks involved as a community of believers are transformed into a recognizable organization.

Most often, consolidation takes the form of dogma, creed, policy, and procedure, which act as safeguards against fragmentation. While providing structural support these features also tend to sap the strength and vitality of the emotional intensity that existed during the enthusiastic beginnings. The faithful are placed in a position of conforming to what is acceptable rather than seeking for new insight and increased spiritual strength. The spiritual vigor which opened the heavens for their predecessors is lost and denied to them by the
self-protection of consolidation. 19

The revelatory instructions to Page helped soften this process. Mormonism was able to strike a balance between the need to centralize revelation with regard to procedure and doctrine and the desires of individual members to establish personal spiritual communication. The revelations coming out of this conference stated that only Joseph was to speak in an official capacity for the church. Also, when God spoke to the church it would be through Joseph -- the designated and accepted leader. This preserved for Joseph the charismatic magnetism necessary to encourage and maintain allegiance. It also avoided the inevitable competition of other voices and contending theology that left so many millenial sects unable to maintain viability and sense of purpose.

The revelations also contained instructions for Page -- and by implication all others -- to continue pursuing inspiration and enlightenment through the gifts of the spirit. It was promised that by his faithfulness in conforming to the dictates of God through Joseph, he would not be required to give up all hope of receiving spiritual direction. Rather, if he would ask "it shall be given thee from the time thou shalt go, until the time thou shalt return, what thou shalt do." Oliver received similar counsel suggesting that the spirit of God would lead him and teach him. It would then be within his rights to teach
the church and be heard. However, this was to be presented not in the nature of commandment but only as wisdom. \footnote{21}

Therefore, the church was not to stagnate in an institutional pool. It was able to offer the prospect of continued spontaneity in the midst of centralized control. If Joseph had responded otherwise he would have betrayed the initial premise of the church -- that men as individuals could approach God and receive personal communion. The tension between organizational and individual revelation is a legacy that has persisted to the present time as a necessary precept in the viability of Mormonism.

The September conference had other far-reaching implications. Throughout the translation of the Book of Mormon, Joseph relied upon revelatory instruments as a medium for spiritual communications. One of the significant reasons that Cowdery and the Whitmers were so attracted to Hiram's revelations was that they were achieved through a familiar method. Seeric devices certified the validity of revelation for these early followers of the folk traditions. Joseph Smith, though a product of this culture, seemed to outgrow the need for such implements. Upon publication of the Book of Mormon, he became less interested in the form and more concerned with the content of revelation.

In the spiritual preparation of Joseph Smith, the
stone may have been as much for Joseph as it was for his believers. The seer stone provided the means for translation of the Book of Mormon, but after the book was published, Joseph for the most part, gave it up. His proficiency in spiritual matters no longer required the support of external devices.

The decision of the conference confirmed this development. The result of the successful resolution of the constitutional matter raised by Page and his stone was that, from this point on, the membership would look to the Prophet as the oracle and medium of revelation. This established the revelatory pattern not only for the leader of the church, but also set the precedent for all members who wished to exercise spiritual gifts. The Lord was to be approached with humility and prayer. A worthy soul was now the revelatory tool. This process became so established in Mormonism that external media for revelatory purpose later afforded embarrassment. 21

Notwithstanding his acceptance of the decision of the conference to place Joseph's revelations in ascendancy to his own, Hiram was not inclined to give up the medium of seeric implements as confirming witness of the prophetic office. In Hiram's view, the conference gave no specific injunction against the stone itself, only on the nature of revelation for the church. Throughout his life Page
remained firmly enculturated in such folk ways, and he continued to look to the stone for Divine guidance.

Following Joseph's martyrdom and his own withdrawal from fellowship, he wrote to William McClellin to explain why David Whitmer would not step forth and claim the presidency of the church. Hiram acknowledged Whitmer's right, but indicated that to speak of David as a prophet "we do not speak of him as a mere prophet; but as prophet; Seer, and revelator, the three terms being combined in one because that was the way which he was ordained." Page observed that as to the single term "prophet" David was obviously qualified for, "he who has the spirit of Christ has the spirit of prophesy...." But for David to be a "regular prophet" he must obtain the gift. He then continued:

[David] was appointed at the head of the church legally as well as Joseph. David claimed that office he holds that office and it is given him by the spirit of prophecy to determine the correctness of all things in spiritual matters when he inquires of the Lord for that purpose, but this does not constitute him a Seer... he who has these things [seeric implements] is called a Seer; if it requires the possession of these means to constitute a Seer then David cannot be said to be a Seer at this time, no more than Joseph could from the receiving power till he had the means....

Hiram felt that these instruments were uniquely associated with the giving of new scripture. If the time came that the Lord wished to send forth other records, and if the church sufficiently purified itself, David was the man who was placed in position to accomplish the task. Only then would the "means" be given again. He felt
confident that this was a divinely instituted practice to avoid assumption of the leadership role by any "who would fain set themselves up to be prophets and leaders of the church which would bring the church into confusion there being many that want to be leaders." Hiram himself seems to have lost the ability to work revelation through his stone. He later wrote to Oliver Cowdery stating:

Brother Oliver I am neither a prophet nor the Son of a prophit altho I am ordained to that order and when the time comith that the Lord will see fit to bestow the means as he did in the beginning then israel shall be led as in days of old; then the saying shall be fullfilled old things shall become new.

The conference created a position somewhat unique for Joseph Smith. The declaration that all authority and revelatory power rested upon him made the entire institutional structure dependant upon the acceptance of his leadership. As was now expressly made clear, power would flow from top to bottom. Hence, all men who participated in the heirarchical structure held their authority only if Joseph continued in his. This made the validity of the church experience strangely dependant on the strength or weakness of the oracle -- in this case Joseph, and in the future on any man who would ascend the office of President.

Loyalty, then, became a sign of faith and power. Continuance in the church rested upon one's trust in the leadership. Congregational tendencies were sublimated, and a theocratic formulation was re-affirmed. To disagree with
policy, doctrine, or revelation was to call into question the divine nature of the prophetic calling. To desire a change in the direction of various aspects of church procedure required the personal decision that the Prophet had fallen and therefore was leading the faithful into a state of apostasy. The relationship between the human nature of the Prophet in contrast to the essence of Divine leadership became a source of much concern in the early church. Joseph's own personality and many of the startling innovations he introduced created much consternation, many seasons of doubt, and not a little apostasy. Many who left Mormonism, Hiram included, would anguish over the confusion involved in determining when the man spoke versus when the Prophet spoke. It has not become less of a conflict for twentieth-century Saints.

The constitutional issue also pushed the church in another direction. This had nothing to do with conceptual or theoretical ideas concerning authority. Instead, it marked the beginning of many geographical relocations eventually terminating in the Great Basin settlement of the western wilderness. As mentioned, the genesis of the authority problems that focused in the September conference, was a preoccupation with identifying the location of the city of the American, New Jerusalem, a concern which was central to Page's revelations. Of all the things that might have been revealed by Page, this
particular item was singled out as deserving comment:

And now, behold, I say unto you that it is not revealed, and no man knoweth where the city Zion shall be built, but it shall be given hereafter. Behold, I say unto you that it shall be on the borders by the Lamanites.  

Joseph probably had earlier introduced the concept of Zion's location within the American nation. The Book of Mormon certainly was clear in expressing such an idea. Most likely, speculation as to the exact location was the subject of much discussion within the church. The enthusiasm of the Whitmers and Cowdery for Hiram's revelations forced Joseph to deal with locating Zion in an immediate and direct manner. As he did, it started a chain of events that uprooted the church and affected thousands of lives.

The revelations and instructions received at the conference demonstrate the influence of millennial thought and the desire to locate the City of Zion. In an attempt to calm the excitement, Joseph instructed Oliver to read the fifth chapter of Isaiah during the conference session. This chapter makes subtle reference to the errors of hastening the work of God -- a barb Hiram no doubt felt. But, it also speaks of the scattering and gathering of the House of Israel. The gathering would occur when God, "will lift up an ensign to the nations from far, and will hiss unto them from the end of the earth: and, behold, they shall come with speed swiftly." This chapter of Isaiah
was also quoted verbatim in the Book of Mormon, and given
the context of the conference, Joseph certainly used this
scripture in an attempt to reassure the Saints of their
destiny.

A revelation given a few days prior to the
conference, "in the presence of six elders," was the most
explicit revelation to date on the events of the gathering
of Israel, the Second Coming of Christ, the signs and
judgments to precede the millennium, and the resurrection
and the final judgment. The location of the revelation was
certainly the Whitmer house, and the "six elders" who were
listed in the revelation's introduction were most likely
Peter, Jacob, John, and David Whitmer, Oliver Cowdery, and
Hiram Page. The reason this revelation is clear. In
response to the many questions being asked, Joseph sought
an authoritative response to the pressures that were being
exerted from his closest associates. The information that
Joseph received broadened the church's understanding of the
millennium experience. 

The revelation condemning Oliver and Hiram for
their independent expressions and actions also contained
significant instructions that would be the prelude to the
identification of the location for Zion. Hiram and Oliver
were both commanded to go to the Lamanites and preach the
gospel to them. Hiram never participated in this venture,
the reasons for his failure being unknown. But, it is
clear that Oliver understood the real purpose of the mission. On 17 October 1830, he wrote a solemn covenant, swearing to fulfill the mission's objectives:

I, Oliver, being commanded by the Lord God, to go forth unto the Lamanites, to proclaim glad tidings of great joy unto them, by presenting unto them the fullness of the Gospel, of the only begotten Son of God; and also, to rear up a pillar as a witness where the temple of God shall be built, in the glorious new Jerusalem; do therefore most solemnly covenant with God that I will walk humbly before him, and do his business. 27

Before this mission was accomplished, there were developments that compelled the Saints to move westward. Enroute west, the missionaries stopped in Ohio to proselyte, where they received Sidney Rigdon as one of their noteworthy converts. Rigdon, a Campellite minister, brought in turn a substantial number of his own congregation into the church when he converted. More significantly, he was a millenarian himself, who was experimenting with a communal society in Ohio. Upon his conversion, he traveled to New York to meet and visit with Joseph. This visit, December, 1830, was a catalyst for further developments in the understanding of Zion. Rigdon states that though they met in a small log cabin,

we began to talk about the kingdom of God as if we had the whole world at our command, we talked with great confidence, and talked big things...we talked about the people coming as doves to the windows, that all nations should flock into it; that they should come bending to the standard of Jesus....When God sets up a system of salvation, he sets up a system of government...that shall rule over temporal and spiritual affairs 28

The conversation further stimulated the young
prophet. During Rigdon's visit Joseph received parts of the Book of Moses that had been lost from the Old Testament canon. Previous to December, Joseph received several parts of this book. Now, however, chapters six and seven were added. These chapters contain information concerning the first Zion city established by Enoch of old. The greatness of the City, the coming of the Lord to dwell within its confines, the unity of the people, economic equality, and the taking of the people to the bosom of God are the main outlines of the story. This provided more impetus in the millennial excitement felt by the Saints.  

As a result, the church soon moved to Ohio where a ready congregation seemed to be waiting and where the possibility of growth seemed great. From Ohio Joseph would travel west in response to correspondence from Oliver and the other missionaries to the Lamanites. These men claimed to have found a suitable location for the anxiously waited gathering place. Their suggestions were confirmed by divine revelation, as Independence, Jackson County, Missouri, became the site for the New Jerusalem. Hiram was among the very first to arrive. One wonders if Hiram sensed the importance of the things he and his stone had set in motion. Many Latter-day Saints still hold fast to mystical aspirations involving the land of Independence, Missouri. The legacy of the Page revelations is to transmit over the decades the excitement and spiritual
union he felt for these things. Though the enthusiasm that Hiram felt for receiving revelation through the stone was tempered, the chastisement and embarrassment he may have felt dissipated in the vigor with which he threw himself into the building of the heavenly City of God. It must have seemed as a small price to pay.
Notes to Chapter IV


3. Writing in 1945, Fawn Brodie recognized the importance of this conference upon the changing nature of the church. See, Fawn Brodie, No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), chp. 4. As early as 1922, E.E. Ericksen noted that an understanding of Mormon people and Mormon institutions might best be achieved by giving attention to the great problems which they encounter. If this is so this conference assumes even more significance to the historian. See, E.E. Ericsen, The Psychological and Ethical Aspects of Mormon Group Life (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1922), introduction.


9. Book of Commandments 24:43. Also, DC 26:2; DHC 1:64-70.

10. DHC 1:104-105.

11. This early draft is dated 1829, and is in the Joseph Smith Collection, LDS Church Archives. Oliver also
helped to write DC 109; 134, as well as early statements on marriage and political beliefs.

12. For detailed information, see, Grant Underwood, "Book of Mormon Usage in Early LDS Theology," BYU Studies 17 (Autumn 1984): 35-74. Also, Grant Underwood, "The Earliest Reference Guides to the Book of Mormon: Windows into the Past," Journal of Mormon History 12 (1985): 69-89. The most commonly quoted chapters were 3 Nephi 21 and 3 Nephi 16. The most frequent verses used were Ether 13:4-8, and 3 Nephi 21:1-7. These passages deal exclusively with the relationship between America and chiliastic thought.


14. Book of Commandments 30:1-7, now DC 28:1-7. Also, DHC 1:106-108. The conflicts and problems leading up to and during this conference resulted in changes to the Articles and Covenants. A comparison of the Book of Commandments with the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants shows that Joseph and Oliver are no longer referred to as just "elders." In the later edition Joseph is called the "first elder" and Oliver is called the "second elder." This clearly reflects Joseph's intention to solidify his position of leadership for the young church. Compare Book of Commandments 30:1 and DC, 1835 ed. 2:1. Also, a number of verses were added to the Articles and Covenants between 1830 and 1835.

15. Book of Commandments 30:1-7. It should be noted that in later years David Whitmer denied that they fully believed in Page's revelations. David wrote: "As to revelations which came through Hiram Page's stone, I will state that Oliver and I never thought much about them. We talked them over and thought they might be from God or might be from the Satan." David Whitmer to Joseph Smith III, December 9, 1886, Joseph Smith III Papers, RLDS Library, Independence, Missouri. This position, however, appears to be later posturing on David's part.

16. Autobiography of Newell Knight, pp. 8-12, LDS Church Archives. Others have not been so kind in their appraisal of Joseph Smith in this situation. See, Eber D. Howe, Mormonism Unvailed (Painesville, Ohio: Eber D. Howe, 1834), pp. 175-230; J. B. Turner, Mormonism in all Ages (New York: Platt and Peters, 1842), 28-29. It is interesting to note Wilson's argument that thauatourc practices are so individualistic that permanence, direction, and rational organization are extremely difficult to achieve. If this is so, it is evidence that
Joseph Smith was most skillful in bringing this constitutional issue to a satisfactory and amiable conclusion. See, Bryan Wilson, Magic and the Millennium (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), pp. 72, 91, 100, 129, 131.

17. Autobiography of Newell Knight, pp. 11-12, LDS Church Archives.


21. Joseph's seer stone and other seeric implements were not left completely. The Prophet retained an interest in these things all through his life. The stone itself appears to have been an integral part of Joseph's early preparation and development. Though he never forsook it entirely, it appears that as he became more confident in his own abilities he relied less and less on the stone. See Jan Shipps, "The Prophet Puzzle: Suggestions Leading to a More Comprehensive Interpretation of Joseph Smith," Journal of Mormon History 1 (1974):3-20. For examples of Joseph's later interest in seer stones, see, DC 130:6-11. Also, Brigham Young's record of conversations with Joseph regarding his own stone as well as indications that the Prophet taught all people should have their own seer stone, Brigham Young, Manuscript History, 27 December 1841, LDS Archives.

22. Hiram Page to William McClellin, Fishing River, Missouri, 2 February 1848, typescript, LDS Archives.

23. Hiram Page to Oliver Cowdery, Richmond, Missouri, 23 July 1848, typescript, LDS Archives.


26. Book of Commandments 29, now DC 29. In
addition, Joseph presented a number of revelations during the period September 1830 to January 1831. These revelations include sections 29, 30, 32, 33, 34, 37, 38, and 39 in the latest edition of the Doctrine and Covenants. They should be studied carefully to appreciate the unfolding LDS theology of the imminent coming of the Kingdom. This was one of the greatest periods of revelation and synthesis with regard to eschatology in the church.


29. The Book of Moses is contained in the *Pearl of Great Price*. This book is canonized LDS scripture.
CHAPTER V

HIRAM PAGE AND THE PROCESS OF APOSTASY

In 1838 Hiram Page made a complete break with Joseph Smith. The reasons for this estrangement are both instructive and significant if we are to understand why so many of the primal group of Latter-day Saint converts separated from mainstream Mormonism. Their motivations and disenchantments tell us much concerning the millennial impulse of nineteenth-century America, and the inability of the new sect to cope with the dynamics of the American religious heritage.

As we have seen already, Page’s separation from Mormonism occurred within the context of the failure of the Saints to achieve the reality of their city of the New Jerusalem -- the latter-day Zion -- in Jackson County, Missouri. Studies of millennial sects demonstrate that this failure is not unique. In fact, it has been noted that the non-event of the Kingdom is inherently part of millennial sect development. It is a distinguishing feature of such groups to suffer discomfiture through loss of their initial expectations. The Latter-day Saints found themselves in common company. Not only do the more
esoteric millennial world-views experience such

disconfirming situations, but pristine Christianity

suffered a like trauma with the death of Jesus upon the
cross. 1

Hiram Page was a millenarian. He brought the bright
hope of his millennial dreams to bear on all of his church
experience, and he found in newly revealed scripture the
confirmation that Second Coming of Christ was imminent. He
took up his stone to discover the exact location of the New
Jerusalem and may have helped precipitate the circumstances
that moved the Saints westward. He was with the first
group of Saints to cast his lot in the revealed location of
Zion. Perhaps Hiram believed that the time of preparation
would be short, and that he would soon participate in the
coming Kingdom.

At the services consecrating the Independence,
Missouri area as the Mormons' Zion, Sidney Rigdon, who was
appointed to dedicate and sanctify the ground, asked the
gathered Saints, "Do you receive this land for the land of
your inheritance with thankful hearts unto the Lord?"
Those in attendance covenanted in spoken voice that they
did. When Rigdon again asked, "Do you pledge yourselves to
keep the law of God on this land which you never have kept
in your own lands?" the Saints likewise responded in the
affirmative. When further queried, "Do you pledge
yourselves to see that others of your brethren who shall
come hither do keep the laws of God?" they covenanted,  
"[we] do." Whether or not Hiram was at this singular 
meeting made little difference, for he surely heard of the 
proceedings in detail. His subsequent actions demonstrated 
that Page in truth made these covenants in his heart. What 
joy he must have felt to know that Rigdon announced, "I now 
pronounce this land consecrated and dedicated unto the Lord 
for a possession and inheritance for the Saints, and for 
all the faithful servants of the Lord to the remotest ages 
of time...." -- all this by virtue of the authority and 
power Hiram perceived residing in God's prophet, Joseph 
Smith.  

Hiram felt so sure of the reality of these 
revelations and events that he vigorously threw himself 
into the work. He consecrated all of his worldly 
possessions to the cause he espoused, as a new economic 
order was instituted for the Saints. He allowed himself to 
be beaten and his family driven and exiled from their home, 
all with the assurance that the Saints were involved in 
God's true work. When word arrived that Joseph was on his 
way with an army of the Saints -- armed and prepared to 
fight for the Kingdom -- he may have secretly hoped that 
the Mormon paramilitary action might commence God's 
millennial judgment upon their enemies. He must have been 
reassured that the Saints would return to Zion and finish 
their preparations for the last days. And when Page
witnessed the failure of God's prophet to redeem Zion by power and authority, after Page had so willingly dedicated his entire life to the cause, his faith was sorely tried. The resulting disconfirmation, which juxtaposed Page's "ideal" Mormonism with the hard reality of Joseph's apparent failure, disoriented Hiram and made him face some very difficult choices concerning his religious future.

Page and other early Mormon millenarians had two singular alternatives. Either they could find the means to justify and compensate for the loss of their millenial dreams, or they could declare the current state of Mormonism to be in apostasy.

All millennial sects demonstrate the same general characteristics. None of these traits is more common than the strategy used to give life to a sense of failed mission. The presence of obvious dissonant pressure within the group demands the elimination, or at least the reduction, of this centrifugal force. It has been observed that at the critical moment, when the non-event of the anticipated kingdom becomes evident, a group will naturally turn to proselytism as a source of comfort. These two aspects of sect development -- the failure of mission and the subsequent increase in missionary activity -- appear to be not only the most highly visible features of millenial activity, but also to come in a sequential process.

We see, then, that rationalization becomes the
compensation for the disconfirming event. As developed in
*When Prophecy Fails: A Social and Psychological Study of a
Modern Group That Predicted the Destruction of the World*,
the logic seems to suggest that, "if more and more people
can be persuaded that the system of belief is correct, then
clearly it must, after all, be correct." Whether or not
individual sects would agree with the compensatory nature
of this conclusion is not the issue here. Rather, the
identifiable aspect of increased zeal manifest in the
expansion of missionary effort accompanying a severe
disconfirmation of eschatological hopes is noted as a
common, elemental factor.

Historical Christianity, of course, is the central
element of this aspect of millennialism. Following the
death of Jesus on the cross, the immediate hope of future
glory was sublimated by the injunction, "And the gospel
must first be published among all nations." Consequently,
we should not be surprised that, though Mormon missionary
effort had been sporadic in the early years of the
movement, after 1838 and the expulsion of the Saints from
the state of Missouri, Latter-day Saints began to proclaim
earnestly the Gospel throughout all the world. Their
activity fit the pattern suggested by Festinger, Riecken,
and Schachter, the authors of *When
Prophecy Fails*, who identified five requisite conditions
that occur when the non-event of the kingdom precipitates a
subsequent rise in proselyting. Specifically, they allow us to understand why Hiram Page withdrew from Joseph's direction:

1- A belief must be held with deep conviction and it must have some relevance to action, that is to what the believer does or how he behaves.

2- The person holding the belief must have committed himself to it; that is, for the sake of his belief, he must have taken some important action that is difficult to undo. In general, the more important such actions are, and the more difficult they are to undo, the greater is the individual's commitment to the belief.

3- The belief must be sufficiently specific and sufficiently concerned with the real world so that events may unequivocally refute the belief.

4- Such undeniable disconfirmatory evidence must occur and must be recognized by the individual holding the belief....

5- The believer must have social support.... If [however] the believer is a member of a group of convinced persons who can support one another, we would expect the belief to be maintained and the believers to attempt to proselytize or to persuade nonmembers that the belief is correct.

We readily see that these conditions existed for Hiram and the Latter-day Saints, especially those in Missouri who were intimately involved in the construction of Zion itself. Their convictions were profound and motivational. Because of their beliefs, they uprooted from civilized society and became pilgrims upon the land. The laying of the first log and the dedication of the land for the site of God's own work placed them in cosmological time. The practicalities of city-building were accomplished in the imitation of the celestial archetype of
creation. The rituals and profane gestures offered in the preparatory period served to locate the Mormon effort in what one scholar has termed the "symbolism of the center," or the center of the world. 

As such, the Page and his associates had high expectations for their Zion. The intended city had its divine prototype. The Heavenly City proceeded the formation of the Mormon terrestrial model, and was located in the ideal region of eternity. Joseph's revelations indicated that the American Zion was to be the "center place." At Independence, Missouri, Jesus Christ, himself, would come to reign for one-thousand years. All of the Saints were to be gathered to this central location that would be a "seat and a place to receive...all things." Zion would flourish for the glory of the Lord would be there and the enemies of the Saints would not dare to go up against it. Those who came to Zion would inherit a crown of glory. The city would increase in beauty and holiness -- each parent having specific responsibility in the instruction and education of Zion's blessed children. Being built up on celestial principles, Zion and her inhabitants would escape all judgments that were shortly to befall the wicked of the earth as the Son of God returned in Glory and Power.

Mircea Eliade suggests that participation in such a venture has more than temporal or merely immediate
significance. The wilderness is "cosmicized." According to Eliade, man is thus given the opportunity to participate in an act equivalent to the primordial act of creation. A society transforms a new land from chaos into cosmos, and in the actual participation the believers provide validity and reality for the act itself. Continuing, Eliade notes:

...they regard this act as neither an original undertaking nor as human and profane work. Their enterprise was for them only the repetition of a primordial act: the transformation of chaos into cosmos by the divine act of creation. By cultivating the desert soil, they in fact repeated the act of the gods, who organized chaos by giving it form and norms. Better still, a territorial conquest does not become real until after -- more precisely, through -- the ritual of taking possession, which is only a copy of the primordial act of the Creation of the World. ...consecration of the new country [is] a "new-birth," thus repeating baptism. ...every territory occupied for the purpose of being inhabited or utilized...through the act of ritual...is given a "form" that makes it become real....Reality manifests itself as force, effectiveness, and duration. Hence the outstanding reality is the sacred; for only the sacred is in an absolute fashion, acts effectively, creates things and makes them endure. The innumerable gestures of consecration...reveal the primitive's obsession with the real, his thirst for being. 10

Thus, for Hiram and all of his associates in the work of building Zion, they had not only withdrawn from the more profane aspects of society into a spiritual interpretation of life, they ultimately placed themselves within sacred time and place. By realization of the Heavenly City they were co-workers with the ancients, creators, and holy men themselves. The depth of their respective commitment to such a cause is, perhaps for us today, impossible to
fathom.

However, the "Sacred Mountain" of the Lord -- the place where heaven and earth will meet -- must be built in the real and profane world, among real and profane peoples. This clash between the ideal and the actual will inevitably lead to conflict and the disruption of the sacred cause by those of a more this-worldly bent. The animosity of the "old settlers" in Jackson County, Missouri, to these other-worldly dreamers was so violent that disconfirmation found its voice in brutalization, and even death. The Saints, in turn, tried to build the New Jerusalem and had failed. So stark was the illumination of their shattered dreams that a major crisis of faith ensued. It is here that we find an explanation for Hiram Page's conduct in leaving the main body of Saints.

As suggested, the body of the church led by Joseph found a means of alleviating their discomfiture by increased proselyting activity. Hiram chose the other course. The difference seemed to lie in the fact that where others found their social support system within the Church, Hiram's was private and non-church.

As we have seen, Page's friends and family -- Oliver Cowdery and the Whitmer relations -- found themselves at odds with established authority and direction. Accused of dishonest handling of church land and funds, associating with known apostates, and causing
embarrassment for the church, Cowdery and the Whitmers were excommunicated. They, in turn, charged the leadership with implementing ecclesiastical programs to further their own interests. They also alleged that the Mormon heirarchy had harassed both themselves and their families. John Whitmer claimed that Mormon-sanctioned persecution became so severe that the dissidents feared for their lives. 11

To what extent Hiram was involved in these circumstances is unclear. He likely participated in the Whitmer-Cowdery land speculations, but not so deeply as to bring him under official censure. It is clear, however, that after the excommunications of Cowdery and the Whitmers, Hiram chose to withdraw from fellowship. Though he appears at first to have temporarily adjusted to the failure of the church to realize the millennial preparations in the revealed Zion, Page's disillusions resurfaced with the problems of his family and friends. Perhaps had his associates remained within the body of the church, he, too, might have stayed and found comfort in missionary labors. But, with the social foundation of his life placed in jeopardy, he followed the theoretical pattern and withdrew from fellowship.

The removal of the bonds of brotherhood, however, did not resolve his religious and spiritual turmoil. Deeply religious, with definite ideas concerning the nature of spiritual experience in and out of organized religion,
Hiram found it impossible to disassociate himself from religion entirely. He remained driven by his long-standing millennialism as well as by the need to satisfy his more private spiritual needs. Indeed, his subsequent religious life became typical of many early Mormon converts who subsequently transformed themselves into dissidents against their former faith.

The Mormon message was so unique in its approach to the power and authority that those who became disaffected rarely returned to orthodox or traditional Christianity. Even in their disaffection, they were convinced that Catholicism and Protestantism were improperly established and without sufficient authority. Their reaction was probably owing to Joseph Smith. He had not only provided the charismatic gifts necessary to validate the existence of the new church, but he formulated a new authority structure with sufficient power to attract and maintain allegiance.

These acts were decisive, even for those who later left the church. Once becoming convinced that the primitive Christian authority had been restored to the earth and that all other claims to that power were anathema, Hiram and others were faced with a process of synthesis and rationalization of their own struggles within a Mormon context. Page’s experience with this problem provides a window into the difficulties experienced by
schismatics as they dealt with the strength of the Mormon claims.

The problem encountered was how to declare Mormonism to be in a state of apostasy and yet maintain the viability of the original belief in restored and valued authority. Hiram and his associates initiated what would become the common pattern of resolution. They declared Mormonism to be valid only to a certain point, with subsequent labelled events as departure from its initial, founding truth.

Still a vibrant and capable leader, Joseph Smith became the focus of the struggle. Somehow the belief had to be maintained that he was initially God’s chosen prophet, and that through him the restored blessings of Christianity had been made manifest. The rationale required the additional argument that in the growth of the church, Joseph, himself, had erred and had become a catalyst to the loss of power. Such a position, they believed, validated their own authority that they had received at Joseph’s hand, while at the same time demonstrating the lapse of power among the general membership. To buttress such a contention, Page and his associates in later years described several critical moments in early Mormonism that showed Joseph Smith’s errancy.

As they viewed it, the initial problem was Smith’s
growing disenchantment with the tools of a seer. Upon the completion of the Book of Mormon translation, Joseph had; to a degree, given up the seer stone and had relied more upon himself as the instrument of revelation. This stone had played such a vital role in the charismatic attraction for the young prophet and was such a factor in the spiritual experiences of Hiram, the Whitmers, and Oliver Cowdery, that, for them, it signaled the beginning of Joseph Smith’s loss of power.

Page’s views were explicitly stated by William McClellin. McClellin, an early convert who also had become dissatisfied, followed the lead of Page in denouncing historical Mormonism. In a letter to Joseph Smith III, the Mormon Prophet’s oldest son, William claimed that he had been "very intimate and familiar with [Joseph]" from October 1831 to August 1836. "It seems to me," he wrote, "but few men had better opportunities to know Joseph Smith for five years than I." McClellin also asserted that he traveled with Joseph for hundreds of miles, clerked for him, ate with him, slept with him, and, "had good opportunity to know his make and strength of mind." To the question of whether Joseph was indeed a Prophet, Seer, and Revelator, his response was, "I firmly believe he was...until he finished the Book of Mormon." But then his authority supposedly ceased. "I ask was he a Seer on the day the church was organized? ...I say no! distinctly no!!
No man can be a Seer without the means [Urim and Thummim, seer stone, etc.]. He did not possess the means[,] hence was not, nor could not be [a] Seer." 12

Thus, from the beginning of Mormonism's formal organization, Hiram felt that there was a "degression" in Joseph's prophetic ability. In Page's mind, evidence of Joseph's loss of power after giving up his stone was demonstrated in what he called the "case of the Canada affair". As we have seen, the church found itself in serious financial difficulty with the capital outlay required to publish the Book of Mormon. Hyrum Smith apparently heard of the possibility of selling the Book of Mormon copyright in Canada. Page claimed that "Joseph thought this would be a good opportunity [sic] to get a hand on [a] sum of money," which, according to Page was intended for exclusive use of the Smith family and not for the church. Hiram's account also suggested that intrigue entered into the preparations for the journey. Joseph allegedly wished to keep the knowledge of the venture from Martin Harris, who had earlier committed substantial financial resources to further the publication of the Book of Mormon and would thereby have a vested interest in the project.

According to Page, Oliver Cowdery, Joseph Knight, Josiah Stoal, and Page himself were chosen "as I understood by revelation" to accomplish this mission. Living at
considerable distances — thirty to one hundred miles apart — preparations were made in "a sly manner" for the journey. Page relates:

it was told me we were to go by revelation but when we had assembled at father Smiths, there was no revelation for us to go but we were all anxious to get a revelation to go; and when it came [the revelation] we were to go to Kingston where we were to sell if they would not harden their hearts; but when we got there, there was no purchaser neither were they authorized at Kingston to but rights for the provence; but little York was the place where such business had to be done. 13

Consequently, the emissaries were unable to secure the eight thousand dollars that had been promised, and returned dejected and confused by their failure to accomplish the revelatory instructions.

William McClellin, who allegedly saw and made a copy of the revelation, noted that, "it proved so false that he [Joseph] would never have it recorded, printed or published. 14 Oliver also asserted that upon their return, the men were greatly troubled and confronted Joseph. In response, the young Prophet inquired of the Lord, but received an enigmatic response. The answer was somewhat disturbing: "Some revelations are of God," his revelation stated, "some revelations are man: and some revelations are of the devil." Oliver's reflections reveal the anguish of their minds. Speaking of those things that caused him to lose faith in Joseph for a season, he referred to the revelation as blasphemy. He wrote in 1839:

it may be classed with that revelation, that some among
you will remember, which sent Bro. Page and me, so unwisely, to Toronto, with a prediction from the Lord by "Urim and Thummim," that we would there find a man anxious to buy the First Elder's copyright. I well remember we did not find him, and had to return surprised and disappointed. But so great was my faith, that, in going to Toronto, nothing but calmness prevailed my soul, every doubt was banished, and I as much expected that Bro. Page and I would fulfill the revelation as that we should live. And you may believe, without asking me to relate the particulars, that it would be no easy task to describe our desolation and grief.

Bro. Page and I did not think that God would have deceived us through "Urim and Thummim," exactly as came the Book of Mormon; and I well remember how hard I strove to drive away the foreboding which seized me, that the First Elder had made tools [fools?] of us, where we thought, in the simplicity of our hearts, that we were divinely commanded.

David summed their feelings by adding that, "when a man enquires of the Lord concerning a matter, if he is deceived by his own carnal desires, and is in error, he will receive an answer according to his erring heart, but it will not be a revelation from the Lord." 15

In later years, Page and the others dated the beginning of Joseph's "fall" with these events. However, they took exception with other acts as well. According to Page and his associates, Joseph next erred by sending the missionaries to preach to the Lamanites in Missouri, for they believed the gospel should not to be preached to the Lamanites until it had been taken from the Gentiles or the American people. Joseph's introduction of a communal economy -- the Law of Consecration, or order of Enoch -- with its subsequent failure in Missouri and Ohio was viewed as further evidence of the Prophet's self-seeking
motivations. Organizationally, the appointment of a Bishop for the church, a Patriarch, a High Council, the organization of the Quorum of the Seventy, and the ordination of men to office of High Priest were also seen as signs of a loss of vision, and were outside the circumscribed boundaries of church organization as described in New Testament and Book of Mormon precedent.

Because Hiram had personally endured the privation of Jackson County and the expulsion of his family from the envisioned location of Zion, the failures of the church in Missouri were especially difficult for him to bear. Joseph had instructed the Saints in Jackson County to stand for their own defense, which in retrospect had proven unwise. Perhaps if Joseph had been present, or even if he had had adequate intelligence concerning the situation, his instructions would have been different. But, Hiram had no patience for Joseph’s decisions, even when they were being made from distant Kirtland. Wouldn’t God’s prophet know the circumstances and provided proper solutions?

The failure of Zion’s Camp to accomplish the redemption of the Saints was, for Page, yet another indication of Joseph’s inadequacies. As a resident of the county at the time when the Mormon army had marched from the East, Hiram was surely aware of the challenges and realities of the situation. However, he placed the whole burden for failure upon Joseph Smith. When the entire camp
was stricken with cholera, it was, in Page's view
confirmation of God's displeasure with Joseph's handling of
his spiritual responsibilities.

The failure to redeem Zion and subdue its enemies
drove Hiram to the scriptures to discover Joseph's error.
In a letter to McClellin in 1848, he claimed that Joseph
had tried to place himself above the revealed word.
According to Page, the Prophet had presumptuously and
prematurely attempted to gather the Saints to the revealed
Zion in alleged contravention of Book of Mormon teachings.
He noted that, "the book of Mormon says that when the
Savior comes; at that day the church was scattered upon all
the face of the earth...." For Hiram this meant that at
the coming the church was not "gathered in 2 or 3 places."
This was Joseph's tragic error: "the folly of pretendid
endowment by the wisdom of man to accomplish an event which
the lord has reserved to be accomplished by his setting
foot upon the Mt. of Olives." 16

The culmination of the church's degenerative
process came after the Zion's Camp failure. In April 1830,
Joseph orginally named his church The Church of Jesus
Christ, which fit nicely with the primitivist inclinations
of the early seekers. Such a name indicated that the
restoration of early Christianity was a reality. However,
after the return of the military camp from Missouri in May
1834, Joseph temporarily changed the name of the church to
The Church of the Latter-day Saints. The Whitmer group regarded the alteration as evidence that the Lord had withdrawn His name from the church.

For Hiram the removal of the "correct name" was not an organizational matter. Rather, he viewed the change as an indication of the church's apostasy, which had resulted from Joseph's actions. Sidney Rigdon was charged with the outward responsibility, but Hiram believed that angels had "whispered" in the ear of Joseph to do this as a sign to the faithful that the power of the church was gone. 17 Hiram, writing in 1848, demonstrated his understanding of the events that transpired. He noted:

Joseph by the [spirit] of prophecy saw that the church was to be gathered; but his natural avaricious desirs of monopolist had such a powerful baring upon his mind that in many things he erred and offended till his transgressions became so abominable that the Lord could not suffer him to hold the kees any longer. 18

Writing from their perspective, the Whitmer group viewed Joseph's attempts to organize and defend the church as a personal folly. Hiram repeatedly faulted Joseph for unconsciously merging personal, carnal, and worldly desires with the spiritual concerns of the restoration. Every foible and failure of Joseph became another block in Page's superstructure of rationalization and justification. All that remained for Page was to determine the authority foundation that would support his own beliefs. This proved to be the major weakness of the group.

One of the most fascinating aspects of Mormonism is
the loyalty of the primal group to the original vision in
spite of their subsequent alienation from the mainstream.
The initial conversion experience of these men had been
strong and long-lived. Here Hiram is no exception. Hiram,
as one of the original converts, had been called upon to
witness the plates that Joseph translated into the Book of
Mormon. From his writings it is evident that this was no
casual experience. In fact, it became the anchor to his
soul in the troubled times Page experienced after Jackson
County.

Five years before his death Hiram wrote a letter to
William McClellin in response to a question McClellin had
posed. William, having never witnessed the plates himself,
was apparently suffering through a private religious battle
concerning the validity of the early and most fundamental
aspects of Mormonism. Hiram noted that the question
revolved around the Book of Mormon itself. "You want to
know my faith relative the book of Mormon," Hiram writes.
This, for Page, was not a matter to be questioned. He
wrote:

As to the book of Mormon, it would be doing injustice
to myself, and to the work of the God in the last days,
to say that I could know a thing to be true in 1830,
and know the same thing to be false in 1847. To say my
mind was as treacherous that I had forgotten what I
saw[;] to say that a man of Joseph's ability, who at
that time did not know how to pronounce the word Nephi,
could write a book of six hundred pages, as correct as
the book of Mormon, without supernatural power[;]
and] to say that those holy Angels who came and showed
themselves to me as I was walking through the field, to
confirm me in the work of the Lord of the last days --
three of whom came to me afterwards and sang an hymn in their own pure language; yea, it would be treating the God of heaven with contempt to deny these testimonies, with too many others to mention here. 19

Here lies the key to understanding Hiram Page. This experience contained sufficient power to alter his perception of life. According to his son, to the end of his life Hiram never denied what he said he saw and experienced with regard to the beginnings of Mormonism. 20 These experiences made it virtually impossible that he could find solace during his estrangement within the extant sects of Christianity. Page and the Whitmers spent the remaining years of their lives waiting upon the Lord for spiritual confirmation of their position as they had previously received. When it did not come, it left them in a state of flux and indecision.

Hiram remarked in 1847 that "the name of Christ is as good a name as I want to wear." 21 But the reinstituting of the name of Christ upon the believers was not enough to give the Whitmer group a sense of direction and purpose. For this David Whitmer might have given assistance. The group argued that upon the failure to redeem Zion and the withdrawal of the Lord’s name from His church, it was time to appoint another in the place of Joseph. This ordination was actually effected by Joseph himself, 7 July 1834, when David was appointed to be Joseph’s successor and President of the church in Missouri. Hiram believed that the Lord was unwilling to Joseph to
"hold the keys any longer; and made him confer those keys upon David with legal authority."  

All of those associated with David vainly awaited the time when he would step forth and assume the leadership responsibilities. Such an assumption of leadership, no doubt, would be accompanied by Godly power. Having been so closely associated with the beginnings of Mormonism and believing that the Lord had spoken during the church’s founding events these men once again looked for explicit Divine approval and instruction. How else could they justify their opposition to Joseph? They had so locked themselves into the need for charismatic expression and the exercise of the seeric gift through supernatural means that any kind of organization was stalled by the inability to re-capture the signs and wonders of the original organization.

Reflecting the feelings of the group as a whole, Hiram wrote:

Zion cannot put on her beautiful garments that she may be adorned as a bride adorneth herself for her husband, neither can she be redeemed until all her abominations are confessed and proclaimed as upon the housetops, and she forsake all evil practices; the Ark being steadied by him whom God has appointed, and if he whom God has appointed will not do the work in his time, the Lord will put him down, and raise up another that will. Although I hold the office of High Priest, yet I dare not to raise up a finger to move the ark forward without a "thus saith the Lord," through the Lord’s Seer; yet I can set myself in order, and try to persuade others to do likewise.  

Others did not wait as patiently. Writing to McClellin
concerning his and David's understanding of the matter, he reflected:

you want David to lead the church and to act in his office as he was ordained at [Wites] in Clay county but he will not lead Israel until Israel is to be led; we believe Israel will be led but not till the time when that image of the beast which John spoke of makes a law to put to death all that will not worship the beast; at or near that time Israel will be led by a man like unto Moses who will have power with God to deliver Israel; as to David's acting in his official capacity as an elder or if you choose another apilation Apostle in this church of Christ he is ready to act when ever the Lord calls him to the work. 2

What sign might have persuaded them that David could step forth and assume the prophetic calling? In a lengthy explanation Hiram wrote of the need for an expression of charisma as well as for an orderly approach to ecclesiastical leadership. "When we speak of David as prophit," he writes, "we do not speak of him as mere prophit; but as prophit, Seer, and revelator, the three terms being combined in one because this was the way which he was ordained...." Hiram also noted that under the broad term of "prophet" David was just such a man, having attained to the spirit of Christ and to the spirit of prophecy. According to the privilege of office, Hiram held, "David Clames...that it is given him by the spirit of prophecy to determine the correctness of all things in spiritual matters when he inquires of the Lord for that purpose."

However, the spirit of prophecy is not the fullness of the leadership role. Hiram and his fellow dissidents
waited for the restoration of the gift of seership as demonstrated in the beginning. The use of seeric implements and tools would enable them to enjoy the gift of seeing to which they had previously attained. The preeminate role of these gifts was acknowledged by Hiram to be a protection for the church as the source of disspealing darkness and error:

He who has these things... is called a Seer; if it requires the posessaeon of these means to constitute a Seer then David cannot be said to be a Seer at this time, no more that Joseph could from the [time] of receiving power till he had the means... because the spectillcles are reserved to go with the plates and we expect the one will come with the other and David is the man whom the Lord has apointed to fill this office; that is, to be the head of the church in all spiritual matters as a man posessed of all the necessary gifts for the church of Christ at this time and when the Lord sees that his church has purified themselves sufficiently and that it is wisdom in him that other records should come forth; he has the man ready; being regularly apointed and ordained who is willing to act in this apointment... [We] see there is great wisdom, it excludes all those who would fain set themselves up to be prophets and leaders of the church which would bring the church into confusion there being many that want to be leaders....

Hiram, himself, appears to have lost the seeric gift that he once possessed in the early years of charismatic excitement. In a letter to Oliver Cowdery in 1847 Hiram states:

Brother Oliver I am neither a prophet nor the Son of a prophit [---] altho I am ordained to that order [---] and when the time comith that the Lord will see fit to bestow the means[,] as he did in the beginning[,] then israel shall be led as in days of old[.] [T]hen the saying shall be fullfilled old things shall become new.

Hiram and his associates found themselves in a
disconcerting position. They justified and validated their own authority independent of Joseph Smith while remaining true to the power of the original experiences. The process of separation from the main body of the Saints did not force them to reconcile with what they considered apostate Christianity -- an intellectual impossibility given their early experiences within the church. They retained what to them was the most significant feature of Mormon origins by reaffirming their belief in extraordinary gifts of the spirit. This, however, caused them to be caught in an uncertainty that could never be resolved. Being unable to recapture the initial enthusiasm they enjoyed under the tutelage of Joseph Smith, they patiently waited for the millennial day and the subsequent restoration of seeric gifts. This left them so organizationally weak that they never became a force on the Mormon landscape.

The Whitmer group did not proselyte. Other than a few letters to friends and David Whitmer's An Address to All Believers in Christ, they failed to gather converts. This seems unusual in light of the emphasis missionary work that normally occurs in sect development, as per recent sociological findings. Perhaps this was due to the loosely defined organizational structure that existed among them. Also, the group's desire for specific revelatory direction likely inhibited proselyting initiative. The lack of missionary activity certainly contributed to their
inability to sustain momentum and decisively contributed to their demise as a force within Mormonism.

Some of what came to be called "Whitmerites" finally found a home with the Re-organized Latter Day Saints after Joseph's death. It is significant that the Reorganized Church of Latter Day Saints was the one alternative with a solid ecclesiastical organizational structure. Hiram and most of his associates, however, never forsook the purity of their hope. Page never relinquished the vision that seership and additional scripture were forthcoming. Fully confident that that the Lord would manifest himself as before, he died still awaiting the glorious millennial day in which these things would be revealed.
Notes to Chapter V


3. L. Festinger, H.W. Riecken, and S. Schachter, *When Prophecy Fails* (New York: Harper & Row, 1956). This study is an analysis of a group in Lake City in the 1950's. They predicted the end of the world on a given 21 December only to have their expectations disconfirmed. This work is extensively quoted in Gager's *Kingdom and Community* as a typical example of millenial sect. See especially pp. 39-41.


5. The Church, under Joseph’s direction, had engaged in prosyleting efforts since the beginning of its organization. Mostly these efforts were to the areas of the United States that were home to the families and relatives of those who had affiliated themselves with Mormonism. Also, there had been an effort to convert the native American population on the frontier, and some missionary activity in the Southern States. However, with the expulsion of the Saints from Missouri, the proselyting began in earnest. Under the direction of Joseph Smith missionaries were sent to England and other foreign countries for the first time. Their efforts reaped impressive results, adding many Saints to the cause as others withdrew. The role of immigrant converts in strengthening the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and providing a base for later colonization in the Great Basin is an area of study where much work needs to be done.


8. *DC, 1835 ed.*, 28:2, now *DC* 69:6. Also,
DHC 1:234-235.


16. Hiram Page to William E. Mclellin, Fishing River, Missouri, 4 March 1848, typescript in LDS Archives.

17. McClellin, The Ensign of Liberty of the Church of Christ, (Ohio, 1847) Vol. 1 No. 1, p. 5. See also, William E. McClellin, The Ensign of Liberty, Vol. 1 No. 2, pp. 20-21. This collection of McClellin’s publications is found in the LDS Archives.

18. Page to McClellin, Fishing River, Mo., 2 February 1848. This is Page’s most extensive rehearsal of his own perceptions of Joseph’s errors and the reasons for his withdrawal from Mormon society. He traces what he views as Joseph’s desire for “filthy Lucre” back to his attempts to remove the plates from their hiding place. Though these letters were written from the perspective of his own apostasy, they nevertheless reflect the rationalizations that bolstered the group as they searched for explanations for Mormonism’s supposed failure.


24. Hiram Page to William E. McClellin, Richmond, Mo., 6 June 1848. Typescript copy in LDS Church Archives, original in RLDS Archives.


26. Hiram Page to Oliver Cowdery, 2 October 1847. Typescript copy in LDS Church Archives, original in RLDS Archives.
CHAPTER VI

HIRAM PAGE -- SUMMARY OF A PROTOTYPE

The origins, church life, and subsequent apostasy of Hiram Page are of significant historical value in attempting to arrive at a more complete understanding of the Mormon response to its social context. Page’s life also serves to illustrate the motivations of first generation Mormon converts. As such, Page may be viewed as prototypical of the early primal group of believers who joined the Church and later became disaffected.

Mormonism is representative of the ideal sect in sociological models of new religions. It was a minority movement diverging in doctrine and practice from orthodox Christianity. Adherents to the faith regarded their claims to authority and theology exclusive to all other religious claims. The Church considered itself restorationist, and depended on special commentary on Scripture to resolve uncertainties that existed. This insight came in the form of the Prophet or additional divinely sent scripture.

The Church came into existence as Americans, consciously or unconsciously, perceived that established religion had lost its way. During a time of social and religious ferment, Mormonism validated its authority and
existence by reference to superhuman intervention rather than to a traditional authority structure. Its first members were attracted by prophetic charisma and by the exercise of extraordinary spiritual gifts. After the initial period of enthusiasm, however, there was a rejection of the more esoteric folk beliefs and occult practices. Charisma became centralized and concerned within an authority structure, a development which served to insure the integrity of the movement.

The Church was millenarian. Members viewed themselves as co-workers with God to bring about the coming of His Kingdom. With the failure of the Saints to achieve Zion in Missouri, their hope of an imminent millenial glory suffered a disconfirmation. The non-event of the kingdom exacted predictable results. The Church membership either tempered the disconfirming events by increased proselyting activity or they sought solace in a modified form of belief. The schismatics, generally perceived as the most psychologically disinherit, separated from the main body and attempted to restate and reaffirm the original mission of the Church.

An examination of the available source material for Hiram Page suggests a type of individual attracted to the claims of Joseph Smith and the Restoration message. First, Page was dissatisfied with the articulation of social and religious values by the denominations. Spiritually and
geographically, he became a pilgrim in the land. Bryan Wilson notes that the disinterested are mostly unaware of specific problems and are unable to vocalize their concerns in concrete terms. They sense, only, that something is wrong. This vague perception, notwithstanding, does not lessen their sense of urgency. Page, himself, was an itinerant wanderer in his early years. His lack of permanence certainly served to intensify his sense of loss.

Second, not content with the lack of spiritual manifestations within established religion, Page, like many of the early converts, turned to thaumaturgic relief. These more arcane practices existed side by side with religion in ante-bellum America and filled an emotional void. Hiram clearly did not consider these practices and beliefs as contrary to religion. Rather, these now peculiar "gifts" were viewed as an extension of the same worship -- even as a special dispensation from God. Accordingly, folk beliefs and occult practices forged a link between believers like Page and Joseph Smith.

Third, before coming into contact with Joseph Smith or the restoration message, Hiram was a millenarian. Like many others, Page believed that the millenium was imminent and that it was the destiny of the American nation to be a redemptive instrument in the hands of God. The fact that Hiram took up his stone to discover the location of the New Jerusalem and that many believed in his revelations, leads
us to suggest that eschatology was a pre-occupation with the early Saints.

Fourth, Hiram's estrangement from Joseph Smith occurred in context of the disconfirming events in Missouri. The separation was amplified by the excommunication of his friends and the removal of Page's social network from the Church. While it might be argued that the major cause of disenchantment with Joseph was the result of the Whitmer family troubles in Missouri, the available Page documents suggest otherwise. Nowhere does Hiram refer to problems of his wife's family as the source of his discontent. His major concern was always disappointment with Joseph's failure to accomplish the preparations for the coming Kingdom. Hiram's trauma was so severe that he spent considerable time developing a personal eschatology based on apocalyptic scripture to explain the delay in the realization of the millenial glory.

Finally, Page's separation from mainstream Mormonism illustrates the process that apostasy took within the Church. The experience of the Whitmer group suggests that the founding claims contained such power and attraction that a return to orthodox Christianity was extremely difficult. The group's modified religious faith occurred within a Mormon context and retained a belief in the original establishment of authority. Page's argument,
that Joseph Smith was a true prophet until avarice and self-importance led to a his rejection by God, is illustrative of most schismatic Mormon claims.

Hiram has largely been forgotten by most contemporary Latter-day Saints. He is only a name at the bottom of the testimony recorded in the Book of Mormon. However, his legacy to the twentieth-century Church is significant. Importantly, Hiram played a significant role in providing validity to the Restoration message. Jan Shipps notes that the original group of converts were integral in the transformation of restoration claims into a "set of objective facts and operating principles around which whole societies may be organized. Professor Shipps continues:

The experience of the original group becomes profoundly important in that -- whether or not they were persuaded to accept the restoration on the basis of rational argument or by some intuitive, nonrational means -- their belief makes the beginning of the restoration possible. Consequently, their acceptance itself becomes in time, a part of the original set of restoration claims. Their belief validates the claims and at the same time becomes, as the belief of the early Christian apostles demonstrates, an infinitely repeatable paradigmatic act wherein the claims of the restoration are continually transformed into facts and principles through an endless chain stretching across the stream of time."

Few have been as eloquent as Hiram was in affirming the power of the Restoration message. To the end of his life, Page maintained an unequivocal testimony in the visionary experiences of Church origins. Modern Mormons take great satisfaction in recounting the experiences and
testimonies of this early group of Latter-day Saints. Though somewhat forgotten, Hiram should not be overlooked for his contributions to the process of faith building.

The role Page played 26 September conference became a fundamental aspect of Church growth and policy. The issue which this conference posed of institutional vs. individual revelation is still a continuing source of concern for Latter-day Saints. On 2 August 1913, the First Presidency of the Church issued a statement designed to specifically address this issue:

From the days of Hiram Page (Doc. & Cov., Sec. 28) at different periods there have been manifestations from delusive spirits to members of the Church. Sometimes these have come to men and women who because of transgression become easy prey to the Arch Deceiver... These people... are led astray by false spirits who exercise an influence so imitative of that which proceeds from a divine source that... they... find it difficult to discern the essential difference. Apparently Satan transformed himself into "angel of light.

When visions, dreams, tongues, prophecy, impressions, or an extraordinary gift of inspiration conveys something out of harmony with the accepted revelations of the Church or contrary to the decisions of its constituted authorities, Latter-day Saints may know that it is not of God, no matter how plausible it may appear. Also they should understand that directions for the guidance of the Church will come by revelations through the head.

...the Lord's Church is a "house of order." It is not governed by individual gifts or manifestations, but by the order and power of the Holy Priesthood as sustained by the voice and vote of the Church in its appointed conference.

To this time, this has been the most enduring legacy of Hiram Page. However long ignored, Hiram should be recognized for his contributions and take his place
among the principal men of the early restoration. In response to the charges of his being a transgressor, an apostate, or someone who had been simply deceived, Page, if he were living, might respond as he did to Oliver Cowdery over a century ago:

Now I say unto you...every man must plant for himself and proon his own vinyard as time and season will permit; now those that have planted shall see to their own abundance.
Notes to Chapter VI


3. Hiram Page to William McClellin, Fishing River, Missouri, 4 March 1848, typescript in LDS Archives. This letter is Page's most extensive treatment of his millenarian views. He came to believe that the preparations for the Second Coming of Christ would not begin until the Lord set His foot upon the Mount of Olives as recorded in John's Revelation. From that time until the actual Coming of the Lord would be a period of forty-five years. During this period the great judgments of God would be poured out upon the earth.

4. Ibid.


7. Hiram Page to Oliver Cowdery, 2 October 1847, typescript in LDS Archives.
Hiram's stone has been described as approximately 5" by 3" by 1/2" in size and thickness. It has two holes for the implementation of the seeric gift. It is also said to have a small drilled hole for a chain enabling the user to wear it around the neck. It was handed down in the Whitmer family through one generation and finally came into the hands of Mrs. Mayme Kootnz, Richmond, Missouri. See, Alvin R. Dyer, *The Refiners Fire* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1972), pp. 263-262. For the most comprehensive treatment of Seer stones in the early Mormon Period see, Ogden Kraut, *Seers and Seer Stones*, (Dugway: Ogden Kraut).
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HIRAM PAGE: AN HISTORICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF AN EARLY MORMON PROTOTYPE

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ABSTRACT

Recent sociological studies propose a model for understanding early Mormonism in its cultural context. Such models, while experimental, suggest commonalities between Mormonism and contemporary millennial sects. Enthusiastic beginnings, early convert response to American millennialism, the containment of charisma through institutionalization, discomfiture of Mormon millennial expectation, and the process of apostasy within the church provide the parameters of this study.

The life of Hiram Page, an early convert, is used as a foil to this end. Page is prototypical of the original band of followers who were attracted to Joseph Smith. Drawn to Joseph for spiritual comfort, Page and his associates supported the Prophet's work, testified of the extraordinary events of the Mormon Restoration, and as the first believers made the movement possible. Later, they became dissatisfied with the developmental church and withdrew from fellowship in an attempt to reestablish what they perceived as the original and pristine expressions of Mormonism.

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