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DAVID W FLETCHER

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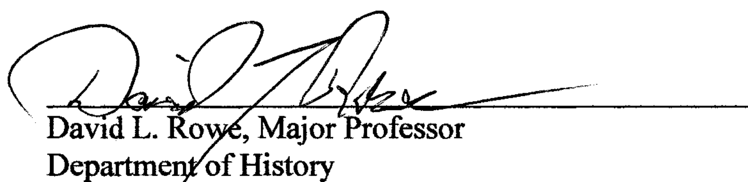

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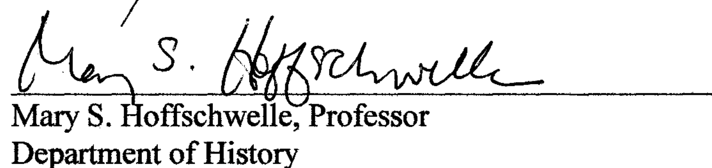

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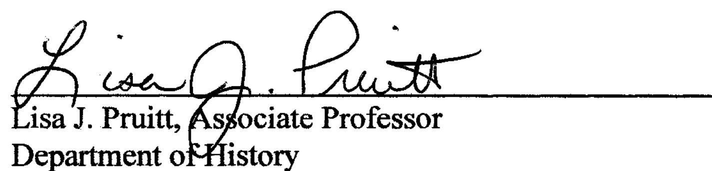

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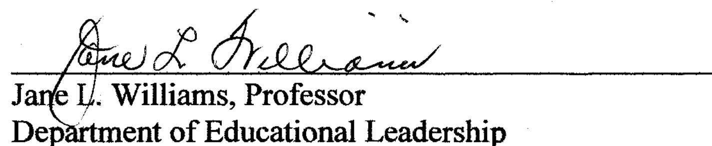

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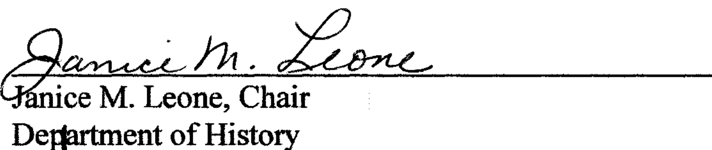

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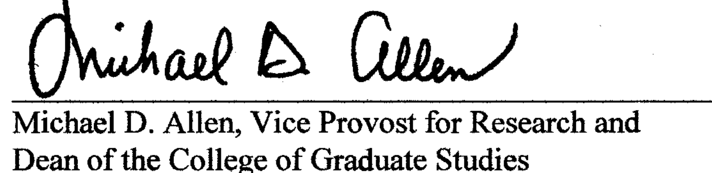

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TO MY FAMILY

FOR THEIR SUPPORT & ENCOURAGEMENT

RHONDA

SETH, ADAM, & JARED

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ABSTRACT

APOCALYPTIC RHETORIC IN THE OLD SOUTHWEST

Apocalyptic Rhetoric in the Old Southwest inquires how end-of-the-world and millennial language was used by those who inhabited or visited the nation's southwest frontier in the early 1800s. Emphasis is placed on the use of apocalyptic language in relation to two key events–the revivals of 1800 and the New Madrid earthquakes of 1811-1812–and the social and political changes of the early antebellum period, particularly in Tennessee. During the early nineteenth century, apocalyptic language in the Old Southwest came predominantly from Protestant or Christian sources, and its use by non-Christian sources was negligible. What is argued chiefly is the inherent ambiguity of apocalyptic language as represented by antithetical interpretations of the same event. This uncertainty is to be expected, because apocalyptic rhetoric is religious language filled with symbol, metaphor, and hyperbole. The fluidity of apocalyptic thought also illustrates the complex evolution of opposing millennial ideas, religious and political, that developed during the antebellum era. Eight illustrations, seven examples of primary texts, and a bibliography are included.

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INTRODUCTION

In the early 1800s, several frontier regions of the young United States underwent considerable social and cultural transformation. One of these regions, the Old Southwest, evolved from an "untamed" wilderness to a burgeoning society of plantations and towns governed by new state legislatures and connected by a growing network of roads and carriageways.[1] This transformation took place at an unprecedented pace and over a huge expanse of land, and this has made its study challenging and difficult. D. W. Meinig, Professor of Geography at Syracuse University, highlights "the complexities of the topic" and the "challenge of holding together such an ever-enlarging and differentiating expanse." He notes, "It is not easy to prepare a coherent picture and general assessment of one of the most rapid, prodigious, and portentous set of geographic developments in modern world history."[2] Part of this "rapid, prodigious, and portentous" transformation included religion and religious ideas about a new order of existence and the coming of the millennium to America.

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[1]See the quixotic overview by Henry Adams, *The United States in 1800*, introduction by Robert H. Ferrell (1889,1957; repr., Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 1-28.

[2]D. W. Meinig, *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History*, Vol. 2, Continental America, 1800-1867 (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1993), 221.

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Such religious ideas embraced beliefs about cataclysmic upheaval and spiritual renewal. Notions about the end of the world in relation to "big" events like the New Madrid earthquakes of 1811 and 1812 and the frontier revivals of 1800 and 1801 played an important role in the evolution of America's frontier culture and its social patterns. The earthquakes and the revivals occurred after the turn of the century, and their apocalyptic interpretations suggest an acceptance of beliefs about teleological meanings by religious leaders and the populace in general. But what meanings can be gleaned from the juxtaposition of these unusual events and apocalyptic language? How did people interpret the earthquakes and the revivals in light of beliefs about the end of the world? Were rapid socioeconomic and political changes of the time viewed in apocalyptic terms? These questions, of interest to social scientists and specialists in American religion, will be explored in this study.

Ideas about the end of the world and the events associated with it have a long and lively history in western thought.[3] Apocalyptic rhetoric and language about end-time happenings speak to the longings of humans who seek to understand the destiny and purpose of their own lives and their world. History itself in the western sense presumes a series of "critical actions" that bring into existence a "new present" and change the present into what is "irretrievably past." This process undergirds the human struggle "to gain true existence, an effort to achieve substantiality" so that each person may avoid

---

[3]Frederic J. Baumgartner, *Longing for the End: A History of Millennialism in Western Civilization* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999); Eugen Weber, *Apocalypses: Prophecies, Cults and Millennial Beliefs through the Ages* (London: Random House UK, 1999).

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living "in vain" and vanishing "like a shadow."[4] The *telos* or end for each person and for the world as a whole has been an important part of this struggle to know and understand the meaning of human existence.

World religions, especially those belief-systems that hold to a linear in contrast to a cyclical view of history, have taken a leading role in this effort to understand the fate of humans and their cosmos. For the West's three major religions–Judaism, Christianity, and Islam–Frederic Baumgartner notes, "Time passes from the creation to its end according to the will of God, with specific events as mileposts along the way."[5] Baumgartner also recognizes that a sense of progress toward an end is not completely inconsistent with a cyclical view of history. As Norman Cohn shows, Jewish and Christian apocalypses had their antecedents in world views embraced by Egyptians, people of Mesopotamia, Vedic Indians, and particularly the Zoroastrians.[6] But priority for apocalyptic history and thought in the West belongs to Jewish and Christian ideas about the end of time and its cataclysmic portrayal.

In ancient and classical times, Jewish and Christian apocalyptic writings focused on the end of the world, the coming of the Messiah, final judgment, and the afterlife. So much so that D. S. Russell assets, "There is a homogeneity about [the apocalyptic

---

[4]Erich Frank, *Philosophical Understanding and Religious Truth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), 116, quoted in Rudolph Bultmann, *History and Eschatology: The Presence of Eternity* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), 4.

[5]Baumgartner, *Longing for the End*, 3.

[6]Norman Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come: The Ancient Roots of Apocalyptic Faith*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2001).

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tradition] which justifies its classification as a distinct literary *corpus*."[7] In his work that examines ideas borrowed from Judaism by Christianity, Russell defines apocalyptic as esoteric in substance, literary in form, symbolic in language, and pseudonymous in authorship. His chapter titles delineate the relevant topics: human history and divine control, angels and demons, the time of the end, the Messianic kingdom, the traditional Messiah, the Son of Man, and life after death. But Russell concedes, "It is not always easy to define, . . . although it reveals certain fairly well-defined characteristics, apocalyptic is recognizable even when some of its formal characteristics are absent. It may be said to consist rather in a religious mood or temper which is different from, though related to, that of prophecy."[8]

According to Cohn, this apocalyptic mood originated with the Iranian religious reformer and prophet Zoroaster. After a thorough review of the apocalyptic beliefs of ancient Egyptians, Sumerians, Babylonians, Indo-Iranians, Canaanites, and Israelites, he concludes:

> In Zoroaster's view the world was not static, nor would it always be troubled. Even now the world was moving, through incessant conflict, towards a conflictless state. The time would come when, in a prodigious final battle, the supreme god and his supernatural allies would defeat the forces of chaos and their human allies and eliminate them once and for all. From then on the divinely

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[7]D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic, 200 BC - AD 100* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), 104.

[8]Ibid. Compare Leon Morris, "Characteristics of Apocalyptic," *Apocalyptic* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1972), 34-67; and Paolo Sacchi, "The Great Themes of Apocalyptic," *Jewish Apocalyptic and its History*, trans. William J. Short, Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha, Supplement Series 20, edited by James Charlesworth and Lester Grabbe (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 42-47.

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> appointed order would obtain absolutely: physical distress and want would be unknown, no enemy would threaten, within the community of the saved there would be absolute unanimity; in a word, the world would be for ever untroubled, totally secure.
>
> Unheard of before Zoroaster, that expectation deeply influenced certain Jewish groups . . . Above all it influenced the Jesus sect, with incalculable consequences.[9]

Cohn argues convincingly that the apocalyptic expectation cultivated by Zoroaster in the religious culture of the ancient Near East remained uniform in its core vision. He further suggests that this central motif of chaotic, cosmic conflict succeeded by peaceful, paradisaical utopia subsequently befitted legions of historical contexts and situations. He notes:

> The story itself has continued down the ages. And what a story it has become! Much theological speculation; innumerable millenarian movements, including those now flourishing so vigorously in the United States; even the appeal once exercised by Marxist-Leninist ideology–all this belongs to it. Nor is there any reason to think that the story is nearing its end. The tradition . . . is still alive and potent.[10]

In ancient Israel, prophetic glimpses of Yahweh's judgment and a new order of existence by the Hebrew prophets Ezekiel, Isaiah, Daniel, and Zechariah expounded this apocalyptic genre.[11] This tradition was carried on during the dark ages of Judaism by Enoch, the disciples of Ezra, and the scholars at Qumran and found its culmination in the Gospel of Mark, the writings of Paul the Apostle, and the grandest of all Christian

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[9]Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come*, 232-233. For a different view, see Walter Schmithals, *The Apocalyptic Movement: Introduction & Interpretation*, trans. John E. Steely (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), 111-126.

[10]Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come*, 233.

[11]Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975).

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apocalypses–the New Testament book of Revelation.[12] These sources became the foundation for a rich legacy of apocalyptic ideology in western thought that has been passed along from the time of the founding of Christianity until today.

The early church advanced in earnest this "long look" from the beginning of time to the present and then to the end of time. By emphasizing past, present, and future, early Christian scholars gave their writing of history a distinct linear focus. Brian Daley well states the Christian view as voiced by notable patristic writers in contrast to other classical philosophies. He says:

> Patristic writers insist that the Christian lives in hope *within history*, and is freed by that hope to take history seriously. Jewish apocalyptic literature held out a hope for new beginnings, beyond the present order of time and space, to a people who had been led by centuries of oppression to doubt the possibility of the fulfillment of its hope within history. Platonic philosophy, supportive though it was of the religious instinct, implicitly discounted the value of the world of concrete, changeable individual things, while Stoicism called on the philosophic mind to resign itself to being consumed in the toils of an endless, cyclic cosmic process. Gnostic religion, in both its non-Christian and Christian forms, held out to its "enlightened" initiates the hope of escaping–in the spiritual, luminous core that was their best self–from the visible world, the body, and the institutions of everyday life, all of which it regarded as the product of a primordial cosmic mistake. Much as it drew on all these traditions for its themes and images, Christian eschatology from the second century onwards insisted on the continuity of its hope with *this* world and its history: on the necessary inclusion of the body in the human person's final salvation, on the relevance of Church, sacraments and doctrine to one's ultimate fate before God, on the necessity of moral goodness within this present life for those who wish to share in a life to come and–perhaps most significantly–on the presence of the *eschaton* already within time in the person of the risen Jesus. The Spirit of Jesus, experienced within the community

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[12]Dale C. Allison, Jr., "The Eschatology of Jesus," and M. C. de Boer, "Paul and Apocalyptic Eschatology," in *The Continuum History of Apocalypticism*, edited by Bernard J. McGinn, John J. Collins, and Stephen J. Stein (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2003), 139-194; Steve Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series 115, ed. Stanley Porter (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 11-146.

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> of faith, was for the early Christians "the guarantee of our inheritance, until we acquire possession of it" (Eph 1.14), the "first-fruits" of "the redemption of our bodies" (Rom 8.23). The finality of God's Kingdom had already begun in this perennially unstable human realm.[13]

To promote this common hope, early Christian scholars agreed on basic teachings about end-time occurrences: a linear and teleological view of history, the resurrection of the body, God's judgment of all humans, the prospect of individual judgment by God at the end of one's life, God's retributive justice (i.e., bliss for the righteous and misery for the wicked), and a general sense that deceased believers remain involved in the life or communion of the church. But even from its inception the Christian Church could not totally agree on teachings about last things. As points of contention or disagreement, Daley notes five broad areas: the time and nearness of the world's end, the exact physical characteristics of the resurrection body, the extent of eternal salvation (e.g., what is meant by "all creation"), the possibility of change after final judgment, and the possibility of purgation from sin after death.[14] Daley's work highlights the fact that even a revered tradition of shared teachings about the meaning of history, its *telos* or goal, and specific final events did not stop the church from conjecture and debate over certain aspects of the end-time that remained ambiguous and uncertain.

This ambiguity arose from the rich variety of apocalyptic texts available to Christian exegetes and the wide diversity of thought (and its difficulty) in the major work of Christian apocalyptic–John's Revelation. Even today, this uncertainty in interpretation

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[13]Brian E. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 218.

[14]Ibid., 219-223.

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accounts for the appeal of John's prophecy and its apocalyptic imagery to a wide range of readers. Greg Carey, for example, sees the interpretation of Revelation as an ongoing struggle among millenarian, literary-historical, liberationist, and ethical humanist readers "for the authority to interpret the Apocalypse in the public sphere."[15] The ambiguity of Revelation's apocalyptic ideology also accounts for its application to cultural and political as well as religious events over the centuries. Because religious themes about the end of the world pertained to political leaders and their realms of control, religious rhetoric naturally spilled over into political and social rhetoric. By critiquing Roman power and its culture of assimilation and by basing that critique on a meticulously crafted scheme for the end of all things, a scheme orchestrated by heavenly or otherworldly powers, John set in motion for all time a revolutionary vision for the exercise of power and the meting out of human justice.[16] That such a revolutionary message could relate keenly to visually-oriented societies–to listeners in John's day, to subsequent generations, and to hearers and readers today–is no surprise.[17]

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[15]Greg Carey, "The Apocalypse and Its Ambiguous Ethos," in *Studies in the Book of Revelation*, ed. Steve Moyise (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2001), 164-170.

[16]See "The lamb will conquer" in Klaus Wengst, *Pax Romana and the Peace of Jesus Christ*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 118-135; and "The Critique of Roman Power" in Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 35-39.

[17]Christopher A. Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire: Monsters, Martyrs, and the Book of Revelation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Frances Carey, ed., *The Apocalypse and the Shape of Things to Come* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

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Today the obsession with apocalyptic ideas–this "long look" by way of projection from the past, through the present, and toward a future end of time–hardly has abated in religious, social, and political thought. Natural disasters across the globe receive immediate attention in the press, and bizarre or unusual events are given extraordinary meaning. Daily outbreaks of violence, especially in the Middle East, are followed with painstaking care, since Christian preachers want to predict accurately the signs that will lead to the rapture and the second coming of Christ.[18]

Malise Ruthven, however, in his study on religious and secular fundamentalism indicates a much broader base of apocalyptic notions than Christian speculations. He pinpoints "messianic movements built around eschatological expectations," "chiliastic expectations and end of the world scenarios," and "secularized versions" of Jewish, Muslim, and Christian eschatology as indicative of what he calls "the collapsing of myth into history." According to Ruthven, this is only one of the "family resemblances by which different members of the fundamentalist tribe may be identified."[19]

As a prominent example, Ruthven states, "The attacks of 9/11 revealed the dangers of this apocalyptic outlook" (e.g., in its execution by adherents of Islam and in the reaction by followers of Christianity). He writes:

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[18]Richard Abanes, *End-Time Visions: The Doomsday Obsession* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998); Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992).

[19]Malise Ruthven, *Fundamentalism: The Search for Meaning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 90-94. See also Gershom Gorenberg, *The End of Days: Fundamentalism and the Struggle for the Temple Mount* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

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> The leaders were not ignorant young men from a deprived region of the world protesting against economic injustices, but privileged enrages ["angry ones"] who could have expected to achieve high-status jobs in fields like medicine, engineering, and architecture. Their rage was theological. . . . Their final act was not a gesture of Islamic heroism, but of Nietzchean despair. The same mentality exists in the Western branch of what is often called fundamentalism–but might be better described as 'Abrahamic apocalypticism'. Christian premillennialists are theological refugees in a world they no longer control. . . . They have a baleful influence on American foreign policy, by tilting it towards the Jewish state which they aim eventually to obliterate, by converting 'righteous' Jews to Christ. . . . Whatever spiritual benefits individuals may have gained by taking Jesus as their 'personal saviour' the apocalyptic fantasies harboured by born-again Christians have a negative impact on public policy. Because of its impact on the environment and its baleful role in the Middle East, America's religiosity is a problem.[20]

Ruthven's connection of apocalyptic ideology to modern concepts of fundamentalism shows intensely the relevance and perils of end-of-the-world predictions in the postmodern, global setting. But he fails to reflect fully the deeply rooted nature of apocalyptic ideas in America's culture and its religious expression, especially as voiced by various traditions within the Christian faith.

Conceivably, every society has adapted and embellished traditions about "world cataclysm, the regeneration of the earth, and the creation of a terrestrial paradise."[21] America was no exception to this, but America's founding and early expansion by Europeans who ventured across the Atlantic Ocean to a "New World" strikingly relied on Christian ideas about the creation of a peaceful utopia. Toward the end of the Middle Ages, inhabitants of the Old World began to search for a better place and a better world–a

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[20]Ruthven, *Fundamentalism*, 216-217.

[21]Daniel Wojcik, *The End of the World As We Know It: Faith, Fatalism, and Apocalypse in America* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 1.

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New World. Old World images of America as a "new order of the ages" (*Novum ordo Seclorum*) brought thousands of Europeans to its shores. Explorers and religious leaders led the way. Christopher Columbus conceived of the New World as John's "new earth" in the biblical book of Revelation. Franciscan missionaries to America, influenced by twelfth-century Italian mystic and philosopher Joachim of Fiore, echoed this sentiment. The Puritans also carried "this fervent iteration of America's millennial destiny" from the Old World to Massachusetts Bay, and such exuberant hope persisted in a variety of configurations into the early and mid-1800s.[22]

As they imitated the apocalyptic zeal of their Christian predecessors, early nineteenth-century preachers and prophets in America wanted to give meaning to the new order that was being shaped out of myriad socioeconomic and geopolitical changes. Because of the constant churning of events as the frontier moved farther to the West, there were many opportunities–"cracks" or "breaks" in the cosmological order–for ideas about the end of the world to creep in and take hold of the hearts and minds of common people. But a debate ensued, one that has persisted until today, about whether the rapid sequence of events in antebellum America represented something positive or something negative.

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[22]M. H. Abrams, "Apocalypse: Theme and Variations," *The Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature: Patterns, Antecedents, and Repercussions*, edited by C. A. Patrides and Joseph Wittreich (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1984), 357. See too Bernard McGinn, *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979); James West Davidson, *The Logic of Millennial Thought: Eighteenth-Century New England* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1977).

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In this debate, postmillennialists saw the world getting better and better and viewed societal changes as gradual progression toward an earthly "kingdom of God." Alternatively, premillennialists believed the world was getting worse and worse and explained the succession of changes as general decadence leading up to a final, cataclysmic intervention by the Almighty. Millennialism, derived from two Latin words meaning "a thousand years," has provoked contention among Christian thinkers for almost two millennia now and has gyrated around cryptic words written in the final book of the Christian New Testament. In a concluding vision of his Apocalypse or Revelation, John saw Satan bound for a thousand years. Then he saw Christian martyrs who had died for their faith come to life and rule with Christ for a thousand years.[23] Ever since, Christian interpreters have tried to figure out John's vision–whether the return or Second Advent of Christ and subsequent end-time events would precede (the view of premillennialists) or antecede (the view of postmillennialists) this "thousand-year reign" of Christ. A third view, that of amillennialists, has suggested that neither post- nor pre-millennialists had the ultimate interpretation of the movement of historical events toward a *telos* or goal and that John used "thousand years" as a symbol or figuratively and not to presage a literal period of time.[24] This debate over the ambiguous nature of John's prophecy has stood historically at the heart of apocalyptic concerns. Secular variations of

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[23]Revelation 20:1-6.

[24]Many postmillennialists would endorse the figurative sense of John's message; see Samuel Hopkins, *A Treatise on the Millennium . . .* , Religion in America Reprints, ed. Edwin S. Gaustad (1793; repr., New York: Arno Press, 1972), 42ff.

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post-, pre-, and amillennialism have complicated the overall picture.[25] As a result, the debate has spread from religious to political interpretations of antebellum America.

On the one hand, "liberal" or "progressive" interpreters of the era's religion, reform movements, and politics noticed what they felt to be steady progress toward the betterment of American civilization or society. In the words of Jack P. Maddex, "They were not 'millenarians' who longed for a cataclysm to erase a world they rejected, but 'progressive millennialists' who hoped that gradual development would convert 'the kingdoms of this world' into those 'of our Lord and of his Christ.'"[26] They therefore viewed rapid social change as something wholesome and good. On the other hand, "conservative" or "traditional" interpreters at the time viewed religion and reform efforts to be a reaction to the negative effects of rapid social change. Paul Boyer remarks:

> Even in these years of soaring reformist aspiration, the darker variant of apocalyptic interpretation made its presence felt. Those drawn to this tradition shared the longing for a righteous social order, but combined it with deep pessimism about the possibilities of achieving the Christian utopia by the instrumentalities of government, legislation, and reform effort. In these antebellum decades, a succession of millennial groups . . . rejected the larger society as irredeemably wicked and depraved and withdrew into separatist

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[25]See, for example, Nathan O. Hatch, "The Origins of Civil Millennialism in America: New England Clergymen, War with France, and the Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (July 1974): 407-430; Ruth H. Bloch, "The Social and Political Base of Millennial Literature in Late Eighteenth-Century America," *American Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (September 1988): 378-396.

[26]Jack P. Maddex, Jr., "Proslavery Millennialism: Social Eschatology in Antebellum Southern Calvinism," *American Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (Spring 1979): 46; see also Major L. Wilson, "Paradox Lost: Order and Progress in Evangelical Thought of Mid-Nineteenth-Century America," *Church History* 44, no. 3 (September 1975): 352-366.

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> communities where they believed the kingdom of God could most likely be achieved.[27]

Postmillennialists dominated this debate during the antebellum period, but James H. Moorhead admits that "premillennialism . . . was not without disciples." He suggests a blurring of the "darker contours of millennialism" by postmillennialists to reconcile social progress "with the symbols of the Apocalypse."[28] In fact, both groups agreed that order out of chaos would come. For postmillennialists it would come in the here and now, but for premillennialists it would come in the hereafter. The discussion continued throughout the nineteenth century. But how was this debate framed by events early in the century, and what does this suggest about apocalyptic or millennial thought in antebellum America?

In the early nineteenth century, apocalyptic language erupted in connection with cataclysmic events like the New Madrid earthquakes. Common troubles like disease and death also gave rise to apocalyptic speech, and political discourse sometimes displayed its own type of apocalyptic verbiage, especially during intensely emotional times brought about by crises like war. But apocalyptic language most naturally concurred with the outbreak of Protestant revivals on the frontier, since traditional Christian beliefs operated in an apocalyptic framework.

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[27]Paul Boyer, "The Growth of Fundamentalist Apocalyptic in the United States," in McGinn, Collins, and Stein, eds., *The Continuum History of Apocalypticism*, 519-520.

[28]James H. Moorhead, "Between Progress and Apocalypse: A Reassessment of Millennialism in American Religious Thought, 1800-1880," *Journal of American History* 71, no. 3 (December 1984): 525, 535.

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The teleological message of frontier revival preachers relied characteristically on threats and promises associated with the end of the world. Soon this otherworldly outlook and the variations of its intensity led to tensions and outright schisms in the ranks of Christian believers. As a result, "mainstream" Christians mediated or subordinated their eschatological outlook to dogmas about salvation (i.e., soteriology), but "fringe" movements gave apocalyptic rhetoric a more central and essential role in their group's identity. Those who felt put off by supernatural interpretations (e.g., God's direct intervention) of the frontier revivals moved toward scientific or secular explanations of the unusual phenomena exhibited by believers. Social reformers who were influenced by nonreligious utopian ideologies, which contained their own brand of apocalyptic tendencies, went their own way and set up various quixotic communities.

Ostensibly a unifying force in the short term, particularly to those who benefitted from them, the revivals of the early nineteenth century proved to be a divisive force in the long term. Apocalyptic beliefs did not and could not unite the churches nor their adherents. Whatever other factors caused this divisive impact on frontier society in early nineteenth-century America–socioeconomic conditions, various pressures of industrialization and modernization, shifts toward egalitarianism–the role of religion, the revivals, and the elusive nature of Christian apocalyptic must not be overlooked.

This investigation of a perplexing aspect of apocalyptic language–its teleological paradox and ambiguity–gleans from references to the end of the world and related catastrophic events during the period of Christian revivalism in the Old Southwest from about 1800 to 1820. The use of apocalyptic language by church leaders, frontier

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preachers, and others will be examined in light of local settings and antebellum religion in general. For the purpose of this inquiry, "apocalyptic rhetoric" is defined in its classical sense, as indicated above, and broadly includes ideas about end-time events whether on earth or in the afterlife. Numerous studies examine the role, scope, and meaning of apocalyptic language in American religious and political discourse. Fewer studies examine apocalyptic language in popular discourse or as a result of a particular type or set of events, and little has been written about the role of apocalyptic rhetoric in the revivals of the early nineteenth-century or as a result of the New Madrid earthquakes. This probe into the significance of apocalyptic language for "cosmic" events like the New Madrid earthquakes and the revivals aims to enhance understanding and encourage additional study of a pertinent facet of antebellum Christianity in America.

The study begins with Chapter One, "Signs and Wonders and the New Madrid Earthquakes," that examines apocalyptic language in relation to the New Madrid earthquakes of 1811-1812. The immediacy of the situation, as it appeared to those who witnessed or felt the tremors, pushed their interpretation of the quakes and other related natural phenomena in the direction of cosmic language about the end of the world. Many responded to these dire omens by converting to Christianity. But there were detractors who were not persuaded by the apocalyptic rhetoric, and many of those who were convinced subsequently defected. When the quakes died down and life returned to normal, the end of the world was not so apparent. This shows how apocalyptic language could be elusive and highlights its obvious, but often neglected, ambiguity.

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Chapter Two, "Tecumseh's Prediction of the New Madrid Earthquakes," looks at a special case of apocalyptic language in the context of the frontier's social and political evolution. As settlers moved westward and were benefitted by the federal government's suppressive policies toward the Indians, a number of tribes responded by renewing their commitment to native traditions and ancestral lands. Native American revitalization movements were religious in nature and made use of apocalyptic language to indicate the collapse of the world as they knew it and the struggle to maintain harmony in a world disrupted by invasive threats to their ancient ways and their unspoiled lands. Among the Shawnee, Tecumseh and his brother Tenskwatawa experienced visions that anticipated comets, "falling" stars, floods, and earthquakes. In particular, Tecumseh's prediction of the New Madrid earthquakes swayed many natives to align with his confederacy against the incursions on their lands and way of life. In contrast to Christian interpretations of the comet and the earthquakes as signs of divine favor on the movement of settlers westward, Tecumseh appealed to both the comet in the heavens and the shaking of the earth as signs for the tribes to unite and resist. The same cataclysmic events and the apocalyptic language employed to describe them could be used conversely by different religious traditions. This is another indication of the ambiguity of apocalyptic language.

Chapter Three, "Religious Apathy and Revival on the Southwest Frontier," shifts to an earlier time and examines the perceived low state of religion in the Old Southwest after the turn of the nineteenth century. Christian ministers decried the sad state of morals and worked tirelessly to evangelize what they believed to be an unregenerate society. Sacramental gatherings and camp meetings attracted the masses and gave clergy

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the opportunity to motivate and convict the populace with preaching filled with traditional apocalyptic rhetoric. Many settlers took the threat of the end of the world and the prospect of eternal damnation to heart and converted to Christianity. A wave of revivals swept the frontier as large numbers of people gathered in Kentucky and Tennessee and experienced spiritual healing both in body and mind. Clergy responded variously to this apparent advent of the kingdom of God. Although the revivals promoted cooperation among frontier churches, the excitement and emotionalism led to unusual practices that threatened creedal doctrines and led to schism within major faith groups like the Presbyterians. The elusive and ambiguous nature of apocalyptic ideas certainly played an important role in this religious formation on the American frontier.

Chapter Four, "Revival Phenomena and Religious Division on the Frontier," continues the story of the revivals and details some of the strange bodily manifestations that accompanied the frontier revivals. Supporters of the revivals readily used apocalyptic imagery about God's judgment and the end of the world to explain these "exercises" or phenomena. But revivalists from centrist Protestant churches, while adopting the evangelistic incentive of the revivals for the advancement of traditional Christian beliefs, avoided the extremes of revival phenomena and their apocalyptic implications. Traditional Christian eschatology stressed personal salvation and the experience of each individual believer in relation to an exalted Lord or Christ. When apocalyptic ideas disrupted what was thought to be sacrosanct in terms of cherished doctrines about salvation, centrist Protestant ministers and thorough-going devotees to apocalyptic teachings like the Shakers parted ways.

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After the excitement of the revivals died out, ideas about the literal end of the world eventually shifted to ideas about the end of the world as people knew it. Because the end of the world did not come about in a literal way (i.e., the premillennial idea), the progress and optimism of the era seemed to support the conclusion that the kingdom of God might come about in a metaphorical way (i.e., the postmillennial idea). When the revival era passed, many looked to social reform rather than conversion as the means to bring about the kingdom of God on earth. This shows the adaptability of apocalyptic language to changing circumstances and again illustrates its inherent ambiguity.

Chapter Five, "Rapid Change and Apocalyptic Tendencies," surveys the nation's breakneck political and socioeconomic changes during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This is done by looking at how developments at the national level affected the Old Southwest and, as a case study, Tennessee. The chapter also explores whether apocalyptic ideology as a "more esoteric form of thought" could be used to "make sense" of unwieldy cultural and social evolution. As the Old Southwest evolved, pioneers and civic leaders generally spoke about divine or providential guidance, but rarely did they make use of apocalyptic language. Seldom did apocalyptic rhetoric penetrate socioeconomic or political thought. Exceptions did occur in religious contexts, from religious sources (e.g., preachers or prophets), or as a result of catastrophic events like the wholesale oppression of Indians and blacks. This raises doubt about the usefulness of apocalyptic rhetoric to assess the overall movement of events in antebellum America. The problem is not surprising, since apocalyptic language predicts potential rather than actual realities, and one of its key characteristics is ambiguity.

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The flexible nature of apocalyptic thought challenged the people of the Old Southwest and will continue to perplex historians and students of American religion. Apocalyptic rhetoric's disparate religious contexts and interpretive nuances presented problems then, and they continue to do so today. In nineteenth-century America, spectacular events like the earthquakes and the revivals intensified an apparent polarity between end-of-the-world thinking and projection of new world paradigms. Belief in a literal end of the world and its cataclysmic agents clashed with the viewpoint about social progress and its goal to achieve the millennium in the here-and-now. Either way, the apocalyptic world view was a religious one that was primarily Christian and biblical. Native American and other religious systems added their own unique type of apocalyptic thought, but none of these were as pervasive in the Old Southwest as what was developed by Protestant Christianity. Social reformers and even politicians occasionally weighed in on the question of the millennium, but these ideologies borrowed heavily from Protestant Christianity and were never as thoroughgoing as biblical apocalyptic.

The polarity of apocalyptic rhetoric in the Old Southwest, however, was temporary. Life went on for settlers and their families, for interpreters and prognosticators. What was apparent about the end of the world or the millennium did not become real in any literal sense, since the continuum of time remained unbroken. But what was potential in terms of apocalyptic events occupied the minds of those who believed and who hoped to survive a cataclysmic moment and experience a better future. A key to appreciate and understand this fluidity of thought is the acceptance of the ambiguity of apocalyptic rhetoric. To that end, the exploration now begins.

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CHAPTER ONE:
SIGNS AND WONDERS AND THE NEW MADRID EARTHQUAKES

From December 1811 through February 1812, major earthquakes occurred along the lower Mississippi River near New Madrid in Missouri Territory. The earthquakes, estimated by seismologists to exceed 8.0 on the Richter scale, shook the entire region and caused disturbances as far away as the eastern coast of the United States, southern Canada, and northern Mexico.[1] Two thousand aftershocks followed, and one observer aptly noted that the earth "twitched and jerked like a side of freshly killed beef."[2] Although the earthquakes rocked a sparsely populated area (Fig. 1.1), their reach and consequence stirred the imaginations of those who witnessed, felt, or heard about them.

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[1]On the extent of the earthquakes, see Myron L. Fuller, *The New Madrid Earthquake (A Scientific Factual Field Account)*, United States Geological Survey Bulletin 494 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1912; repr., Marble Hill, Missouri: Gutenberg-Richter Publications, 1995), 13-31; James Lal Penick, Jr., *The New Madrid Earthquakes*, rev. ed. (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1981), 1-14; Jelle Zeilinga de Boer and Donald Theodore Sanders, *Earthquakes in Human History: The Far-Reaching Effects of Seismic Disruptions* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005), 108-138. For a good description of the destruction, see William Atkinson, *The Next New Madrid Earthquake: A Survival Guide for the Midwest* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989), 9-25.

[2]"Earthquakes and the New Madrid Fault: Seismic Activity, Maps, Information," n.d., http://www.showme.net/~fkeller/quake/ (accessed 16 April 2006); Fred Roe, "The Great New Madrid Earthquakes," 3 November 2002, http://www.tuppenceworth.ie/biglife/quake.html (accessed 16 April 2006).

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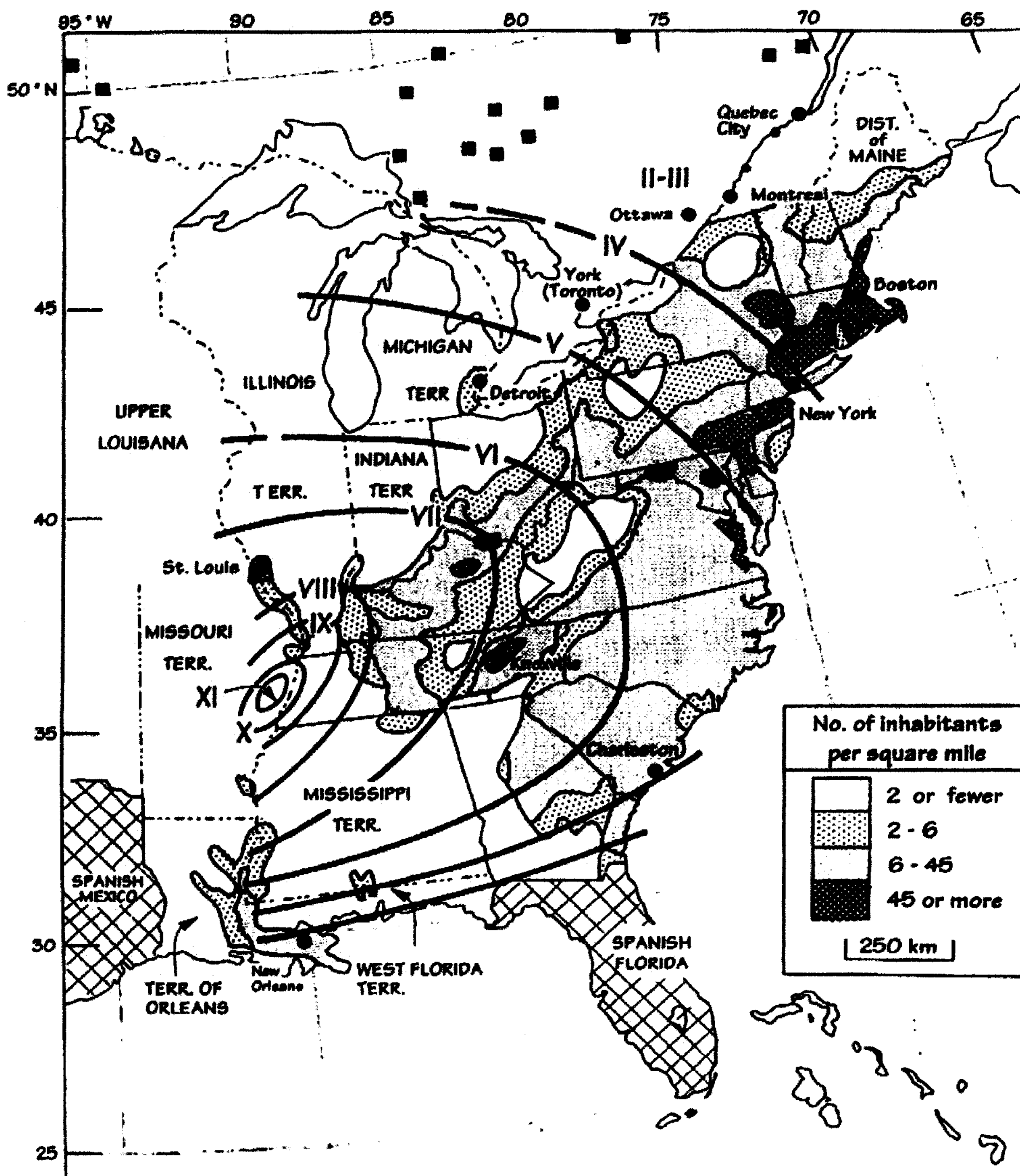

Fig. 1.1. Zones of seismic intensity and population distribution at the time of the New Madrid earthquakes of 16 December 1811. Based on calculations of Arch C. Johnston and Eugene S. Schweig, "The Enigma of the New Madrid Earthquakes of 1811-1812," *Annual Review of the Earth and Planetary Sciences* 24 (1996): 343, in Jelle Zeilinga de Boer and Donald Theodore Sanders, *Earthquakes in Human History: The Far-Reaching Effects of Seismic Disruptions* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005), 110.

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The earthquakes and the convergence of other remarkable sensations like the Great Comet of 1811 were pivotal events in the Old Southwest. For many they provoked images about the end of the world and sparked fires of spiritual renewal. In the ideological milieu of the frontier world, a world that believed in attributing supernatural meanings to extraordinary or unusual events, notions about divine intervention or magical efficacy prevailed.[3] Cataclysmic events, especially when they were destructive of life or property, often evoked the language of cosmic disturbance, universal upheaval, and world cessation. But these "signs" and "wonders" were not conclusive over a long period of time. Although the memory of the earthquakes lingered for years, the shock of their immediacy was lost. For the long-term, their potency to spellbind fickle mortals was temporary, and their ability to inspire apocalyptic language was fleeting. For the short-term, though, New Madrid residents, travelers in the area, and thousands of others endured a shaking on 16 December 1811 unlike anything they had experienced before.

One traveler on the Mississippi River at the time of the earthquakes was William Pierce. Pierce began his tour of the "Western Waters" from Pittsburgh, and he and his companions set out for New Orleans in a flat-bottomed boat near the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers on Friday, 13 December. By 15 December, just before the eruption of the quakes, he was "about 116 miles from the mouth of the Ohio" or in the

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[3]See the helpful discussions by Jon Butler, "Toward the Antebellum Spiritual Hothouse," *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990), 225-256; and Peter W. Williams, "Religion, Time, and History: Providence and Prophecy," *Popular Religion in America: Symbolic Change and the Modernization Process in Historical Perspective* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1980), 119-130.

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vicinity of Little Prairie (near Caruthersville, Arkansas). Pierce recalled, "The night was extremely dark and cloudy; not a star appeared in the heavens, . . . indeed, the sky has been continually overcast, and the weather unusually thick and hazy."[4] A few hours before dawn, all hell literally broke loose. In his letter to the editor of the *New-York Evening Post*, penned on Christmas Day at Big Prairie (near Helena, Arkansas), Pierce recounted colorfully the remarkable things he had seen since the quakes began.

Agitated by the bizarre events, Pierce found it impossible to describe in ordinary language what had happened. He wrote:

> Tremendous and uninterrupted explosions, resembling a discharge of artillery were heard. . . . There was a volcanic discharge of combustible matter to great heights, and incessant rumbling was heard below, and the bed of the river was excessively agitated, whilst the water assumed a turbid and boiling appearance. . . . Never ever was a scene more replete with terrific threatenings of death. . . . We contemplated in mute astonishment a scene which completely beggars description, and of which the most glowing imagination is inadequate to form a picture.[5]

Pierce tried to explain the destructive forces of the earthquakes in language typical of early nineteenth-century science. But he was moved by the unusual happenings beyond "rational" descriptions to personify nature in poetic and even apocalyptic terms. He described the earth's wreckage with vivid, heightened language:

> Here the earth, river, &c. torn with furious convulsions, opened in huge trenches, whose deep jaws were instantaneously closed; there through a thousand vents sulphurous streams gushed from its very bowels leaving vast and almost

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[4]William Leigh Pierce, letter to the editor of the *New-York Evening Post*, 25 December 1811, *An Account of the Great Earthquakes, in the Western States, particularly on the Mississippi River; December 16-23, 1811* (Newburyport, Massachusetts: Thomas & Whipple, 1812), 3-4.

[5]Ibid., 6.

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> unfathomable caverns. Every where Nature itself seemed tottering on the verge of dissolution. Encompassed with the most alarming dangers . . . it was a struggle for existence itself.[6]

Pierce wrote about other unsettling occurrences as well. He related the panic of the water fowl, the terror of the Indians, and the confusion of local inhabitants. He had heard how the suddenness and potency of the quakes put the people in the little town of New Madrid in a state of "confusion, terror and uproar." They were so disturbed that "those in the town were seen running for refuge to the country, whilst those in the country fled with like purpose towards the town." This chaotic spectacle of crazed turmoil (see Fig. 1.2) prompted Pierce to summarize his version of the quakes in language of cosmic disturbance. Instinctively, he perceived a coordinated effort of heaven and earth:

> All nature indeed seemed to sympathize in the commotion which agitated the earth. The sun rarely shot a ray through the heavens, the sky was clouded, and a dreary darkness brooded over the whole face of creation; the stars were encircled with a pale light, and the comet appeared hazy and dim.[7]

Pierce ended his letter with an amazing observation. He told the editor, "My dear Sir, I have given a superficial view of this awful phenomenon; not much to convey instruction upon a very interesting subject, as to gratify the curiosity of the public relative to so remarkable an event."[8] If not to be understood as a tactful use of modesty, Pierce's incredulity of the strict accuracy of his own eyewitness account puts doubt on the reliability of his testimony. Alternatively, if Pierce's letter can be regarded as a

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[6]Ibid., 6-7.

[7]Ibid., 11, 12.

[8]Ibid., 13.

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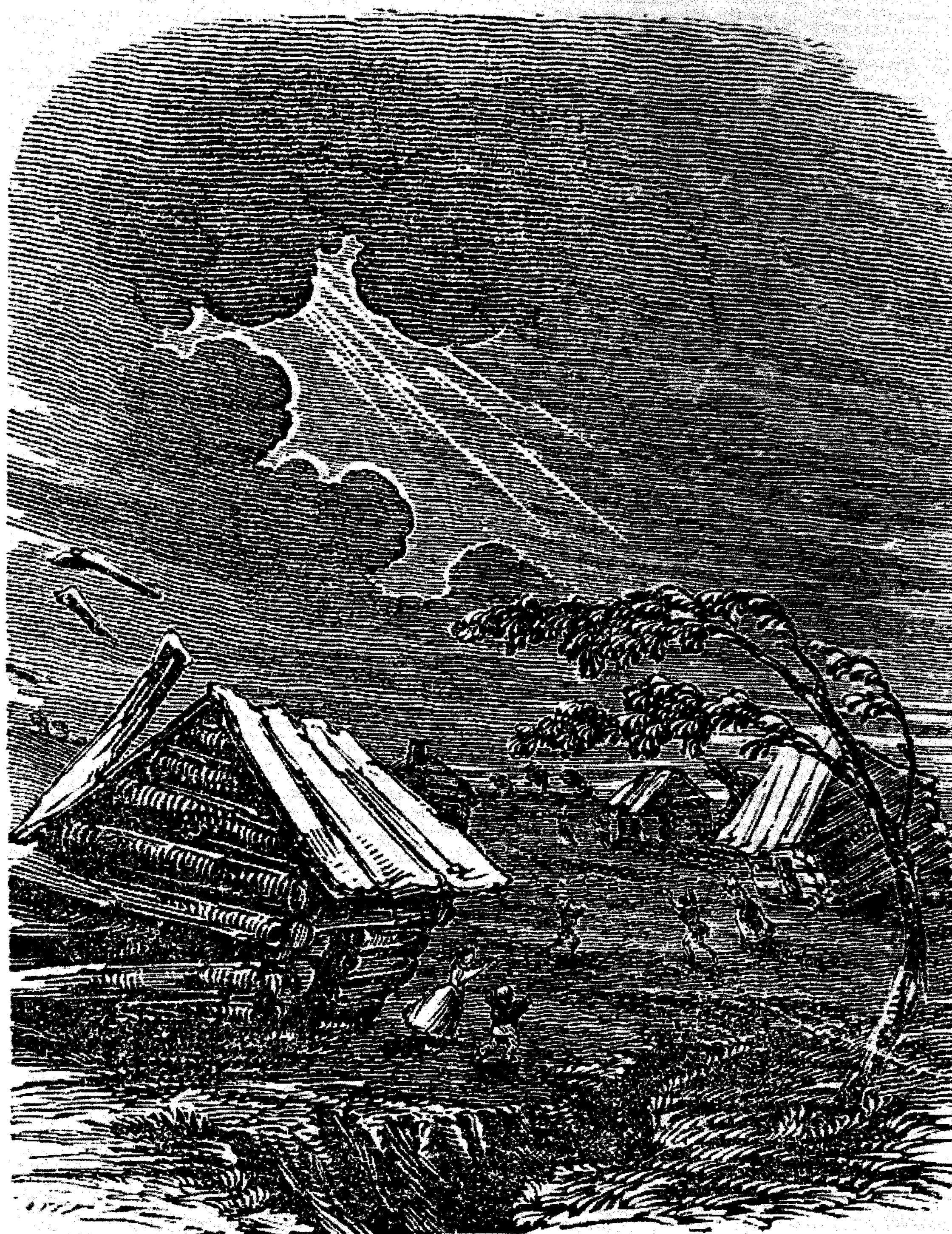

Fig. 1.2. "The Great Earthquake at New Madrid" woodcut, reproduced in Henry Howe, *Historical Collections of the Great West* . . . (Cincinnati: H. Howe, 1851), 237, from Norma Hayes Bagnall, *On Shaky Ground: The New Madrid Earthquakes of 1811 - 1812* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1996), 29.

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dependable source for the earthquakes (e.g., because he included a lot of fascinating details "collected from facts"), then he assuredly bore witness to his own emotional upheaval. To be sure, Pierce wrote hastily from notes that were made in haste, so his narrative appears to be arranged logically in some places but jumbled up in other places. This can be accounted for quite simply. Pierce himself was disquieted by the earthquakes, and this led him to embellish his report with ideas of cosmic upheaval. He confessed to the *Evening Post* this lack of strict, rational analysis or, as he called it, "a superficial view . . . not much to convey instruction." For apocalyptic language nothing less should be expected than this mood of ambivalence and uncertainty.

Another witness to the power of the shocks and their devastating effects was John Bradbury, a Scottish naturalist who had come to America to study and collect botanical specimens for the Liverpool Philosophical Society. Like Pierce he had to resort to apocalyptic language to describe the significance of what he saw. On 14 December, Bradbury and his party arrived at New Madrid where he disembarked to pick up some supplies. His impression of the small outpost was one of disappointment, since he "found only a few straggling houses . . . [and] only two stores . . . very indifferently furnished."[9] The next morning they left New Madrid, passed the first or Upper Chickasaw Bluffs (near Osceola, Arkansas) in the course of the day, and by evening came in view of *Chenal du Diable* or Devil's Channel (i.e., Devil's Race Ground), a dangerously shallow point on the river. Because the sun had set already, Bradbury wisely instructed his French crew to

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[9]John Bradbury, *Travels in the Interior of America, in the Years 1809, 1810, and 1811* . . . (Liverpool, England: Smith and Galway, 1817), 196.

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moor the boat with its cargo of 30,000 pounds of lead to a small island about five hundred yards from the channel's entrance. There, in the middle of the river, the crew ate supper and settled down for the night.

At approximately two o'clock the next morning, Bradbury was roused from his sleep "by a most tremendous noise, accompanied by an agitation of the boat so violent, that it appeared in danger of upsetting." He scurried past four of his frightened boatsmen to the door of the cabin where he saw "the river as if agitated by a storm" and heard "the crash of falling trees and the screaming of wild fowl on the river." After the initial shock, Bradbury secured some "papers and money" and scrambled ashore to assess the damage. By candlelight he measured one "really frightful" chasm about four feet deep and over eighty yards long and continued to work with the crew throughout the night to safeguard their resources and their very lives.[10]

As the aftershocks persisted, he took note of the violence–loud noises, screeching birds, shaking and jarring, and crumbling riverbanks–and the panic and confusion of his crew. Surely Bradbury himself was disturbed by the situation and the extreme terror felt by his patron and the boatsmen. He noticed that "the men appeared to be so terrified and confused, as to be almost incapable of action," and he recorded over and over in French their agitation–*"O mon Dieu."* After daybreak as he and his companions watched canoes and small boats–lacking their passengers but not goods and belongings–float down the foamy, timber-filled river, he felt keenly their narrow escape from death. For Bradbury this sight was "a melancholy proof" that the people and crafts they had passed the

[10]Ibid., 199-201.

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previous day had succumbed to the earthquakes.[11] But his acquiescence to a superstitious rationale for the earthquakes seemed to indicate that the scientist's critical judgment had been clouded by his direct experience of the powerful forces at work.

On 17 December, the day after the big shocks, Bradbury and his crew talked with twenty or so people who had gathered to pray in a log cabin near the Lower Chickasaw Bluffs (close to Memphis). He "found them almost distracted with fear" and saw "a bible lying open on the table." The weary, rattled people told the river travelers about ruptures in the earth from which many "had fled to the hills." One man, whom Bradbury portrayed as "possessing more knowledge than the rest," informed them that the earthquakes had been caused by the recent comet "that had appeared a few months before." The man then described the cosmic origin of the earth-shattering phenomena. The comet had:

> two horns, over one of which the earth had rolled, and was now lodged betwixt them: that the shocks were occasioned by the attempts made by the earth to surmount the other horn. If this should be accomplished, all would be well, if otherwise, inevitable destruction of the world would follow.

Incredibly, Bradbury judged the man "confident in his hypothesis, and myself unable to refute it, I did not dispute the point."[12] Either the Scotsman politely chose not to negate the man's folklore, or he himself had been shaken by the quakes to the point of irrationality. Perhaps Bradbury recognized above all else the "catch" or "escape" clause

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[11]Ibid., 199-202.

[12]Ibid., 205-206. For testimony to the comet, see "New Madrid–references by specific subject," n.d., http://www.ceri.memphis.edu/compendium/subject.html (accessed 16 April 2006).

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in the man's pronouncement–"If this should be accomplished . . . if otherwise . . ." This customary feature of apocalyptic language preserved the ambiguity of its predictive aspect and protected the utterance from failure, since one condition or the other would take place necessarily. All the same, Bradbury passed along this cosmic anecdote as a workable but apocalyptic reason for the origin of the earthquakes.

In their acceptance of apocalyptic warrant for the earthquakes, eyewitnesses like Pierce and Bradbury were not alone. Following the initial upheavals, George Crist of Nelson County near Louisville confessed, "Everybody is scared to death. . . . A lot of people thinks that the devil has come here. Some thinks that this is the beginning of the world coming to a end." After more shocks in February 1812, Crist feared, "If we do not get away from here the ground is going to eat us alive. . . . We are all about to go crazy–from pain and fright." He moved away later with no regrets: "As much as I love my place in Kentucky–I never want to go back."[13] Among common folk, supernatural conjectures about the cause of the earthquakes wavered between demonic involvement and righteous indignation. Many believed the quakes signaled the imminence of the world's end, and this led to panic and a desire to escape. As Crist remarked, because he and his family did not want to experience any more tremors, they moved away to what they believed to be a safer place. This uneasiness, even of those who lived a distance

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[13]George Heinrich Crist, unknown documents, 16 December 1811, 23 January and 8 February 1812, and 14 April 1813, submitted by Floyd Creasy, a descendant of Crist, to "The Virtual Times: The New Madrid Earthquake," n.d., http://hsv.com/genlintr/newmadrd/accnt3.htm (accessed 16 April 2006).

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from the epicenter, showed the extensive power of the earthquakes, their role in affecting people's apocalyptic consciousness, and their influence on migratory patterns.

Religious leaders especially noticed this uneasiness among settlers in the region. Preachers attested significant numbers of baptisms and conversions, since sinners wanted to avoid further outpourings of God's wrath. In the immediate vicinity of the quakes, membership in the Methodist Church increased the following year by a whopping fifty percent. Preachers labeled these end-of-the-world converts "earthquake Christians."[14] Peter Cartwright, a Methodist preacher who had moved to the Cumberland region from Virginia, noticed that the severe earthquakes in the winter of 1812 "struck terror to thousands of people, and under the mighty panic hundreds and thousands crowded to, and joined the different Churches."[15] At Nashville he experienced the following reaction during a turbulent aftershock:

> Early the next morning I arose and walked out on the hill near the house where I had preached, when I saw a negro woman coming down the hill to the spring, with an empty pail on her head. . . . When she got within a few rods of where I stood the earth began to tremble and jar; chimneys were thrown down, scaffolding around many new buildings fell with a loud crash, hundreds of the citizens suddenly awoke, and sprang into the streets; loud screaming followed, for many thought the day of judgment was come. The young mistresses of the above-named negro woman came running after her, and begging her to pray for them.

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[14]See "Arkansas Stories: The Great Earthquakes of 1811," n.d., http://www.arkansasstories.com/newmadrid-earthquake-two.html (accessed 16 April 2006); Louisa Dalton, "Do old glaciers cause new earthquakes in New Madrid, Missouri?" 7 March 2001, http://www.stanford.edu/dept/news/pr/01/glacier37.html (accessed 16 April 2006); and "The Arkansas News: Massive Earthquakes Shake Mississippi River Country," n.d., http://www.oldstatehouse.com/educational_programs/classroom/arkansas_news/detail.asp?id=443&issue_id=32&page=4 (accessed 16 April 2006).

[15]Peter Cartwright, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright* (1856; repr., Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956), 126.

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> She raised the shout and said to them, "My Jesus is coming in the clouds of heaven, and I can't wait to pray for you now; I must go and meet him. I told you so, that he would come, and you would not believe me. Farewell. Halleluiah! Jesus is coming, and I am ready. Halleluiah! Amen." And on she went, shouting and clapping her hands, with the empty pail on her head.[16]

Sentiments like these that saw in the earthquakes a sure sign of the imminent end of the world and the salvation of righteous believers came predominantly from church-goers and preachers on the frontier. The catastrophic earthquakes and the concurrent comet presaged for Christians the end of the world and the beginning of divine judgment–for the saints a time of shouting hallelujahs in anticipation of meeting Jesus and for sinners "a time of great horror."[17] But the impression of apocalyptic ideas and their lasting effect was uncertain and unpredictable.

Like the Methodists, the Baptists enjoyed quick evangelistic growth during this time of nature's fury. But a good number of these new believers turned away from the church once the earthquakes subsided. At a funeral service in the fall of 1811, Reuben Ross, a Baptist elder from Stewart County, Tennessee, observed a great light in the northwestern sky just as the casket was put in the grave at dusk. The comet caused "a deep sensation" among the startled mourners who believed they saw a "harbinger of impending calamity." When the earthquakes came later, many converted and according to Ross became "earthquake Christians."[18] Many who "got religion" in a hurry during the

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[16]Ibid.

[17]James B. Finley, *Autobiography of Rev. James B. Finley, or, Pioneer Life in the West*, ed. W. P. Strickland (Cincinnati: Cranson and Curtis, 1854), 238.

[18]James Ross, *The Life and Times of Elder Reuben Ross* (Philadelphia: Grant, Faires and Rodgers, 1882), 201, 204.

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shockwaves lost it soon after the rumblings stopped. Ideas about the end of the world and its imminent destruction commanded their attention only as long as the immediate physical evidence of the earth's trembling backed up the apocalyptic claims. And some disagreed with apocalyptic expectations on grounds of strict "logical" reasoning. One rustic individual inferred that the end was not imminent. Powerful shocks had "rudely bounced" him "from his bed in the darkness," but he was certain that "Judgment Day" could not come at "night."[19]

Other settlers were not so fickle in their response to the earthquakes. As a result of his experience, Jacob Bower, a Pennsylvania emigree who lived in Muhlenberg County, Kentucky, got convicted permanently. He reminisced about "the ever memorable morning" of 17 December 1811:

> When most people were in their beds sound asleep, there was an Earthquake, verry violent indeed. . . . I expected immediate distruction [and] had no hope of seeing the dawn of another day. Eternity, oh Eternity was just at hand, and all of us unprepared; just about the time the sun arose, as I supposed, for it was a thick, dark and foggy morning, there was another verry hard shock–lasted several minutes terible indeed. To see everything touching the earth, shakeing–quivering, trembling; and mens hearts quaking for fear of the approaching judgment. Many families ran together and grasped each other in their arms. One instance near to where I lived, the woman & five children, all gathered around her husband, crying O my husband pray for me, The children crying, Father, pray for me, O, pray for me, for the day of Judgment is come, and we are unprepared![20]

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[19]Mary Trotter Kion, "Great American Plains: Earthquake in the Year 1811," 2 November 2001, http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/great_american_plains/81962 (accessed 16 April 2006).

[20]"The Autobiography of Jacob Bower: A Frontier Baptist Preacher and Missionary," in William W. Sweet, ed., *Religion on the American Frontier: The Baptists 1783-1830* (1931; repr., New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1964), 191.

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Bower maintained that the tremors continued for about two years but were hardly noticeable, and Deists and Universalists "in those days were scarce." When the quakes eased off, many who "converted" became uninterested in church and religion. For his part, Bower remained steadfast, took up preaching, and surmised that the earthquakes produced fewer apostates than the revivals he knew about. He wrote:

> It was frequently said by the enimies of religion, the Baptists are all *skakers*, that when the Earth is don shaking, they will all turn back, and be as they were before. But . . . I have witnessed about nineteen revivals of religion 11 in Kentucky, 6 in Illinois, and 2 in Missouri. And I have the pleasure of being aquainted with many, who were brought in, the time of the Earthquake, and these were as fiew, and perhaps fiewer apostates among them, as any revival I have ever seen.[21]

Perhaps in this assessment Bower reflected his own fidelity to Christian ministry more than anything else, but he did raise an important point about one difference in the revivals and the earthquakes. The earthquakes, unlike the revivals that operated under the aegis of church leaders and had some human controls, came suddenly without warning and caught people by surprise. This had the obvious effect of literally shaking people to act, to do something in response to the earthquakes. How people reacted often depended on what they believed about the earthquakes. They had a variety of options from which to choose, because interpretations of the earthquakes differed.

At the onset of the earthquakes people were curious and wanted to know how and why the earthquakes occurred. The exceptional amplitude of the tremors–by one estimate felt in twenty-seven states–resulted in many newspaper reports across the United States and Canada (e.g., in St. Louis, New Orleans, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, New York,

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[21]Ibid., 200.

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Quebec, and Montreal).[22] Variant descriptions came from cities, towns, and rural areas, even though the essential features of the quakes were the same. Some people wondered about the "how" or the nature of the quakes. Jared Brooks of Louisville, Kentucky, crafted a rudimentary measuring device to keep a tally on the earthquakes and classify them according to intensity. Brooks apparently was satisfied with the empirical aspect of his attempt at primitive seismology and did not speculate on any nonphysical cause of the quakes. But the experiment itself called into question unstudied explanations, whether natural or supernatural, as something deficient.[23] Others investigated the "why" or rationale of the earthquakes. In his "Detailed Narrative of the Earthquakes," Senator Samuel Mitchill from New York collected extensive evidence and summarized the particulars in ten principal points. He concluded that he gave enough data to satisfy the proponents of three major hypotheses used "to explain the awful phenomena of earthquakes . . . the *mechanical* reasoner . . . the *chemical* expositor . . . [and] the *electrical* philosopher."[24]

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[22]Otto W. Nuttli, ed., "Appendix–Nuttli 1973 Paper, Contemporary Newspaper Accounts of Mississippi Valley Earthquakes of 1811-1812," February 1972, http://www.eas.slu.edu/Earthquake_Center/SEISMICITY/Nuttli.1973/nuttli-73-app.html (accessed 16 April 2006); R. Street, "A Contribution to the Documentation of the 1811-1812 Mississippi Valley Earthquake Sequence," *Earthquake Notes* 53, no. 2 (April-June 1982), http://www.eas.slu.edu/Earthquake_Center/SEISMICITY/Street/rstreet.html (accessed 16 April 2006).

[23]Fuller, *The New Madrid Earthquake*, 22-26, 33.

[24]Samuel L. Mitchill, "A Detailed Narrative of the Earthquakes which occurred on the 16th day of December, 1811 etc.," *Transactions of the Literary and Philosophical Society of NY*, Vol. 1 (May 1814): 281-307; transcribed by Susan E. Hough, May 2000, http://pasadena.wr.usgs.gov/office/hough/mitchill.html (accessed 16 April 2006).

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After the shocks died down and the excitement of the immediate disruptions faded away, the earthquakes began to take on new meanings in the memory of individuals and society in general. There was of course the customary use of the earthquakes by Christian evangelists as a rhetorical tool to warn sinners of impending judgment and to persuade them to get saved. But not everyone was inclined to accept supernatural explanations of the earthquakes prima facie. Empiricists like Brooks stayed busy well after the initial shocks with physical observations and record-keeping. Politicians such as Mitchill obliged diverse popular opinions, put forth considerable information about what had happened, and simply ignored supernatural hypotheses. Even poets, who tried to make sense of it all through nonliteral, metaphorical elucidations, did not feel compelled to invoke divine fiat. In this spirit, Henry Schoolcraft waxed poetic and scribed:

> And the earth, as if grasped by omnipotent might,
> Quaked dreadful, and shook with the throes of affright,
> Deep northwardly rolled the electrical jar,
> Creating amazement, destruction, and war;
> The rivers they boiled like a pot over coals,
> And mortals fell prostrate and prayed for their souls:
> Every rock on our borders cracked, quivered, and shrunk,
> And Nackitosh tumbled, and New Madrid sunk.[25]

This mixed utility of the earthquakes accentuated their multi-causal nature as well as their unknown origin, but apocalyptic imagery in depictions of the earthquakes did not

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[25]Henry R. Schoolcraft, "Transallegania or the Groans of Missouri," from *Journal of a Tour into the Interior of Missouri and Arkansaw . . . in the Years 1818 or 1819* (London: Richard Phillips and Company, 1821), quoted at "Local History Website of the Southern Missouri State University Department of History: Schoolcraft's Journal," n.d., http://history.missouristate.edu/FTMiller/LocalHistory/Schoolcraft/schcrftpoem.htm (accessed 9 August 2006). In Appendix A, compare "A call to the people of Louisiana," an apocalyptic ballad about the earthquakes that was composed by an unknown author about 1812.

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disappear. Based on the understanding of the earthquakes as "signs" and "wonders," memory of them persisted and new meanings for their outbreak were found. Travelers who came afterwards to the lower Mississippi region took note of their impact on people's memory and the physical landscape. One of these visitors, Charles Latrobe, contended in his travel notes that portents like the splendid comet, rivers flooding, unprecedented sickness, and a spirit of restlessness "combined to make the year 1811 the Annus Mirabilis of the West."[26] Latrobe, a London-born Moravian gentleman, toured the United States beginning in 1832, and his version of the earthquakes personified the earth as alive, distressed, and hungry. He said:

> The vicinity of New Madrid seems to have been the centre of the convulsion. There . . . the earth broke into innumerable fissures. To the present day . . . slight shocks . . . are there felt . . . strange sounds may at times be heard, as of some mighty cauldron bubbling in the bowels of the earth. . . . Thousands of acres with their gigantic growth of forest and cane were swallowed up, and lakes and ponds innumerable were formed. The earth in many parts was observed to burst suddenly open, and jets of sand, mud and water, to shoot up into the air. . . . Islands disappeared, and in many parts the course of the river was completely changed. . . . The gaping earth unfolded its secrets, and the bones . . . hidden within its bosom for ages, were brought to the surface. Boats and arks . . . were swallowed up. . . . And finally, you may still meet and converse with those, who were on the mighty river of the West when the whole stream ran toward its sources for an entire hour.[27]

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[26]Charles Joseph Latrobe, *The Rambler in North America, 1832-1833*, vol. 1 (London: R. B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1835), 102. Compare John D. W. Guice, "1811-Year of Wonders in the Mississippi Territory," *Journal of American History* 86, no. 1 (June 1999): 167-170; and Jay Feldman, "A Time of Extraordinaries," *When the Mississippi Ran Backwards: Empire, Intrigue, Murder, and the New Madrid Earthquakes* (New York: Free Press, 2005), 3-22.

[27]Latrobe, *Rambler in North America*, 110-111. Compare Eliza Bryan, letter to Reverend Lorenzo Dow, 22 March 1816, in *History of Cosmopolite* (Philadelphia: J. B. Smith, 1859), 344-346, quoted at "New Madrid Eyewitness Accounts," n.d., http://www .ceri.memphis.edu/compendium/eyewitness/bryan.html (accessed 16 April 2006).

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Latrobe also believed the year's concentration of wonders–comet, floods, and earthquakes–pointed to a supernatural explanation. Latrobe, however, moved beyond incredible and inexplicable occurrences to what could be postulated and explained reasonably. While conceding the emotional appeal of fabulous events that were beyond human control, he hinted at their value for replication by humans on the same landscape the earthquakes had touched. He summed up his argument:

> It was at this very epoch in which so many natural phenomena were combining to spread wonder and awe, that man too, in the exercise of that power with which his Creator has endowed him, was making his first essay in that region, of an art, the natural course and further perfection of which was destined to bring about yet greater changes than those affected by the flood and earthquake: and at the very time that the latter were agitating the surface, the very first steam-boat was seen descending the great rivers, and the awe-struck Indian on the banks beheld the Pinelore flying through the turbid waters.[28]

By transferring the "power" of radical change from divine to human initiative, Latrobe shifted the responsiveness of humans in general (i.e., "wonder and awe") to the Indians particularly (i.e., "the awe-struck Indian"). He thereby broadened the meaning of the concurrence of these wonders to include pro-settler and anti-Indian goals and designs. As a result, he regarded the pangs of the earth and the portents in the heavens to be providential signs for the westward trek of explorers and settlers particularly through new technologies like the steam engine that had been developed about the same time. This more complex reading of the earthquakes by Latrobe fit with the circumstances of the time as the country pressed further westward during the 1830s.

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[28]Latrobe, *Rambler in North America*, 103.

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Before Latrobe, others had been alert to these signs of the times. One writer to the *Connecticut Mirror* chided New Englanders for their lack of responsiveness. "Had such a succession of Earthquakes as have happened within a few weeks been experienced in this country five years ago, they would have excited universal terror," the writer quipped. The contributor believed the "extent of territory" shaken by the earthquakes was "astonishing" and suggested a ready explanation: "What power short of Omnipotence could raise and shake such a vast portion of this globe?" For this Christian interpreter of events, the evidence was too weighty to withhold judgment. He wrote:

> *The period* is portentous and alarming. We have within a few years seen the most wonderful eclipses, the year past has produced a magnificent comet, the earthquakes writhing the past two months have been almost without number–and in addition to the whole, we constantly "*hear of wars and summons of wars*." May not the same enquiry be made of us that was made by the hypocrites of old–Can ye not discern the signs of the times?"[29]

Another unnamed contributor to the *Louisiana Gazette and Daily Advertiser* posted a shrewd observation almost two weeks prior to the initial outbreak of earthquakes in December of 1811. The anonymous contributor remarked that:

> Fires, storms, tornadoes, freshets, duels, murders, and assassinations, have been more active . . . in the current year, than in any within the recollection of the oldest member of our society. Some of the *augurers* think those events are only the forerunners of greater calamities; that the wandering meteor called the Comet has been universally acknowledged by all nations of the harbingers of evil [*sic*, as the harbinger of evil]. Much as the deist and free-thinker may laugh at the signs and omens looked at and respected by the ancients, yet the evidence is strong in

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[29]"Signs of the Times," *Connecticut Mirror* (Hartford), 10 April 1812, quoted in Nuttli, "Appendix–Nuttli 1973 Paper, Contemporary Newspaper Accounts of Mississippi Valley Earthquakes of 1811-1812."

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> favor of the doctrine. Unfortunately for us, there is a science lost to the world . . . Astrology.[30]

This writer gave no hint about personal religious persuasion apart from belief in the "science" of astrology. This belief unquestionably went beyond traditional Christian teachings about God's transcendence over the world and providential care of its creatures. Astrological cults had their own ideas about control of the world and their own set of rituals performed by priestesses and priests (i.e., "augurers") to explain the dark secrets of the cosmos and foretell the future. This cut hard against Christian claims that the "word of God" was revealed and the "keys of Death and Hades" were held by Jesus and his apostles exclusively.

But even from a Christian perspective the anonymous contributor to the New Orleans newspaper was right about one thing. Astrology was an ancient practice with centuries of tradition in support of it. With a heritage that possibly exceeded that of Christianity, Deism, and "Free-thinking" combined (at least by a standard of longevity), astrology could do what progressive and rationalistic ideology could not do–grasp and make sense out of the mysteries of the universe. According to this contributor's cosmic assessment, the "wandering meteor" and other strange occurrences were ill omens of some dark disaster for humanity despite the disbelief of scoffers and the ridicule of rationalists. What "greater calamities" might occur remained unclear and undefined by the writer. In its uncertainty, the apocalyptic language of this non-Christian corresponded

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[30]*Louisiana Gazette and Daily Advertiser* (New Orleans), 4 December 1811, quoted in "Nicholas Roosevelt's 1811 Steamboat New Orleans: Louisiana Gazette," n.d., http://www.myoutbox.net/nrlgaz.htm (accessed 16 April 2006).

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to the apocalyptic rhetoric of many Christians. In its foresight of the earthquakes' imminence, it echoed the predictions of the famed Shawnee chief Tecumseh who two months earlier had prophesied the comet and the earthquakes and ascribed cosmic meaning to what was happening across the continent. But the "greater calamities" came and went, and the end of the world did not come. For all these apocalyptic visionaries, the value of their insights would have to wait until another catastrophic moment.

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CHAPTER TWO:
TECUMSEH'S PREDICTION OF THE NEW MADRID EARTHQUAKES

When viewed in their Native American context, the predictions of the Great Comet of 1811 and the subsequent New Madrid earthquakes by the Shawnee chief Tecumseh were remarkable and necessary. In general, Native American religious beliefs included apocalyptic elements, but these beliefs differed prominently from those of Christianity. Indian eschatology usually followed one of two broad categories: (1) stories in which the natural world collapsed or ended as a result of human irresponsibility; and (2) stories in which the cycle of degeneration and destruction preceded a time of rebirth or renewal. The balance of nature and the community of spirits was the key, not progress toward personal salvation as in Christianity, and this harmony was the goal of cataclysmic "purification" like the New Madrid earthquakes.[1]

In the first two decades of the nineteenth century, Tecumseh and his brother Tenskwatawa (Fig. 2.1), known as the Prophet, led an important renewal or revitalization movement among Native Americans in the Ohio River valley that spread across the eastern United States and Canada.[2] In 1805 and 1806, their work became intertribal in

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[1]Clara Sue Kidwell, Homer Noley, and George E. Tinker, *A Native American Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 149-165.

[2]Lee Irwin, "Freedom, Law and Prophecy: A Brief History of Native American Religious Resistance," *American Indian Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 35-55.

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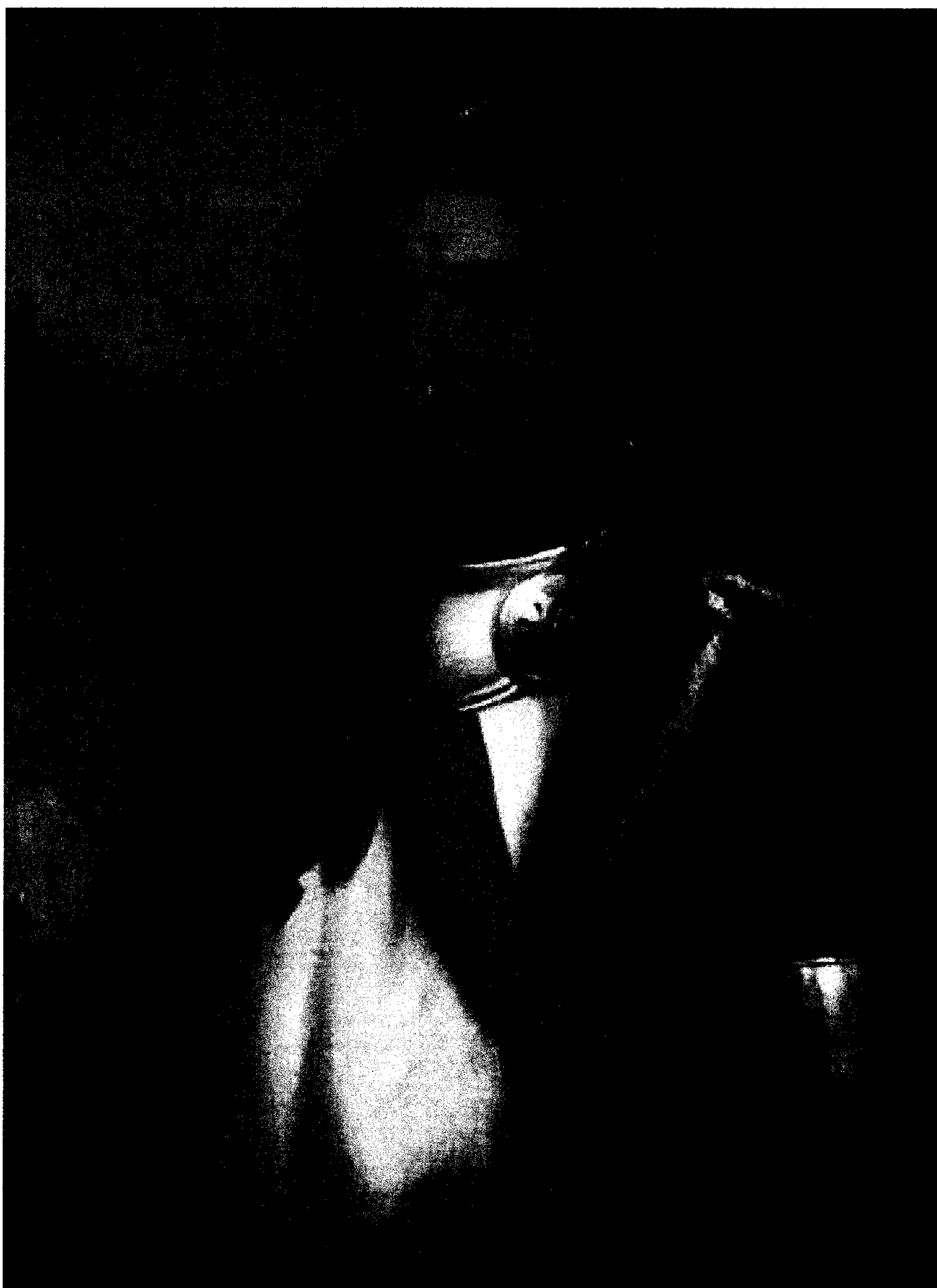

Fig. 2.1. *Tenskwatawa (The Prophet)*, copied by Henry Inman from an original by Charles Bird King, 1830s. Copyright 1996 Smithsonian Institution. From David C. Hunt, "American Collection: Henry Inman," n.d., http://inman.surnameweb.org/documents/henry-inman.html (accessed 3 September 2006).

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scope after the younger Tenskwatawa had a series of visions that included his foretelling the advent of a solar eclipse. Other natural wonders, particularly the New Madrid earthquakes, also were discerned by the two brothers. These Shawnee prophecies about widespread cosmic events have been dismissed as myth or folklore by skeptics who have thought the link between the written records and the oral predictions to be unverifiable. But, when properly understood, these predictions accentuated influential aspects of Native American cosmology and religion in light of and as a response to unending incursions on the tribes' ancestral lands.

The Shawnee and other tribes viewed themselves as subordinate to nature and not in control of it. They existed symbiotically with the natural world, and they drew strength from its power and mystery. They learned meaningful lessons by observation and meditation that affected their cosmology (i.e., beliefs about the world), their language and thought patterns, and their destiny. They and their world were one, so much so that predictions by holy people about unusual or infrequent natural phenomena did not seem odd or strange.[3]

The pioneer descendants of European Christians generally disdained the Indians as savages, uncivilized, and in need of true religion, and they judged them incapable of any genuine religious experience in their natural state. These Christian "invaders," who produced most of the written records about the Indians in the early nineteenth century,

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[3]See Joel W. Martin, *The Land Looks After Us: A History of Native American Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Kidwell, Noley, and Tinker, *Native American Theology*, 126-148. For the intricacies of the cosmology of a specific tribe, see Raven Hall, *The Cherokee Sacred Calendar: A Handbook of the Ancient Native American Tradition* (Rochester, Vermont: Destiny Books, 2000).

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had a clear prejudice against the legitimacy of predictive prophecy among natives, including the Shawnee. In a brief section about Tenskwatawa, for example, Thomas L. McKenney, who served as the federal government's Superintendent of Indian Trade from 1816-1822 and then as Superintendent of Indian Affairs from 1824-1830, described the justification for his bias in the following way:

> We have received, through the politeness of a friend, a narrative of the history of these celebrated Indians, dictated by the Prophet himself, and accurately written down at the moment. It is valuable as a curious piece of autobiography, coming from an unlettered savage, of a race remarkable for tenacity of memory, and for the fidelity with which they preserve and transmit their traditions, among themselves; while it is to be received with great allowance, in consequence of the habit of exaggeration which marks the communications of that people to strangers. In their intercourse with each other, truth is esteemed and practised; but, with the exception of a few high minded men, little reliance is to be placed upon any statement made by an Indian to a white man. The same code which inculcates an inviolable faith among themselves, justifies any deception towards an enemy, or one of an alien race, for which a sufficient motive may be held out. . . . With this prefatory caution, we proceed to give the story of Tenskwautawaw, as related by himself–compiled, however, in our own language, from the loose memoranda of the original transcriber.[4]

From this attitude of condescension toward natives, McKenney conceded the principle of strict veracity by the Indians "among themselves," but he could not rise above a belief in their habitual dissimulation when they interacted with "a white man" or "strangers." A strong Eurocentric bias with its criteria of what constituted civilization, education, and ethics blinded McKenney and many of his contemporaries from seeing and recording fairly the intricacies of native culture and religion.

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[4]Thomas L. McKenney and James Hall, *Biographical Sketches and Anecdotes of Ninety-Five of 120 Principal Chiefs from the Indian Tribes of North America* (Philadelphia: Frederick W. Greenough, 1838), 37.

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In remarks specifically about Tecumseh, McKenney emphasized the leader's mendacity and rationalized this viewpoint on the basis of what he felt to be native superstition. He summed up his assessment by saying:

> Tecumthe was not only bold and eloquent, but sagacious and subtle; and he determined to appeal to the prejudices, as well as the reasons, of his race. The Indians are very superstitious; vague as their notions are, respecting the Deity, they believe in the existence of a *Great Spirit*, to whom they look up with great fear and reverence; and artful men have, from time to time, appeared among them, who have swayed their credulous minds, by means of pretended revelations from Heaven. Seizing upon this trait of the Indian character, the crafty projector of this great revolution, prepared his brother Tenskwautawaw, or Ellsquatawa, . . . to assume the character of a Prophet; and, about the year 1806, the latter began to have dreams, and to deliver predictions.[5]

With such slanted explanations McKenney failed to portray accurately and could not possibly ascertain the nuances and mysteries of native beliefs and practices. By adopting this kind of prejudicial reasoning, those who recorded the culture and traditions of early nineteenth-century natives ironically made their own testimony highly suspect.

As noted in the previous chapter, William Pierce observed that the earthquakes frightened the Indians in the Mississippi valley and possibly killed many. But the upheavals were not completely unexpected among the natives. Over two months prior to their occurrence in December 1811, Tecumseh had predicted the powerful earthquakes. In his quest to persuade the southern tribes to confederate and repel encroaching settlers, the great orator visited the grand council of the Creek Nation that had assembled at Tuckhabatchee near the confluence of the Coosa and Tallapoosa rivers (in southcentral

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[5]Ibid., 42.

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Alabama).[6] His attempts to persuade Big Warrior, principal chief of the Upper Creeks, met with resistance. After lengthy and emotional appeals, Big Warrior consistently refused to pledge his people in confederation. Angered by the old chief's unwillingness, Tecumseh finally shouted at him, "Your blood is white! . . . You do not believe the Great Spirit has sent me. You shall know. I leave Tuckhabatchee directly and shall go . . . to Detroit. When I arrive there, I will stamp on the ground with my foot, and shake down every house in Tuckhabatchee!"[7] When the great comet appeared soon after, Creeks remembered other words from Tecumseh about his "strong arm of fire, which will stretch across the sky."[8] In December, when the earth quaked and houses in their villages

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[6]On Tecumseh's six-month tour from August 1811 to January 1812, see John Sugden, "Early Pan-Indianism: Tecumseh's Tour of the Indian Country, 1811-1812," *American Indian Quarterly* 10, no. 4 (Autumn 1986): 273-304. What effect Tecumseh' tour of the southern tribes had on the Cherokees, their response to the New Madrid earthquakes, and the growth of the Ghost Dance movement has been much debated. William G. McLoughlin, "New Angles of Vision on the Cherokee Ghost Dance Movement of 1811-1812," *American Indian Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (November 1979): 317-345; William G. McLoughlin, "Ghost Dance Movements: Some Thoughts on Definition Based on Cherokee History," *Ethnohistory* 37, no. 1 (Winter 1990): 27; Michelene E. Pesantubbee, "When the Earth Shakes: The Cherokee Prophecies of 1811-12," *American Indian Quarterly* 17, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 301-317; and Russell Thornton, "Boundary Dissolution and Revitalization Movements: The Case of the Nineteenth Century Cherokees," *Ethnohistory* 40, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 366-367.

[7]Quoted in Allan W. Eckert, *The Frontiersman: A Narrative* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967), 527-528. See too Glenn Tucker, *Tecumseh: Vision of Glory* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1956), 206-211; and Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson and His Indian Wars* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 1-5.

[8]Remini, *Andrew Jackson and His Indian Wars*, 4. This was an interesting play on words, since the name "Tecumseh" could mean "Shooting Star."

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collapsed, they knew that the Great Spirit really had sent Tecumseh to them, and he had reached Detroit, just like he had said.[9]

Native Americans regularly relied upon stories and anecdotes to unravel the many puzzles of the natural world. The effect of these earthquakes on native peoples was no different. One tradition, the Chickasaw story about the formation of Reelfoot Lake in northwest Tennessee, credited the earthquakes to the Great Spirit who stomped his foot furiously because Chief Kalopin (meaning "reelfoot") had disobeyed him.[10] But in spite of variant explanations for the earthquakes, the question of Tecumseh's prior knowledge of them must be taken seriously, and no one has found an adequate answer. Perhaps he took the rhetoric about cosmic disturbances from a common stock of phrases parlayed by charismatic native leaders. Or, as typically suggested by Christian interpreters, his utterances were embellished post facto by those who codified the oral tradition.[11] To the contrary, Tecumseh seemed to know about the shocks well in advance and verbalized that understanding on several occasions.

Tecumseh grew up in a world already in conflict. Born in central Ohio in 1768 to a Creek mother and a Shawnee father, Tecumseh witnessed conflict along the border

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[9]See the version in Albert James Pickett, *History of Alabama and Incidentally of Georgia and Mississippi* . . . , 3rd ed. (Charleston: Walker and James, 1851), 2:240-254.

[10]"The Legend of Reelfoot Lake," Reelfoot Lake: The Legend, n.d., http://www .reelfootlake.com/legend.htm (accessed 16 April 2006).

[11]Lewis S. Dean, "'Tecumseh's Prophecy': The Great New Madrid Earthquakes of 1811-1812 and 1843 in Alabama," *Alabama Review* 47 (July 1994): 163-171.

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areas during the Revolutionary War.[12] As a young leader, he and his brother Tenskwatawa resisted the rapid expansion of American civilization and opposed cession of Indian lands in Ohio to the United States in the Treaty of Greenville (1795).[13] A decade later after Tenskwatawa's visions sparked renewal among the tribes of the Great Lakes region, Tecumseh with his great oratorical skill turned the movement from cultural and religious revitalization toward intertribal confederacy.[14] Tecumseh combined the savvy of heightened political rhetoric with his innate disdain for the white man. He saw clearly and poignantly the plight of the tribes and their continual deterioration in face of unrelenting incursions on their ancestral lands. To remedy the situation, he strove to pull together the eastern tribes in a federated revolt against their enemies.

In the thinking of most Native Americans, this extreme course of action called for the use of apocalyptic language to invoke the aid of the celestial bodies, since these heavenly powers watched over and guided the natural world and its events. Tecumseh

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[12]For the classic nineteenth-century biography of Tecumseh, see Benjamin Drake, *Life of Tecumseh and of His Brother The Prophet*. . . (Cincinnati: E. Morgan & Co., 1841; repr., New York: Arno Press, 1969). Best modern renditions include R. David Edmunds, *Tecumseh and the Quest for Indian Leadership*, The Library of American Biography, ed. Oscar Handlin (New York: Longman, 1984); and John Sugden, *Tecumseh: A Life* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997).

[13]For a summary of the progress of westernization in the Ohio Valley, see Beverly W. Bond, Jr., "American Civilization Comes to the Old Northwest," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 19, no. 1 (June 1932): 3-29.

[14]For a good assessment of the record of what Tecumseh said and did versus what the Prophet said and did, consult Alfred A. Cave, "The Shawnee Prophet, Tecumseh, and Tippecanoe: A Case Study of Historical Myth-Making," *Journal of the Early Republic* 22, no. 4 (Winter 2002): 637-673; also, R. David Edmunds, *The Shawnee Prophet* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1983).

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acted accordingly. As leader of the revolt, he appropriately viewed himself as the mouthpiece of the Great Spirit.[15] True to his role as Shawnee chief and prophet for the Great Spirit, he waxed eloquent and uttered in a spirit of bellicosity the following words while encamped among the Creeks at Tuckabatchee in October 1811:

> In defiance of the white men of Ohio and Kentucky, I have traveled through their settlements–once our favorite hunting-grounds. No war-whoop was sounded, but there is blood upon our knives. The pale-faces felt the blow, but knew not from whence it came. Accursed be the race that has seized on our country, and made women of our warriors. Our fathers, from their tombs, reproach us as slaves and cowards. I hear them now in the wailing winds. The Muscogee were once a mighty people. The Georgians trembled at our war-whoop; and the maidens of my tribe, in the distant lakes, sung the prowess of your warriors, and sighed for their embraces. Now, your very blood is white, your tomahawks have no edges, your bows and arrows were buried with your fathers. O Muscogees, brethren of my mother! brush from your eyelids the sleep of slavery; once more strike for vengeance–once more strike for vengeance–once more for your country. The spirits of the mighty dead complain. The tears drop from the skies. Let the white race perish! They seize your land, they corrupt your women, they trample on your dead! Back! whence they came, upon a trail of blood, they must be driven! Back! back–ay, into the great water whose accursed waves brought them to our shores! Burn their dwellings! Destroy their stock! Slay their wives and children! The red man owns the country, and the pale-face must never enjoy it! War now! War forever! War upon the living! War upon the dead! Dig their very corpses from the graves! Our country must give no rest to a white man's bones. All the tribes of the North are dancing the wardance. Two mighty warriors across the seas will send us arms.
>
> Tecumseh will soon return to his country. My prophets shall tarry with you. They will stand between you and your enemies. When the white man approaches you the earth shall swallow him up. Soon shall you see my arm of fire

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[15]See the speech of Tecumseh to the Osages in Missouri, Winter 1811-1812, in John Dunn Hunter, *Memoirs of a Captivity among the Indians of North America, from Childhood to the Age of Nineteen* . . . , 3rd ed., ed. Richard Drinnon (1824; repr., New York: Schocken Books, 1973), 28-31; and, for Hunter's remarks about the speech, William M. Clements, *Oratory in Native North America* (Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 2002), 139-142.

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> stretched athwart the sky. I will stamp my foot at Tippecanoe, and the very earth shall shake.[16]

Various versions of this speech from the memory of observers or through secondhand reports have been passed along in the written sources. As Tecumseh traveled among the different tribes, he undoubtedly gave a number of speeches that had the same basic outline and used similar phrases and terminology. For sure, the connections in the lines of the tradition's transmission have been unwieldy and nearly impossible to ascertain. George Washington Campbell, a United States Senator from East Tennessee, illustrated this when he wrote about Tecumseh's speech to H. S. Halbert. He remarked:

> The speech of Tecumseh as he spoke it to the Creeks or Muscogees was very powerful, and the points were the very same to the Choctaws, Cherokees, Seminoles. It was told to me by Boles, the chief of a squad of Cherokees who split off from the Cherokees and finally settled in Eastern Texas, where Cherokee County is now. Stonahajo told of the speech to the Cherokees and the points were the same.[17]

Even by mid-century the redactions were many and complex. But the fact that no known transcription of this speech (or most of Tecumseh's speeches) was made at the time it was spoken detracts in no way from the plausibility of its basic reliability. As Eckert suggests, "The elemental similarity of the many accounts . . . lends considerable

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[16]Quoted in Wallace A. Brice, *History of Fort Wayne* . . . (Fort Wayne, Indiana: D. W. Jones, 1868), 193-194.

[17]Allan W. Eckert, *A Sorrow in Our Heart: The Life of Tecumseh* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), 764, quoting George Washington Campbell, letter to H. S. Halbert, n.d., *Tecumseh Papers*, Draper Manuscript Collection, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison.

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authenticity to what was uttered."[18] Above all else, the impact of Tecumseh's words on the Creeks and other tribes, not their scientific accuracy or predictive quality by modern standards, remained paramount. As suggested by a prominent biographer of the Shawnee leader, "The significant fact is not whether Tecumseh did or did not predict the earthquakes, but that the Creeks believed that he had done so. That belief was crucial, for it established Tecumseh's credibility."[19]

Tecumseh, like other tribal leaders who gave speeches that were "very smooth flowing, full of logic, and quite persuasive," tried to convince his listeners to bond together and resist the whites.[20] Tecumseh's use of rhetoric in order to bring about confederacy represented "a point of contact between two cultures in conflict" that "both shaped and was shaped by that conflict." In this respect, his speech to the Creeks underscored "the complex connections among rhetoric, culture, and politics."[21] But Tecumseh's speech at Tuckabatchee went beyond the rhetoric of politics to invoke religious belief and its incredible claim to prognosticate future occurrences.

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[18]Eckert, *A Sorrow in Our Heart*, 764. See also the comments by Edmunds, *Tecumseh and the Quest for Indian Leadership*, 148-150. For difficulties in analysis of Indian speeches, see David Murray, *Forked Tongues: Speech, Writing and Representation in North American Indian Texts* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1991).

[19]Sugden, *Tecumseh*, 251. Compare Drake, *Life of Tecumseh*, 145; and Joel W. Martin, *Sacred Revolt: The Muskogees' Struggle for a New World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), 114-132.

[20]W. C. Vanderwerth, *Indian Oratory: Famous Speeches by Noted Indian Chieftains* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 10.

[21]Robert Yagelski, "A Rhetoric of Contact: Tecumseh and the Native American Confederacy," *Rhetoric Review* 14, no. 1 (Autumn 1995): 65.

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Very much a part of Shawnee culture and religion, the ability to foretell or predict future events set apart those who were believed to be endowed with the gift of prophecy. Other Algonquian tribes, notably the Delaware and Kickapoo, and the Iroquois peoples embraced and respected the genius of the prophet in tribal affairs. The century of extreme crisis for Indian identity, about 1750 to 1850, witnessed the rise of great prophets for most of these peoples.[22] Given the circumstances at that time, the prophet's calling, codified by the Shawnee in their prophet's (i.e., Tenskwatawa) sacred slab and the tribe's moral code, was no idle wishfulness.[23] By referring to the earth shaking and fire crossing the sky, Tecumseh may have used "stock-in-trade" language. Most importantly, as representative of the Great Spirit, he called upon heaven and earth to act as witnesses for his movement against the atrocious trespasses on the Indians' ancestral lands. So it was not unusual or out of the ordinary for the great chief to be numbered among the prophets and make use of his gift of prediction when confronting a crisis situation.[24]

This as well conformed to Shawnee beliefs in many deities or spirits that superintended the natural world. The Shawnees like most tribes adhered to a hierarchy of spiritual forces. Theirs was mothered by Kokomthena (Our Grandmother) and fathered by their Supreme Being or Great Spirit who was called Muyetelemilakwau (the

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[22]James H. Howard, *Shawnee! The Ceremonialism of a Native Indian Tribe and Its Cultural Background* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1981), 196.

[23]Ibid., 201-202, 204-207.

[24]Ernest Thompson Seton and Julia M. Seton, *The Gospel of the Redman: A Way of Life* (Santa Fe, New Mexico: Seton Village, 1966), 88-94.

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Finisher).[25] Everything hinged on belief in these ancestral spirits, and nothing happened without their benevolent blessing or malevolent curse. For Tecumseh to utter words of federation in response to the settlers' usurpation of land or to talk of war against the government, as he did at Tuckabatchee, without reference to these spiritual forces would have been unnatural. Too, these chief deities spoke through the prophets who were their special representatives to people on earth. As the deities controlled the earth's natural forces, they chose to impart knowledge of these events through their prophets.

Shawnee cosmology, like conservative Indian beliefs generally, prescribed imminent catastrophe when the laws of the higher deities were neglected or broken.[26] In his efforts among the tribes, Tecumseh endeavored to uphold the sanctity of their ancestral lands and ways and thereby avert the anger of the Great Spirit and consequential disaster. His warnings were anything but trickery or political maneuvering. In the context of Indian cosmology and beliefs about prophecy, his predictions of the comet and the earthquakes make perfectly good sense. Had not Tecumseh voiced disapproval of those who resisted confederation and done so from the highest authority (i.e., the Great Spirit) with the direst consequences (i.e., the shaking of the earth), he would have failed to live up to his calling as a prophet in the fullest tradition of the Shawnee people.

In his remarkable prediction, Tecumseh linked the passing of the comet and the shaking of the earth to his call for united opposition to the westward push by white settlers. These would be the signs of Tecumseh's validity as the champion of Native

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[25]Howard, *Shawnee! The Ceremonialism of a Native Indian Tribe*, 162-170.

[26]Ibid., 168.

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American resistance. As was noted in the previous chapter, Charles Latrobe believed the comet and the earthquakes to be signs of divine favor on the movement of settlers to the West. This shows that the same cataclysmic event, or set of events, could be used by different religious traditions to reach antithetical conclusions. The ambiguous nature of the cosmic signs and the elusive apocalyptic language used to describe them allowed for varying interpretations. As will be seen in the next two chapters, this problem of uncertainty in apocalyptic language affected various groups of Christians during the frontier revivals that happened a decade earlier.

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CHAPTER THREE:
RELIGIOUS APATHY AND REVIVAL ON THE SOUTHWEST FRONTIER

Apocalyptic rhetoric served little usefulness for many of the settlers in the Old Southwest, since religious attachments were far from ubiquitous in early nineteenth-century America. Frontier life better suited self-sufficiency, and the early pioneers tended to more practical concerns than the refinements of religion that they either avoided or neglected. In his *History of Middle Tennessee*, A. W. Putnam portrayed the early pioneers as obsessed with the acquisition of land and the problem of Indians, but he did not include religious life or revivals at all.[1] Many pioneers had crossed the Appalachians to get away from the strictures of law and religion, and the harshness of eking out a living and the continual hostility of the Indians weighed against any serious involvement with religious organizations. Fittingly, the Synod of Kentucky's "Narrative of Religion" in 1815 indicated "much cause to deplore the state of morals throughout our bounds and the existence of that gross darkness that rests on the minds of many."[2]

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[1]A. W. Putnam, *History of Middle Tennessee or, Life and Times of Gen. James Robertson* (1859; repr., Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1971), 11-16, 48-49. Compare the minimal references to religion in the political deliberations of early Tennessee governors and legislatures in Robert H. White, ed., *Messages of the Governors of Tennessee, 1796-1821*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Commission, 1952).

[2]Robert E. Cogswell, *Written on Many Hearts: The History of the First Presbyterian Church, Shelbyville, Bedford County, Tennessee, 1815-1965* (Nashville: Parthenon Press, n.d.), 30-31.

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Protestant clergy repeatedly cited religious apathy as the chief tragedy that afflicted frontier people. In their view, thievery, drunkenness, sexual immorality, and slander tainted frontier life. One Methodist preacher in Tennessee described his circuit as "a Sink of Iniquity, a Black Pit of Irreligion."[3] James McGready, a Presbyterian minister from Logan County in southern Kentucky, lamented, "There is an host of vain, trifling amusements, such as balls, parties, merry-meetings, vain songs, frothy, unprofitable discourse, Sunday visits and diversions. Such as these fill the whole soul, and leave no room for holy things, for Godly conversations, or for Jesus Christ."[4] Because of this perception of a failed state of morals and religion on the frontier, Christian ministers took every opportunity to preach against what they believed to be corruption.

A good example was the practice of preaching moral lessons at public events such as civil executions. At the request of Colonel M. McClanahan, the sheriff of Rutherford County (Tennessee), Reverend Robert Henderson, pastor of the town's Presbyterian Church, preached an execution sermon to about five thousand witnesses who had gathered on a hot summer day in 1819 to watch the hanging of a young man. Henderson titled his message "Young Men Carefully Warned Against the Danger of Bad Company and Earnestly Dissuaded from Such Company." In somber language he warned his

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[3]Ibid.

[4]James McGready, *The Posthumous Works of the Reverend and Pious James M'Gready, Late Minister of the Gospel, In Henderson, Kentucky*, vol. 1, ed. Rev. James Smith (Louisville: W. W. Worsley, 1831-1833), 168. See also the fine study by Christopher Waldrep, "The Making of a Border State Society: James McGready, the Great Revival, and the Prosecution of Profanity in Kentucky," *American Historical Review* 99, no. 3 (June 1994): 767-784.

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listeners about the perils of associating with various types of "bad company"–evil females, the angry and quarrelsome, drunkards, the immodest and licentious, and gamblers. Although not excessive in his appeal to end-time punishment as a deterrent to inappropriate conduct in the here-and-now, the pastor did speak of eternal punishment in contrast to temporal punishment and cautioned, "Eternal misery in hell with sinful companions is often the consequence of being led astray by their society here." To conclude, Henderson couched this forewarning with an exhortation to parents and guardians to care for and discipline their youth.[5]

Early settlers did not have much time for formal religion, but the rough nature of frontier life–its violence and disruptions–often forced the rustic pioneers to make time for religion. Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist churches took the initiative to evangelize the frontier, and each became "a strong social factor in the development of [the] new land."[6] Energetic clergy of these three "democratic churches" traveled widely to meet the pioneers wherever they were. But clergy typically had to combine battle against spiritual evils with battles against Indians and other threats to the pioneers. For example, Gideon Blackburn, a Presbyterian circuit rider in southwest Virginia and the Watauga settlements of East Tennessee, traveled from "fort to fort with the soldiers who were protecting the settlers from Indian attacks" with "Bible and Hymnbook, as well as knapsack and rifle" in

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[5]Robert Henderson, *A Series of Sermons on Practical and Familiar Subjects*, vol. 2 (Knoxville: Heiskell and Brown, 1823), 300-316.

[6]Walter Brownlow Posey, *The Presbyterian Church in the Old Southwest, 1778-1838* (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1952), 7.

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hand.[7] Charles Cummings, another Presbyterian itinerant from the Wolf Hills in Virginia (the Abingdon area), would "put on his shot-pouch, shoulder his rifle, mount his dun stallion, and ride off to church" each Sunday and preach to his congregants, "every man of which held his rifle close to his side."[8]

Conversions were slow as these early itinerants faced the difficult challenges of greed for land and little spirituality among the settlers. But the presence of ministers in threatening circumstances generally was appreciated. When issues of life and death faced the pioneers, preachers infused a vision of hope, a bit of apocalyptic encouragement. In the fall of 1780, Samuel Doak, a Presbyterian minister who later started over twenty churches and an academy near Jonesboro in East Tennessee, mustered with militiamen just before their battle with British regulars at King's Mountain in North Carolina. The Reverend ended his prayer for the men with the rally cry, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon," to which the men replied, "The sword of the Lord and our Gideons."[9]

After the battle, the soldiers returned to their homes and became preoccupied with duties of frontier life. Spiritual matters had little staying power and got crowded out. This shift away from spiritual consciousness affected the frontier and the nation generally. Some credit the decline in religion after the Revolution to "demoralization of the war"

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[7]Virginia W. Alexander and Charles C. Alexander, *Historic Ebenezer (Reese's Chapel) Presbyterian Church and Cemetery: Maury County, Columbia, Tennessee* (Columbia, Tennessee: Mrs. Paul McAnally, 1968), 62.

[8]Posey, *Presbyterian Church in the Old Southwest*, 19.

[9]Lyman C. Draper, *King's Mountain and Its Heroes: History of the Battle of King's Mountain, October 7th, 1780, and the Events Which Led To It* (1881; repr., Marietta, Georgia: Continental Book Company, 1954), 176.

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and "spread of a rationalistic spirit."[10] Whatever the exact reasons, due to a sense of worldliness and neglect of religious duties, the General Assembly's pastoral letter of 1789 warned with "deep concern" that "the Eternal God has a controversy with our nation, and is about to visit us in his sore displeasure."[11] This echoing of the New England colonial jeremiads captured the seriousness of the situation to Presbyterian leaders.

Early Methodist preachers faced comparable difficulties. Benjamin Ogden, a Revolutionary War veteran from North Carolina, moved from Kentucky to Tennessee in 1787 to preach at the Cumberland settlements in Davidson, Robertson, and Sumner counties. He followed a typical Methodist approach for evangelizing the unchurched and organized converts first as "classes" and then as "religious societies" that eventually evolved into churches.[12] But Methodist communions remained small, and even by 1800 Kentucky and Tennessee had only six circuits with about twenty-five hundred members.[13] Church leaders attributed this partly to lack of interest in religion, but others put blame on

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[10]Ernest Trice Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South,* vol. 1 (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1963), 126.

[11]Posey, *Presbyterian Church in the Old Southwest,* 21.

[12]Herman A. Norton, *Religion in Tennessee, 1777-1945* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981), 15.

[13]Jesse Lee, *A Short History of the Methodists in the United States of America, Beginning in 1766, and Continued till 1809* . . . (Baltimore: Magill and Cleine, 1810), 280-281.

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James O'Kelly, an Irish immigrant and Methodist minister in North Carolina, and his schismatic "Republican" Methodists.[14]

America's first Methodist bishop, Francis Asbury, also had a slow go of it on the frontier. He preached at Nelson's Chapel near Jonesboro in May 1788. He passed near Elizabethton a few years later and received hospitality from Presbyterians there. He noted, "I must give the Presbyterians the preference for respect to ministers. We prayed, and came on to a kind people; but to our sorrow we find it low times for religion on Holston and Watauga Rivers."[15] Although travel through the wilderness presented dangers, Asbury confided in the fact that "we have formed a company . . . who are well armed and mounted. . . . If reports be true, there is danger in journeying through the wilderness; but I do not fear–we go armed. If God suffer Satan to drive the Indians on us; if it be his will, he will teach our hands to war, and our fingers to fight and conquer."[16] Asbury and his company survived the dangers, and the first Methodist conference met in Tennessee at Nelson's Chapel in the spring of 1793. Not to be discouraged, Asbury

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[14]See James B. North, *Union in Truth: An Interpretive History of the Restoration Movement* (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing, 1994), 13-19.

[15]Francis Asbury, *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, vol. 1, edited by Elmer T. Clark, et al. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1958), 753.

[16]Ibid., 754. Compare the impressions of Lorenzo Dow, a Methodist itinerant from Connecticut, when he set out for Nashville in the summer of 1803: "It turned in my mind how when I was in Ireland somebody would frequently be robbed or murdered one day and I would travel the same way the day before or the day after, and yet was preserved and brought back in peace; and the same God is as able to preserve me here and deliver me now as then–immediately I felt the power of faith to put my confidence in God; at the same time I observed the Indians." *Life and Travels of Lorenzo Dow, Written by Himself, in Which Are Contained Some Singular Providences of God* (Hartford, Connecticut: Lincoln & Gleason, 1804), 295.

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observed, "We have only four or five families of Methodists here. We had sweet peace in our conference."[17]

Two years later Asbury had a good conference on Nolachucky River with twenty-three ministers, and he preached to about two hundred in the Watauga region the following year.[18] Slow growth among the settlers hardly dispirited the hopeful Asbury. In East Tennessee again in the spring of 1797, he recorded:

> I am of opinion it is as hard, or harder, for the people of the west to gain religion as any other. When I consider where they came from, where they are, and how they are, and how they are called to go farther, their being unsettled, with so many objects to take their attention, with the health and good air they enjoy; and when I reflect that not one in a hundred came here to get religion, but rather to get plenty of good land, I think it will be well if some or many do not eventually lose their souls.[19]

In the fall of 1800, Asbury made his first trip to Nashville with his tiny entourage and William McKendree, a presiding elder from Virginia. On his initial visit to "West Tennessee," Asbury preached to over one thousand people. The next day he attended the conclusion of a four-day "sacramental solemnity" at Drake's Creek meetinghouse about two miles from Saundersville in Sumner County. Presbyterian ministers Thomas Craighead, William Hodge, John Rankin, and William McGee conducted the festivities where Asbury "witnessed scenes of deep interest."[20] Response to the gospel exceeded

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[17]Asbury, *Journal and Letters*, vol. 1, 753.

[18]Asbury, *Journal and Letters*, vol. 2, 48, 83.

[19]Ibid., 125.

[20]Ibid., 256-257. Compare his *Journal and Letters*, vol. 3, 201.

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anything he had seen in East Tennessee. Religious fervor gripped the frontier; the Great Revival of 1800 had begun.[21]

Various causes for the outbreak of revival in the early nineteenth-century have been argued. Some have stressed the ongoing struggle between Calvinism–its biblical convictions, its apocalyptic prospect of America as "the potential scene of the millennium"–and the pervasive rationalism immortalized by the nation's founders. After the turn of the century, the nation "seemed to be losing its revolutionary fervor and commitment." The country struggled "to develop its own institutions and sense of direction." Most unnerving was "the philosophical conflict between the world view of the Calvinists and the new Enlightenment rationalists. The former stressed man's depravity and untrustworthiness; the latter (called deists) stressed his innate goodness, free will, and reasonableness."[22] This view certainly fit with the origin of enthusiasm on the frontier through Calvinistic ministers like David Rice, known to many as "the father of the Presbyterian Church in Kentucky," and two revivalists who emigrated from Orange

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[21]The revivals apparently received little notice outside religious circles. "Four Kentucky newspapers publishing five hundred issues between 1788 and 1804 did not mention the revivals." Posey, *Presbyterian Church in the Old Southwest*, 25. The *Tennessee Gazette* in Nashville likewise omitted mention of the revivals from 1800 to 1804, although not all issues of the first year are extant. See Guy Harry Stewart, *History and Bibliography of Middle Tennessee Newspapers, 1799-1876* (PhD diss.; Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois, 1957), 137-138.

[22]William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 98-99.

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County, North Carolina in the 1790s–James McGready and Barton Stone.[23] But common people possessed little knowledge of rationalism and its prevailing world view except as they picked up these ideas from speeches, legal edicts, or popular sayings and proverbs.

Impetus for the revivals more likely came "from below" or from the people themselves. After all, *they* responded to the fiery messages of the spirit-driven evangelists, and *they* attended the camp meetings en masse. Richard McNemar, a Presbyterian minister who came to Kentucky from Pennsylvania in 1795 and participated in the Kentucky revivals, specifically credited the role of children. He noted:

> The work is still increasing in Cumberland. . . . It is in Nashville, Barren, Muddy, Gasper, Redbanks, Knoxville, &c. Children and all seem to be engaged; but children are the most active in the work. When they speak, it appears that the Lord sends his Spirit, to accompany it with power to the hearts of sinners. They all seem to be wrought in an extraordinary way; lie as though they were dead for some time, without pulse or breath; some longer, some shorter time. Some rise with joy and triumph; others crying for mercy. As soon as they get comfort, they cry to sinners, exhorting day and night to turn to the Lord.[24]

McNemar more importantly viewed the revivals as apocalyptic. He believed they were sent by God not to reform the churches but to usher in the kingdom of God. McNemar thought the revivals indicated "a near prospect of the true kingdom of God, into which many were determined to press." In reference to the religious fervor that occurred near

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[23]On their roles in the revivals in response to the dismal state of religion on the frontier, especially Rice and McGready, see Iain H. Murray, *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism, 1750-1858* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 145-159.

[24]Richard McNemar, *The Kentucky Revival; or, a Short History of the Late Extraordinary Outpouring of the Spirit of God in the Western States of America, Agreeably to Scripture Promises and Prophecies concerning the Latter Day* . . . (repr.; New York: Edward O. Jenkins, 1846), 20.

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Lexington, Kentucky, at Cane Ridge in 1801, he noted, "The late revival was not sent to re-form the churches. It did not come with a piece of new cloth to patch the old garment, to mend up the old hope with some new experience; but to prepare the way for that kingdom of God, in which all things are new."[25]

If some revival leaders seemed certain about the meaning of the evangelistic enthusiasm, others seemed puzzled about the extravagant and unusual work of the Holy Spirit that they witnessed. To them it was anything but contrived and quite inexplicable. Jesse Lee, the Methodist clergyman from Virginia who penned the first history of American Methodism, was able to ascertain generally the time of the beginning of the revivals. But he conceded, "I never could learn whether they began in the upper parts of South Carolina, in Tennessee, or in Kentucky. However, I believe they took place through necessity, and without design; and that there was no plan laid for them in the beginning."[26] Samuel K. Jennings, a medical doctor and Methodist Episcopal Church minister from Baltimore, agreed that "the blessed effects of Camp-Meetings were discovered as if by accident." In defense of the revivals he suggested, "But the discovery being made, those who were deeply interested in repairing *the walls and temple of the spiritual city of our God*, repeated the meetings with the happiest consequences."[27]

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[25]Ibid., 5.

[26]Lee, *Short History of the Methodists*, 279.

[27]Samuel K. Jennings, *A Defence of the Camp Meetings (North America) in Six Objections, Stated and Answered* . . . (Liverpool: H. Forshaw, 1806), 35.

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Jennings, like McNemar, imbued the revivals with apocalyptic meaning. In the preface to his *Defence of the Camp Meetings*, he reminded his readers of the cosmic struggle between good and evil: "Light and darkness must for ever stand opposed to each other. If either prevail, in proportion to its prevalence, the other must disappear. The kingdom of righteousness and true holiness must for ever be opposed to the kingdom of Satan, or the wicked inclinations of men. Every man is subject to one or other of these powers."[28] By using classic Christian rhetoric that expressed a dichotomy, Jennings left no doubt about which side of the struggle–an apocalyptic conflict–he championed in his defense of the revivals.

Other promoters of the revivals were more subtle in their analysis of the phenomena. They believed the void in religious experience on the frontier finally reached its limit for unknown reasons. Revivals filled that void, and the evangelists who had grown weary of the people's indifference to things spiritual gladly obliged the change. Barton Stone, a Presbyterian revivalist who moved to the Southwest frontier from North Carolina in the late 1790s, reflected on this development in his *Christian Messenger*:

> Towards the close of the eighteenth century, there was an unusual death in the professors of religion throughout the western country both among the preachers and the people. In the commencement of the present century, the more pious became seriously alarmed at the prevalence of vice and the declension of vital piety. They agreed to meet often in prayer to God to revive religion, which appeared ready to die.[29]

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[28]Ibid., 9.

[29]Barton W. Stone, "History of the Christian Church in the West," *Christian Messenger*, vol. 1 (24 February 1827), quoted in Hoke Smith Dickinson, ed., *The Cane Ridge Reader* (Paris, Kentucky: Cane Ridge Preservation Project, 1972), 1.

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But if Stone could not pinpoint precisely the human agencies of the revivals, he did not waver in his convictions about their divine source: "Their prayers reached the ears of the Lord; *he answered by fire*, for he poured out his spirit in a way almost miraculous. This powerful work was first experienced in Tennessee, and in the lower parts of [Kentucky], among the Presbyterians, in the summer or fall of 1800."[30]

Stone had been influenced deeply by two revivalists–William Hodge and James McGready–at Guilford Academy in North Carolina, and he felt acutely the need for greater spirituality on the frontier. After his ordination in 1796, he traveled to Tennessee and saw firsthand the apathy among the "religious societies." His depiction of the revivals epitomized his own internal struggle with Satan and the "danger" inherent in an unregenerate world. Concerning the curious "bodily agitations or exercises" that affected the masses, he said, "I have seen many a pious person fall in the same way from a sense of the danger of their unconverted children, brothers, or sisters–from a sense of the danger of their neighbors, and of the sinful world. I have heard them agonizing in tears and strong crying for mercy to be shown to sinners, and speaking like angels to all around."[31]

The gospel that Stone and other revivalists preached put emphasis on personal salvation rather than any global or cosmic redemption. For Stone, salvation of the world could not happen without salvation of the individual. For this reason he lamented the competition and distress among the Christian denominations. "Who shall be the greatest

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[30]Ibid.

[31]Barton W. Stone, *The Biography of B. W. Stone, Written by Himself* (1847; repr., Cincinnati: Restoration Reprint Library, n.d.), 39-40.

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seemed to be the spirit of the contest–the salvation of a ruined world was no longer the burden, and the spirit of prayer in mourning took its flight from the breasts of many preachers and people," he opined.[32] But Stone did not fail to place the lack of concern for the unsaved and the need for genuine spirituality among the masses in its universal perspective. One of his revival hymns expressed this poignantly:

> O, how I long to see the hour
> When sin and death shall lose their power!
> When all the world, both great and small,
> Shall own thee Sov'reign Lord of all!
>
> Thou bleeding Lamb–thou mighty God!
> O, spread thy conquests far abroad!
> Thy kingdom come, exalt thy fame,
> Let all the world bow to thy name!
>
> Shout, Christians, shout the Lord has come!
> Prepare, prepare to make him room!
> On earth he reigns, we feel him near!
> The signs of glory now appear![33]

This expectation of Stone followed postmillennial theology that envisioned the kingdom of God to be set up on earth. As Elder John Rogers, Stone's contemporary and biographer, observed, "It was in 1804 that the glorious era dawned, which is to witness the regeneration of the world." This was the year Stone and other Kentucky ministers dissolved affiliation with Presbyterianism and issued their "Last Will and Testament of

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[32]Ibid., 46.

[33]Ibid., 316-317.

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the Springfield Presbytery."[34] But this intense anticipation of the world's regeneration and a "glorious era" of salvation on the frontier did not come without serious prodding.

At Hampden-Sydney College in Virginia some years earlier (Fig. 3.1), Joseph Alleine's *Alarm to Unconverted Sinners*[35] sparked a spiritual fire and resulted in the sudden conversion of students Cary Allen, James Blythe, William Hill, and Clement Read who were castigated as fanatics by fellow students. In this awakening of the late 1780s, Reverend Blair Smith, the president of the college, mediated the dispute and kept the revival fires burning by inviting the young men to join him in his parlor for prayer and study. President Smith's efforts touched many including James McGready, a newly licensed Presbyterian minister who was traveling from Pennsylvania to North Carolina in the fall of 1788. McGready was deeply affected by what he heard and saw at the college and took these impressions with him to his pastorate in North Carolina and later to the Kentucky frontier.[36]

Unlike his convert and co-revivalist William Hodge who emphasized God's grace in his preaching, McGready adopted a hellfire approach in his evangelistic efforts. In apocalyptic fashion he argued like a "son of thunder" that biblical images of hell such as

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[34]Ibid., 408.

[35]Alleine (1634-1668), an English Nonconformist divine and contemporary of John Wesley's grandfather, left his puritan mark on England and America with the publication and subsequent circulation of his *Alarm to Unconverted Sinners* . . . (repr., London: C. Dilly, T. N. Longman, and T. Wiche, 1797).

[36]Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, vol. 1, 128-130.

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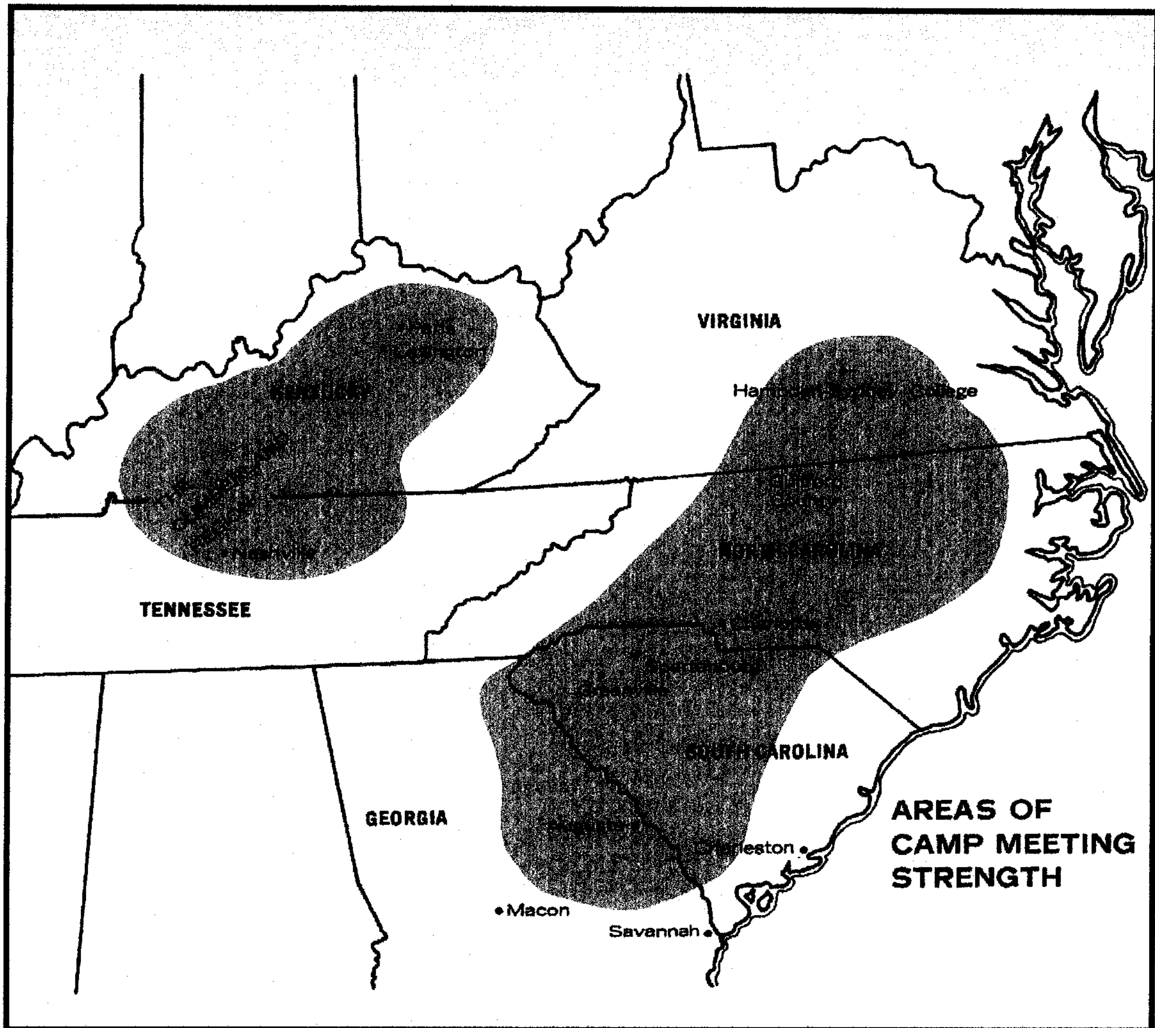

Fig. 3.1. Areas of camp meeting strength. John B. Boles, *The Great Revival, 1787-1805* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1972), inside front cover.

"lake of fire" and "bottomless pit" should not be taken literally. For McGready, divine punishment in hell would be much worse! He preached:

> It is equally impossible in the present state, to form just conceptions of the torments of hell, which are prepared by a holy God for impenitent sinners. We shall suppose that all the pains and torments that ever were endured, by all the human bodies which ever existed upon the earth, were inflicted on one person; add to this ten thousand times the horror endured by Spira, yet all this would not

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> bear the same comparison to the torments of the damned in hell, that the scratch of a pin will do to a sword run through a man's vitals.[37]

Due to the severity of eternal punishment, McGready believed God saved sinners "by power, for he plucks them as brands from the burning, in the day of their conversion to God; he snatches them out of the jaws of the roaring Lion of hell." McGready repeatedly affirmed to his parishioners that God had saved millions "from the jaws of the roaring Lion of hell."[38]

Because of apocalyptic invectives like this to churchgoers at Stony Creek, North Carolina, especially against the common and favorite entertainments of horse racing and gambling, McGready became unpopular. After rabble rousers broke benches in his meetinghouse, burned the pulpit, and threatened him with a letter written in blood, he felt the inspiration to leave suddenly for the West. In 1796, McGready received and accepted a call to the Gasper, Muddy, and Red River churches in Logan County in southwest Kentucky and went to preach his hellfire brand of gospel on the frontier.[39]

In Kentucky during the summers of 1798 and 1799, McGready sensed the evil mood of the moment and exhorted his congregations to fervent prayer on Saturdays and Sundays to prepare for Pentecost, repentance, and redemption. In doing this, McGready acted on the General Assembly's request that a day be devoted to fasting, humiliation,

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[37]McGready, *Posthumous Works*, vol. 1, 63.

[38]Ibid., 24, 40.

[39]Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, vol. 1, 131.

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and prayer to bring the people of the West back from "Egyptian darkness."[40] But McGready, a tall man with dark eyes and a stubborn manner, went beyond the directive and inveighed against the lack of vibrancy in the frontier churches. His message did not go unnoticed, as parishioners broke free from the bonds of liturgical restraint and experienced with full emotions the awfulness of the prospect of eternal damnation. The revivalist vividly remembered:

> Presently several persons under deep conviction broke forth into a loud outcry–many fell to the ground, lay powerless, groaning, praying and crying for mercy. As I passed through the multitude, a woman, lying in awful distress called me to her. Said she, "I lived in your congregation in Carolina; I was a professor, and often went to the communion; but I was deceived; I have no religion; I am going to hell."
>
> In another place an old, gray-headed man lay in an agony of distress, addressing his weeping wife and children in such language as this: "We are all going to hell together; we have lived prayerless, ungodly lives; the work of our souls is yet to begin; we must get religion, or we will all be damned."[41]

According to McGready, many such incidents of apocalyptic distress occurred. "Time would fail me to mention every instance of this kind," he figured.

In the summer of 1800, enthusiasm spread and broke out in several of the Cumberland settlements in Tennessee. McGready had realized the importance of the dawn of a new century and the spread of revival fervor as part of apocalyptic expectations. "The year 1800," he wrote, "exceeds all that my eyes ever beheld upon earth. All that I have related is only, as it were, an introduction. . . . All that work is only like a few drops before a mighty rain, when compared with the wonders of Almighty

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[40]Posey, *Presbyterian Church in the Old Southwest*, 21.

[41]McGready, *Posthumous Works*, vol. 1, xi.-xii.

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Grace, that took place in the year 1800."[42] To facilitate this spread of evangelistic fervor, several members from the Shiloh Church in Sumner County had attended the revivals in Kentucky and were converted.

When they returned home, they became like "fire in dry stubble" among their neighbors.[43] On his travels to the area, Stone recalled receiving en route "an account of a wonderful meeting at Shiloh in Tennessee–that many had been struck down as dead, and continued for hours apparently breathless, and afterwards rose, praising God for his saving mercy–that the saints were all alive–and sinners all around weeping and crying for mercy–and that multitudes were converted and rejoicing in God."[44] This seemed all the more remarkable, since many of the Tennesseans had attended the sacramental meeting at Gasper River out of "great curiosity to see the work, yet prepossessed with strong prejudices against it."[45]

By early fall, revivals or "Sacraments" occurred regularly in the Cumberland settlements of Sumner County. Gatherings of the church for protracted sacramental meetings with accompanying celebrations were not anything new but followed established Presbyterian traditions. By calling these gatherings, Presbyterian ministers

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[42]Ibid., xii.

[43]B. W. McDonnold, *History of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church*, 4th ed. (Nashville: Board of Publication of Cumberland Presbyterian Church, 1899), 13-14.

[44]Stone, "History of the Christian Church in the West," quoted in Dickinson, *Cane Ridge Reader*, 1.

[45]McGready, *Posthumous Works*, vol. 1, xiv. Compare McDonnold, *History of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church*, 13.

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modeled a seventeenth-century practice in Scotland where Presbyterians traveled long distances to observe the Lord's Supper. These gatherings blended entertainment and social events with solemn religious rituals in open-air festivities that often exhibited "a carnival atmosphere."[46]

Not everyone in the Cumberland region agreed with the purpose and proceedings of these camp meetings. For example, on the Red River northwest of Gallatin, Reverends Craighead and Rankin of Nashville assisted in a sacramental camp meeting at Robert Shaw's that was hosted by McGready and William McGee, the minister of Shiloh Church. According to John McGee, the older brother of William and a Methodist preacher himself, one dissenter at this gathering "got mad, cursed the people, and said he would go home, but before he got out of sight of the camp-ground, a tree fell on him, and he was carried home dead."[47]

In September at Blythe's Big Spring on Desha's Creek, another meeting brought together Presbyterian and Methodist clergy "in a blaze of fraternity."[48] Since Presbyterian ministers typically hosted these meetings as sacramental gatherings to observe the Lord's Supper, the Baptists normally did not participate due to their strict practice of "closed"

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[46]James H. Moorhead, "*The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery* from the Perspective of Presbyterian History," *Discipliana* 64, no. 2 (Summer 2004), 35.

[47]Walter T. Durham, *The Great Leap Westward: A History of Sumner County, Tennessee from Its Beginnings to 1805* (Gallatin, Tennessee: Sumner County Public Library Board, 1969), 166.

[48]John Abernathy Smith, *Cross and Flame: Two Centuries of United Methodism in Middle Tennessee* (Nashville: Commission on Archives and History of the Tennessee Conference, 1984), 49.

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communion. A few Baptists occasionally attended the camp meetings and received censure as a result.[49] But Presbyterian and Methodist communicants responded marvelously, as the meeting lasted four days and nights and, according to John McGee, "many thousands of people attended." McGee colorfully recounted, "The people fell before the word like corn before a storm of wind, and many rose from the dust with divine glory shining in their countenances."[50]

One Methodist who benefitted from the revival at Desha's Creek was John Grenade who had come to Tennessee from North Carolina in 1798. Because he had rejected an earlier call to preach, Grenade was stricken by fits of depression. He attended the Presbyterian sacrament and there "obtained deliverance from bondage. . . . Heaven was pictured upon the face of the happy man, and his language, as though learned in a new world, was apparently superhuman. He spoke of angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim, and dwelt with rapture upon the fulness and freeness of the gospel of Christ for the salvation of a lost world."[51] The camp meeting with its appeal to apocalyptic imagery touched and changed Grenade, and he became an effective but perhaps erratic preacher.

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[49]Walter Brownlow Posey, *The Baptist Church in the Lower Mississippi Valley, 1776-1845* (Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1957), 55-56; O. W. Taylor, *Early Tennessee Baptists, 1769-1832* (Nashville: Executive Board of the Tennessee Baptist Convention, 1957), 155.

[50]Quoted in John B. M'Ferrin, *History of Methodism in Tennessee,* vol. 1 (Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1888), 296.

[51]John Carr, *Early Times in Middle Tennessee* (1857; repr., Nashville: Parthenon Press, 1958), 56-57.

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In October, another extended meeting at McGee's Beech Church on Drake's Creek drew substantial crowds and notable Presbyterian and Methodist divines. Francis Asbury, who had visited Nashville for the first time the day before, saw the excitement throughout the night and noted:

> Yesterday, and especially during the night, were witnessed scenes of deep interest. . . . The *stand* was in the open air, embosomed in a wood of lofty beech trees. The ministers of God, Methodists and Presbyterians, united their labours and mingled with the childlike simplicity of primitive times. Fires blazing here and there dispelled the darkness and the shouts of the redeemed captives, and the cries of precious souls struggling into life, broke the silence of midnight. The weather was delightful; as if heaven smiled, whilst mercy flowed in abundant streams of salvation to perishing sinners.[52]

Asbury evidently noticed but did not elaborate on the physical phenomena associated with the frontier revivals–the screams for mercy, the cries of penitence, the moans of sorrow, and the shouts of thanksgiving. Amazing and unusual things–with apocalyptic implications–happened to people during the excitement of the camp meetings. They were slain in the Holy Spirit; they had uncontrollable bodily movements; they got the "jerks."[53]

With the coming of the revivals and their peculiar phenomena to the early nineteenth-century frontier, the significance of apocalyptic ideas heightened. Apocalyptic imagery had played a subsidiary role in early efforts of frontier preachers to convert the general populace. Ministers like McGready and Stone certainly made use of traditional Christian teachings about the end of time and a person's eternal destiny to motivate and convict, but they gave priority to teachings about personal salvation and right living. This

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[52]Asbury, *Journal and Letters*, vol. 2, 257.

[53]For a vivid description, see in Appendix B the memoirs of Thomas Calhoon, who served as a minister in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church from 1810 to 1855.

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was true because religion itself was not an engaging objective for most settlers. The revivals changed that in two ways.

First, the revivals promoted interdenominational cooperation and broke down some of the theological barriers that separated the major Protestant churches. Concerns of regional or global import replaced local, sectarian considerations. Second, the revivals advanced a religion of emotional rather than rational experience. For many, the logic of the creed and doctrinal correctness gave way to the feelings of the moment and personal testimony. This altered the way apocalyptic ideas were used and understood. For some, the excitement of the revivals and their phenomena indicated the arrival of the kingdom of God and the establishment of utopian society. Others, who felt obligated to creedal teachings, cautioned against extreme revival practices and thinking. This led invariably to fragmentation within major faith groups like the Presbyterians and the formation of new faith groups. The economy of American religious pluralism was alive and well on the frontier, and apocalyptic ideas played an influential role in this religious formation.

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CHAPTER FOUR:
REVIVAL PHENOMENA AND RELIGIOUS DIVISION ON THE FRONTIER

In many places of the Old Southwest, strange bodily phenomena accompanied the early nineteenth-century revivals. These physical manifestations indicated the excitability of the populace as well as the experimental nature of frontier religion. The immediate impact of religious ideas on the body was nothing new in the history of religion or even on the American frontier. Perceived by many to be a result of divine intervention and a sign of the coming kingdom of God, these physical manifestations attended large gatherings on the frontier (Fig. 4.1) and were driven by social influences and concerns.[1] In their assessments of who was or was not saved, revival leaders certainly noted the influence of these physical "exercises" or "jerks" on individuals, an influence that cut across strict denominational lines. But the greater legacy of these puzzling bodily gyrations fell to the reordering of ecclesiastical structures, and much of this shuffling took place with respect to teachings about personal salvation and extreme apocalyptic ideas that accompanied these unusual phenomena.

During the summer of 1801, the revival at Cane Ridge near Lexington, Kentucky, drew large crowds and had the greatest outpouring of the so-called "jerks" or "bodily

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[1]See the fine discussion of the social significance of the camp meetings in Ellen Eslinger, *Citizens of Zion: The Social Origins of Camp Meeting Revivalism* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 213-241.

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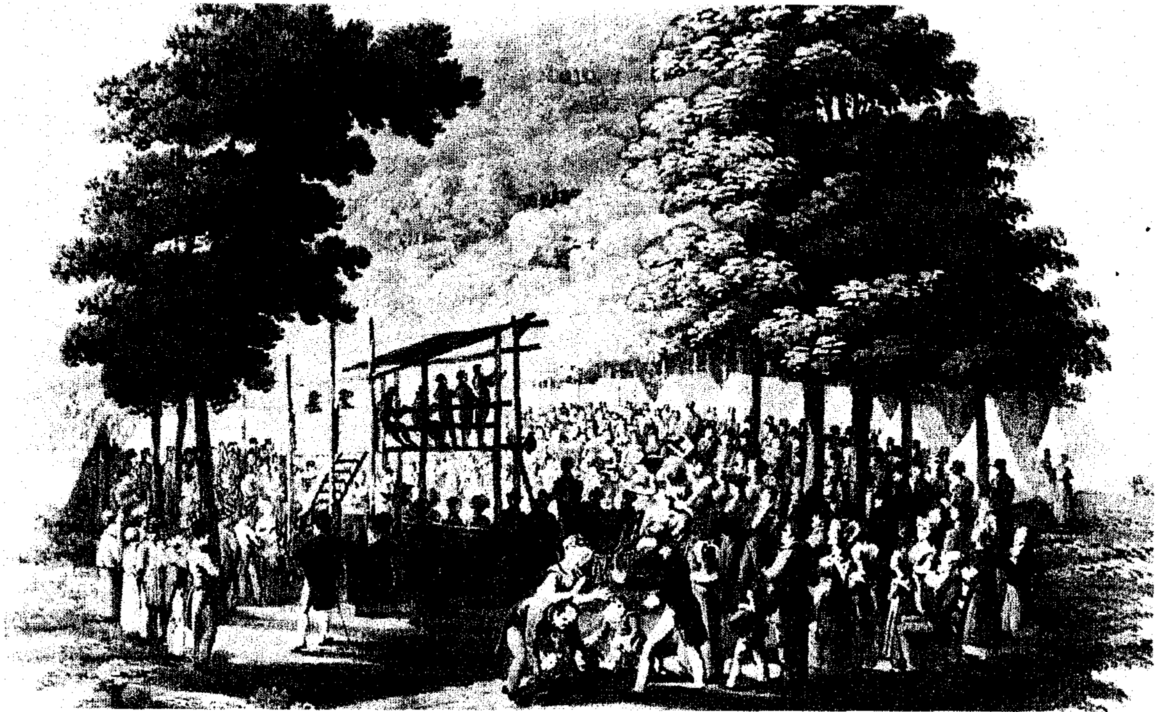

Fig. 4.1. Methodist camp meeting. Library of Congress (public domain), from Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity, Vol. 2, The Reformation to the Present Day* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1985), 247.

agitations or exercises."[2] Barton Stone recalled, "In the spring of 1801, the Lord visited his people in the north of Kentucky. In Fleming, and in Concord, one of my congregations, the same strange and mighty works were seen and experienced. . . . From this meeting, the flame spread all around and increased til the ever-memorable meeting at Caneridge, in August following."[3] Peter Cartwright estimated "twelve to twenty-five

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[2]Barton W. Stone, *The Biography of B. W. Stone, Written by Himself* (1847; repr., Cincinnati: Restoration Reprint Library, n.d.), 39. See as well Paul K. Conkin, *Cane Ridge: America's Pentecost* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 64-114.

[3]Barton W. Stone, "History of the Christian Church in the West," *Christian Messenger*, vol. 1 (24 February 1827), quoted in Hoke Smith Dickinson, ed., *The Cane Ridge Reader* (Paris, Kentucky: Cane Ridge Preservation Project, 1972), 2.

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thousand people" in attendance at the Cane Ridge encampments and noted that "hundreds fell prostate under the mighty power of God, as men slain in battle." Cartwright related widespread occurrence of "the heavenly fire" and gave as proof the following testimony: "It was said by truthful witnesses, that at times more than one thousand persons broke out into loud shouting all at once, and that the shouts could be heard for miles around."[4]

The "Kentucky jerks" broke out in Tennessee as well. Unlike Cane Ridge, the Tennessee revivals have lacked a distinct voice in American religious historiography. This could be due to affiliation of Tennessee's Presbyterian churches with the Kentucky synod and, in part, the frequent movement of preachers. But the year after the Cane Ridge revivals, Thomas Wilkerson, a Methodist preacher assigned to the Cumberland District, saw in Nashville "the greatest excitement . . . the people . . . jerking, running, dancing, barking like dogs." Lorenzo Dow, the eccentric New Englander who traveled to the South to observe the enthusiasm, reported news of equivalent sensations in the Cumberland area in 1804, and revival efforts at Roaring River in Overton County by Valentine Cook, the Cumberland District's Presiding Elder, had even greater incidents of the "jerks" the year after.[5]

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[4]Peter Cartwright, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright* (1856; repr., Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956), 34.

[5]John Abernathy Smith, *Cross and Flame: Two Centuries of United Methodism in Middle Tennessee* (Nashville: Commission on Archives and History of the Tennessee Conference, 1984), 51.

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News of the exciting but unusual phenomena spread fast and far. A picturesque account came from James Finley, a Methodist Episcopal minister from Wyandot County in Ohio. He wrote:

> It was reported that hundreds who attended the meetings were suddenly struck down, and would lie for hours and, sometimes, for days, in a state of insensibility; and that when they recovered and came out of that state, they would commence praising God for his pardoning mercy and redeeming love. This exercise was accompanied with that strange and unaccountable phenomenon denominated the jerks, in which hundreds of men and women would commence jerking backward and forward with great rapidity and violence, so much so that their bodies would bend so as to bring their heads near to the floor, and the hair of the women would crack like the lash of a driver's whip. This was not confined to any particular class of individuals, but saint, seeker, and sinner were alike subject to these wonderful phenomena.[6]

As a supporter of the revivals, Finley offered a prudent and apocalyptic estimate of this "excitement . . . most intense and astonishing." He related that "some thought that the world was coming to an end; others that some dreadful calamity was coming upon the country as a judgment of God on the nation; others still, that it was the work of the devil, who had been unchained for a season, and assuming the garments of an angel of light, was permitted to deceive the ministers of religion and the very elect themselves."[7] Like many fellow clerics, Finley did not accept the validity or divine origin of such curious happenings carte blanche. But he did not dismiss the possibility either.

On the whole, frontier Methodists avoided the extremes of religious experience. One example was the disciplinary action taken by Methodist leaders against John

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[6]James B. Finley, *Autobiography of Rev. James B. Finley, or, Pioneer Life in the West*, ed. W. P. Strickland (Cincinnati: Cranson and Curtis, 1854), 165. See in Appendix C the description given by Richard McNemar.

[7]Ibid.

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Grenade. Grenade told his congregation that, unless it rained the following Sunday, God really had not planned for him to preach. The conference formally tried Grenade for prophesying and revoked his license to preach for three months.[8] Another example was the personal experience of Peter Cartwright who rode Methodist circuits in Kentucky and Tennessee and afterward in Indiana, Ohio, and Illinois. Cartwright was no stranger to religious experience, but he reacted negatively to behavior he considered inordinate or out of bounds in light of orthodox Christian theology and practice.

Cartwright confessed in his *Autobiography* that he grew up "a wild, wicked boy" who relished the evils of "horse-racing, card-playing, and dancing." But he could not escape the hand of the Almighty that was at work in the revivals. Prior to his conversion, Cartwright remembered that he had "such a fear of the devil . . . that it really appeared to me that he was surely personally there, to seize and drag me down to hell, soul and body, and such a horror fell on me."[9] After three months and still without "the blessing of pardon of [his] sins," Cartwright attended an outdoor meeting hosted by Reverend McGready and the Methodist preacher John Page, and this encounter brought about his spiritual transformation. He recalled:

> To this meeting I repaired, a guilty, wretched sinner. On the Saturday evening . . . I went with weeping multitudes . . . and earnestly prayed for mercy. In the midst of a solemn struggle of soul an impression was made on my mind, as though a voice said to me, "Thy sins are all forgiven thee." Divine light flashed all round me, unspeakable joy sprung up in my soul. I rose to my feet, opened my

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[8]Smith, *Cross and Flame*, 51.

[9]Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 31, 37.

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> eyes, and it really seemed as if I was in heaven; the trees, the leaves on them, and everything seemed, and I really thought were, praising God.[10]

As a convert of the revivals himself, Cartwright could not deny his own experience as something divinely sent. As a pro-revivalist, he cautiously accepted the heavenly causation of what he considered "strange and wild exercises." He reasoned, "I always looked upon the jerks as a judgment sent from God, first, to bring sinners to repentance; and, secondly, to show professors that God could work with or without means, and that he could work over and above means, and do whatsoever seemeth him good to the glory of his grace and the salvation of the world."[11]

But Cartwright joined with other Methodist preachers and spoke out against "extravagant wildness." He concluded:

> From these wild exercises, another great evil arose from the heated and wild imaginations of some. They professed to fall into trances and see visions; they would fall at meetings and sometimes at home, and lay apparently powerless and motionless for days, sometimes for a week at a time, without food or drink; and when they came to, they professed to have seen heaven and hell, to have seen god, angels, the devil and the damned; they would prophesy, and, under the pretense of Divine inspiration, predict the time of the end of the world, and the ushering in of the great millennium. . . . This was the most troublesome delusion of all; it made such an appeal to the ignorance, superstition, and credulity of the people, even saint as well as sinner.[12]

As a diligent minister of Christ, Cartwright "watched this matter with a vigilant eye." If he opposed the error, he would face the "clamor" of the masses. If anyone opposed the visionaries, they would single out that person and pronounce God's judgment upon them.

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[10]Ibid., 38.

[11]Ibid., 46.

[12]Ibid., 46-47.

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Because of their combative attitude, Cartwright compared these "visionists" and their apocalyptic teachings to groups that had broken away from mainstream Protestantism and were considered to be heretical. He observed:

> They would even set the very day that God was to burn the world, like the self-deceived modern Millerites. They would prophesy, that if any one did oppose them, God would send fire down from heaven and consume him, like the blasphemous Shakers. They would proclaim that they could heal all manner of diseases, and raise the dead, just like the diabolical Mormons. They professed to have converse with spirits of the dead in heaven and hell, like the modern spirit rappers. Such a state of things I never saw before, and I hope in God I shall never see again.[13]

As a dutiful soldier of orthodoxy, Cartwright acknowledged, "I pondered . . . searched . . . prayed . . . and proclaimed open war against these delusions." Perhaps Cartwright judged "these delusions" from hindsight, since he wrote these memoirs more than fifty years after the events. Presumably, he preserved a plausible but exaggerated account of the apocalyptic emphases of his antagonists.

Cartwright and other revival leaders ostensibly tolerated and promoted apocalyptic behaviors when they remained subservient to traditional Christian teachings about personal regeneration and the soul's salvation at the end of time. James McGready in this manner could speak about apocalyptic events–Christ's second coming, resurrection of the just and the unjust, and general judgment–and their concurrence with God's vengeance and his judgment of atheists and sinners. He affirmed:

> The God of Glory sends his summons forth:
> Calls the south nations, and awakes the north;
> From east to west the sovereign orders spread
> Through distant worlds and regions of the dead.

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[13]Ibid.

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> No more shall Atheists mock his long delay;
> His vengeance sleeps no more; behold the day.
> Behold the Judge descends; his guards are nigh–
> Tempests and fire attend him through the sky;
> Heaven, earth and hell draw near–let all things come,
> To hear my justice, and the sinner's doom.[14]

McGready's vision of the converse of the sinner's doom notably envisioned the favorable experience of the saint's acceptance into heaven. His message, "The Christian's Journey to the Heavenly Canaan," articulated the believer's passage through resurrection and judgment–traditional end-time apocalyptic events–with themes of joy, companionship, and reunion. He stated:

> But oh! the joy unspeakable, the floods of glory that deluge the soul when it parts from the body. The case is opened, and the spirit is liberated from *this* heavy clog of clay. The angel bands draw near; bright shining seraphs surround it on every side, and, perhaps, the departed souls of their Christian friends, who were their companions, sat under the same sermons, underwent the same difficulties and enjoyed the same pleasures, join to conduct them to their Father's House. But who can describe the happiness of the soul when conveyed by the celestial host? He rises from the earth–soars aloft the heavens–leaves sun, moon and stars far behind, and beholds the respondent glories of the new Jerusalem, whose pearly gates fly open wide to receive him. He enters the city of God, welcomed by all the redeemed of the Lord, and embraced in the arms of Jesus.[15]

From this reading there can be no doubt that McGready's eschatology conformed to evangelical emphasis on personal salvation. Barton Stone similarly could link final judgment with personal redemption and write hymns for his congregations that spoke of cosmic reordering. In a compilation of Christian hymns, Stone included the following:

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[14]James McGready, *The Posthumous Works of the Reverend and Pious James M'Gready, Late Minister of the Gospel, In Henderson, Kentucky*, vol. 1, ed. Rev. James Smith (Louisville: W. W. Worsley, 1831-1833), 201.

[15]Ibid., 339-340.

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The Lord, the Judge, before his throne,
Bids the whole earth draw nigh:
The nations near the rising sun,
And near the western sky.

No more shall bold blasphemers say
"Judgment will ne'er begin;"
No more abuse his long delay,
To impudence and sin.

Thron'd on a cloud, the Lord shall come,
Bright flames prepare his way;
Thunder and darkness, fire and storm,
Lead on the dreadful day.

Heaven from above his call shall hear,
Attending angels come;
And earth and hell shall know and fear
His justice and their doom.

"But gather all my saints," he cries,
"That made their peace with God,
"By the Redeemer's sacrifice,
"And seal'd it with his blood.

"Their faith and works, brought forth to light,
"Shall make the world confess,
"My sentence of reward is right,
"And heaven adore my grace."[16]

As for Cartwright and McGready, the emphasis on end-time or apocalyptic events for Stone clearly rested on God's justice in both judging sinners and saving saints by virtue of "the Redeemer's sacrifice."

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[16]Barton W. Stone and Tho. Adams, comp., *The Christian Hymn-Book*, 1st ed. (Georgetown, Kentucky: N. L. Finnell, 1829), 284-285. Compare "mourner's songs," Charles A. Johnson, "Camp Meeting Hymnody," *American Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (Summer 1952): 118-119. And, compare Robert Henderson's eschatology in Appendix D.

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Eschatology (end-time doctrines) and pneumatology (Holy Spirit doctrines) for these revivalists necessarily supported traditional Christian doctrines about personal salvation and individual judgment. Thus, the Spirit's outpouring of "jerks" and other salient marvels in the last days remained useful and permissible. On occasion, though, the imagination and practices of revivalists exceeded the confines of strict Christian soteriology (salvation doctrines). Such tampering for many church leaders overstepped ecclesiastical boundaries.

Samuel Jennings, a defender of the revivals, strongly condemned the soteriology of the extremists and did so in true apocalyptic fashion. He spoke of "other instances . . . how deism which is so prevalent in the world and growing amongst *new light* Quakers, *new kind* of Presbyterians, Arians, &c. Which all are a kind of deism, which are six and half a dozen, and which I conceive to be antichrist, and as by John, alludes to the beast ascending out of the bottomless pit, and which only can be removed by the power of God in a *providential* way."[17] This kind of either/or language, the labeling of so-called deists as "antichrist," and the prospect of divine intervention to remedy the problem placed a wedge between supporters of the revivals. Additionally, those church authorities who looked with disfavor on the excesses of the revivals put pressure on the promoters of revival to conform. Caught up in the frenzy themselves and close to the people whom they served and who genuinely had experienced renewal, many revivalists refused to

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[17]Samuel K. Jennings, *A Defence of the Camp Meetings (North America) in Six Objections, Stated and Answered* . . . (Liverpool: H. Forshaw, 1806), 46.

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respond positively to what they felt was ecclesiastical coercion. This tension among the Presbyterians and others resulted in division.

Schism had not been lacking among the finicky Calvinists in the Old Southwest prior to the turn of the century, but the revivals of the early 1800s put particular strain on churches that could not be suppressed except by the exodus of nonconformists.[18] By 1804, for example, Stone and fellow Presbyterian ministers Richard McNemar, John Thompson, John Dunlavy, and Robert Marshall were judged to be Arminian or Socinian by the orthodox. Robert Bishop, professor of history at Transylvania University, labeled Stone's splinter group the "New Light" or "Socinian Church of Kentucky."[19] Because of attacks like this, Stone felt obliged to reply to accusations that he did not believe in the trinity or divinity of Christ.[20] Stone and his four colleagues refused to recant their heresies and instead rejected their Presbyterian roots. They produced and circulated "The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery" that called for a return to the scriptures for religious authority, rejection of sectarian creeds, and re-creation of the New Testament church on the American frontier.[21] Their short "Last Will and Testament"

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[18]On opposition to the revivals, see B. W. McDonnold, *History of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church*, 4th ed. (Nashville: Board of Publication of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, 1899), 39-47.

[19]Robert H. Bishop, *Outline of the History of the Church in the State of Kentucky, etc.* (Lexington, Kentucky: T. T. Skillman, 1824), 129-140.

[20]See his *Address to the Christian Churches in Kentucky, Tennessee and Ohio on Several Important Doctrines of Religion*, 2nd ed. (Lexington, Kentucky: I. T. Cavins & Co., 1821).

[21]Stone, *Biography*, 51-53.

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included brief excerpts of traditional apocalyptic language. The authors exhorted, "*We will*, that preachers and people, cultivate a spirit of mutual forbearance; pray more and dispute less; and while they behold the signs of the times, look up, and confidently expect that redemption draweth nigh."[22] Although important, apocalyptic events and eschatological teachings took a lesser role in this ecclesiastical split. The chief concerns of these revivalists and their principle reasons for severing connections with the Presbyterians involved issues of church government and religious authority.

Other disaffected Presbyterians made a bold decision, and their action gave revivalists another new organization for ministry. In February 1810 near Charlotte in Dickson County (Tennessee), Finis Ewing and Samuel King, two Presbyterian clerics who supported the revivals, organized an independent Cumberland Presbytery and ordained their first minister–Ephraim McLean from Logan County (Kentucky).[23] The new church benefitted from its connectedness to modified Calvinistic roots and the flexibility of novel evangelistic methods like the camp meetings. The Cumberland Presbyterians grew rapidly, but the founders of the new church infused little apocalyptic spirit into its lifeblood. For instance, the new church's *Constitution* contained only two brief sections on eschatology, "The State of Man, after Death, and the Resurrection from

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[22]Quoted in Edwin S. Gaustad, ed., *A Documentary History of Religion in America*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), 365.

[23]McDonnold, *History of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church*, 82-92.

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the Dead" and "The Last Judgment."[24] Both sections used apocalyptic language consistent with mainstream Calvinistic theology, since the Cumberland Presbyterians' controversy with "Old Light" Presbyterians involved soteriology more than eschatology.

For Presbyterians, Methodists, and the followers of Stone or "Christians," eschatology and its apocalyptic images served a legitimate purpose when secondary to soteriology. When disruptive of church order and structure, as thoroughgoing apocalyptic could be, eschatology had to take a subordinate place. As proponents of established denominational hierarchies, Presbyterian and Methodist clergy worked to set up churches according to fairly strict patterns based on long-standing traditions. The people on the frontier needed something different. Revivals and camp meetings gave them the freedom and the excitement they coveted. When apocalyptic ideas and practices broke out in response to the perceived call of the Holy Spirit, centrist revival leaders firmly attached such ideas and practices to core Christian teaching and avoided extreme apocalyptic tendencies. The greatest evil consequently occurred when those who had been enlightened by the revivals broke away from orthodox churches and joined thoroughgoing apocalyptic groups like the Shakers.

The Shakers, known as The United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Coming, held that their founder, "Mother" Ann Lee, represented the bodily fulfillment of the Messiah's second advent by her appearance in the New World. Shakers combined a simple communal lifestyle and lively worship rituals with what could be called realized

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[24]*Constitution of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in the United States of America . . . as Revised and Adopted by the General Assembly at Princeton, KY, May 1829*, 3rd ed. (Nashville: James Smith, 1834), 129-131, 134.

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millennial ideology. In their departure from traditional Christian beliefs, they believed themselves to be "custodians of truth miraculously received from heaven."[25] This represented a new authority and source for spiritual guidance, and such extremes proved too much for most revivalists. Cartwright lamented the need to do battle with the visionary Shakers, and Stone called the Shakers "our bitter enemies" who worked "magic, like Simon Magus" and taught "old woman's fables."[26] Because John Dunlavy and Richard McNemar, two of Stone's cosigners of "The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery," had defected to the Shakers, Stone decried their teachings. Stone lamented:

> Now the peculiar doctrines of the Shakers are, that Christ has come the second time in Ann Lee, without sin unto salvation–that we are now to obtain salvation by Ann Lee, and not by Jesus of Nazareth; that the final judgment is come and going on by the Shakers–they forbid to marry–they deny the resurrection of the body from the dead, or from the grave–they hold to auricular confession of sin, & c.[27]

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[25]Iain H. Murray, *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism, 1750-1858* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 173.

[26]Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 47; Stone, *Biography*, 62-63.

[27]Stone, *Address to the Christian Churches*, 101. See too John Dunlavy, *The Manifesto, or a Declaration of the Doctrine and Practice of the Church of Christ* (1818; repr., Cincinnati: Art Guild Reprints, 1968), 487-520; "A Brief Account of the Entrance and Progress of What the World Call Shakerism, Among the Subjects of the Late Revival in Ohio and Kentucky" in Richard McNemar, *Kentucky Revival; or, a Short History of the Late Extraordinary Outpouring of the Spirit of God in the Western States of America, Agreeably to Scripture Promises and Prophecies concerning the Latter Day* . . . (repr.; New York: Edward O. Jenkins, 1846), 87-105; and "The Great Revival of 1801, 1802, 1803, and the Introduction of Shakerism," from Josiah Morrow, *The History of Warren County, Ohio* (1882; repr., Mt. Vernon, Indiana: Windmill Publications, 1992), transcribed by Arne Trelvik, 20 August 2003, http://www.rootsweb.com/~ohwarren/ Beers/III/0267.htm (accessed 9 October 2006).

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What most bothered Stone was the disruption of Christian soteriology by the Shakers (e.g., "salvation by Ann Lee and not by Jesus of Nazareth") and their denial of a future resurrection and judgment by a scheme of realized eschatology (e.g., "final judgment is come and going on by the Shakers"). For Christian traditionalists, the Shakers had gone beyond the legitimate boundaries for apocalyptic teaching and practice.[28]

In the Old Southwest, the early nineteenth-century revivals began among the Presbyterians who suffered serious disturbances to their fellowship. Iain Murray, a Scottish scholar of Reformed theology and its history, fittingly recapped the damage:

> One Presbyterian minister became a Quaker; another finally took his people into union with Alexander Campbell's Disciples of Christ; McNemar and two others went the full distance into delusion to become Shakers and supporters of Ann Lee's prophecies; three formed the nucleus for what became the Cumberland Presbyterian Church . . . ; while others, including McGready and Marshall, who had been temporarily carried away, finally remained with their brethren.[29]

In fact, every Protestant church on the frontier went through tensions and division between 1800 and 1820 due partly to the upheaval created by the fervent revivals. Some time after, Archibald Alexander, a professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, offered an explanation of the revivals in a letter to his friend George Baxter, who was a professor at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia. He rationalized the unusual bodily phenomena and explained:

> The Spirit of God was really poured out, and . . . many sincere converts were made, especially in the commencement of the revival; but too much

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[28]For the Shaker view, see Stephen J. Stein, "'Taking up the Full Cross': The Shaker Challenge to the Western 'Christians'," *Discipliana* 65, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 93-110.

[29]Murray, *Revival and Revivalism*, 170-171.

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> indulgence was given to a heated imagination, and too much stress was laid on the bodily affections, which *accompanied the work*, as though these were supernatural phenomena, intended to arouse the attention of a careless world. . . . Thus, what was really a bodily infirmity, was considered to be a supernatural means of awakening and convincing infidels, and other irreligious persons.[30]

Alexander's identification of these phenomena as "bodily infirmities" or, as suggested by an even later interpreter, "nervous affections, which produced horrible convulsions of the body and contortions of the countenance,"[31] drew from insights of medical science and minimized the direct effect of perceived supernatural forces.

Many revivalists most likely would have disagreed with this assessment. They asserted in spite of the difficulties the God-given nature and purpose of the revivals and its accompanying phenomena, and often they did so in heightened apocalyptic language. Revivalist Jennings, for example, firmly believed in God's direct involvement in the cosmos and the revivals. He accepted the ancient chiliastic idea that one day of creation equaled one thousand years of human history, and six thousand years would precede the final epoch of eternal rest. "Six thousand years are now drawing near a close, when *rest* from wickedness shall take place," he affirmed. Jennings reiterated this ancient teaching as trustworthy and asserted that "omens of that good day are now at the door." He elaborated:

> What is the Lord about! Behold, the spirit of missionary in various lands encreasing! Behold the travail of Zion, swelling to solemn cry, "Thy kingdom

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[30]Ibid. On this important shift in the interpretation of religious experience, see Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999).

[31]Morrow, *The History of Warren County, Ohio*, transcribed by Trelvik in "The Great Revival . . . and the Introduction of Shakerism."

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> come, Thy Will be done" (which implies that every thing which stands in contrast as a hindrance must be removed) that God may send forth judgment unto victory! . . . Consequently what wonder if God should arise to shake terribly the earth, and sweep those as with the besom of destruction (by sword, famine, or pestilence, which are the scourages of the Almighty to correct the disobedience of the children of men) who stand in the way of others getting religion. . . . These meetings which originated in the order of God, undesigned by man, and of which the devil's kingdom, with deism, &c. felt the effect.[32]

Jennings no doubt would have rejected Professor Alexander's rationalization of the revival phenomena and its apocalyptic implications as merely "bodily infirmities." But as secularism continued to grip the nation and its religious leaders during the course of the nineteenth century, effusive apocalyptic rhetoric became less tolerable in centrist Protestant churches. Even on the frontier, those inclined to favor the Spirit's guidance toward visions with cosmic consequences increasingly found acceptance of these ideas in utopian societies and fringe religious groups. Others who dared not break away from traditional Christian institutions and thereby forfeit their salvation began to comprehend apocalyptic notions in the framework of postmillennial thought.

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[32]Jennings, *Defence of the Camp Meetings*, 46-48.

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CHAPTER FIVE:
RAPID CHANGE AND APOCALYPTIC TENDENCIES

The New Madrid earthquakes and the frontier revivals brought about important religious changes for many individuals and families in the Old Southwest, but significant socioeconomic and political changes also occurred from about 1780 through the 1840s. In less than three decades the trans-Appalachian claims of Virginia and North Carolina became the states of Kentucky (1792) and Tennessee (1796), respectively, and the young nation also added Louisiana (1812), Mississippi (1817), and Alabama (1819) to statehood. In Tennessee, the territory's population tripled from about 35,000 to over 105,000 between 1790 and 1800, and the state's population increased eight hundred percent to roughly 829,000 from 1800 to 1840.[1] Settlers and immigrants began to displace Native Americans in the state's Appalachian mountains, central plains and valleys, and the Mississippi delta (Figs. 5.1 and 5.2). Agriculture and farming replaced hunting and trapping as mainstay occupations, and slavery became widely accepted as a way of life. But did these rapid socioeconomic and political changes in the state of Tennessee spark instances of apocalyptic language? Was rapid change on the frontier seen as an indication of the end of the world or the beginning of the millennium?

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[1]*Return of the Whole Number of Persons within the Several Districts of the United States* . . . (Philadelphia: Childs and Swaine, 1793), 56; *Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington, D.C.: Robert Armstrong, 1853), ix.

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Fig. 5.1. 1818 map of Tennessee. From surveys by John Strothers (Philadelphia: John Melish and Samuel Harrison, 1818). Courtesy of Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Documents Collection Room, Map #1867.

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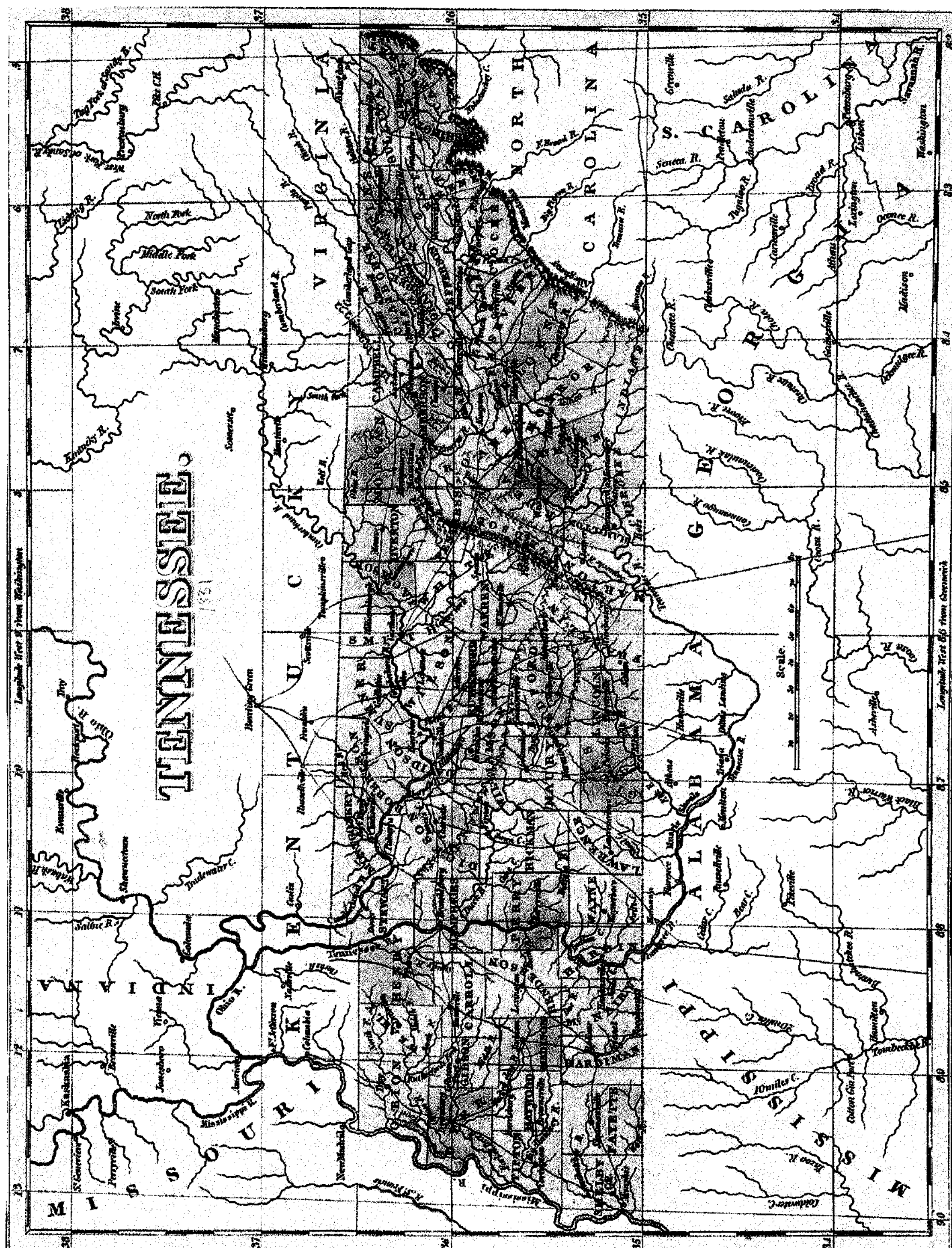

Fig. 5.2. 1831 map of Tennessee. By Young and Delleker, Sc. (Philadelphia: A. Finley, 1831). Courtesy of Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Documents Collection Room, Map #1874. Note the formation of new counties in territories that previously belonged to Chickasaw and Cherokee tribes.

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These changes coincided, particularly in agriculture and transportation, with equally significant advances in technology. An improved cotton gin enhanced the economic prospects of growing cotton, and this transformed the political and social fabric of the South and the central and western lands of Tennessee. The use of steam to propel water craft made raw materials and manufactured goods cheaper and more accessible through speedier transportation on the Mississippi and Tennessee rivers. By the 1830s, railroads augmented transport on the waterways with efficient movement of goods and supplies inland. Later, the invention of the telegraph ushered in the age of telecommunications. The world changed at such a pace that banking struggled to keep up with commerce, and law-making barely kept up with shifting political developments.

As early as the 1790s, Thomas Cooper, an English barrister-at-law who visited America's southwest region, sensed the dynamics of frontier settlement and the conflicts over legal claims. He stated, "For of law there is enough, claims for land interfering continually, rights being so laid upon another, that scarcely any body knows who is safe." Cooper had reason to be optimistic in spite of the hardships. He pointed out:

> The emigration to this part of the Continent has been amazing, and this is the best place in the world for people to remove to with large families, where they will find Providence sufficiently bountiful. . . . If the emigrant should be an enthusiast . . . he will think [this territory] the land of promise, and point it out to his children to be the spot for the millennium of the world, where the farce of titular dignity, and the parade of courts shall never be exhibited; where monarchy shall never intrude, to trample upon the rights of man; but a pure and equable republican form of government shall gradually introduce the practice of those virtues, which are consonant to the true nature of our species.[2]

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[2]Thomas Cooper, *Some Information Respecting America* (Dublin, Ireland: William Porter, 1794; repr., New York: Augustus M. Kelley Publishers, 1969), 37-38.

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Cooper, an outsider, spoke from the perspective of settlers and immigrants of European descent rather than that of displaced Indians or of enslaved blacks. As he suggested, the land promised prosperity and an amiable form of government–a veritable "millennium of the world"–to those who came hopefully to the Old Southwest. Cooper compared the millennium to what he thought was the best form of civilized government, a type of government that had begun in America and was developing quickly on the frontier. This was but one example of a theme expanded by postmillennialists in the nineteenth century–the growth of democratic government as an indicator of the coming of the millennium. But Cooper's brief assessment gave an incomplete picture of the social and political forces that were altering the Old Southwest.

In the formative years from 1770 to 1840, important developments at the national level influenced rapid evolution of the Old Southwest and Tennessee. First, the federal government's opening of lands west of the Appalachians brought about the movement of land-hungry migrants from Western Pennsylvania, Virginia, and the Carolinas through the Cumberland Gap into the eastern valleys and the central basin of Tennessee. Second, settler encroachment on Indian lands and hunting grounds created hostilities that would set in motion an ongoing struggle that would not be resolved in trans-Appalachia until Indian removal in the 1830s. Third, ideas of political independence at the national level sparked various democratic actions on the Tennessee frontier that culminated in the election of two Tennesseans–Andrew Jackson and James K. Polk–to the nation's highest office. Fourth, as a result of the nation's industrial revolution and the South's burgeoning agricultural boom in response to the textile industry's need for cotton, Tennessee enjoyed

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limited but successful economic growth. Fifth, the federal abolition of the transatlantic slave trade and the continuation of chattel slavery throughout the South highlighted the political and moral contradictions of the South's "peculiar" institution. These trends illustrate how Tennessee developed and evolved as an extension of the newly-formed United States.[3] But were these events accompanied by any sense of apocalyptic anxiety or jubilation by those who directly experienced them?

In the 1770s, settlers wanting more freedom and opportunities based on land ownership found refuge in northeast Tennessee around Watauga River, North Holston, Nolichucky, and Carter's Valley. Early pioneers like James Robertson, Daniel Boone, and John Donelson began small communities that attracted others. They defended these communities successfully against Indian attacks, and they literally and symbolically threw off the yoke of British overlordship in the Battle of King's Mountain in October 1780. After 1780, tens of thousands of Scotch-Irish and other European immigrants made their way into the Old Southwest. The federal government took a laissez-faire approach toward settlement of the Old Southwest and focused chiefly on the economic advantages of developing the Old Northwest. This passive attitude in the Tennessee region led to rampant land speculation that had limited controls under Carolina state governance. The federal government did provide for logical transition of trans-Appalachia from wilderness to statehood in the provisions of the Northwest Ordinance (1787). After North Carolina

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[3]Compare the excellent study by John R. Finger, *Tennessee Frontiers: Three Regions in Transition* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2001).

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ceded its western lands in 1789, Tennessee became part of the Southwest Territory in 1790 and attained statehood in 1796.[4]

These events for settlers and their leaders seemed like the natural result of the progress of civilization under the guiding hand of a Providential Ruler. When John Donaldson and his companions set out for the Cumberland Valley from East Tennessee, he prefaced his travel notes with "Journal of a Voyage, intended by God's permission, in the good boat Adventure." A few days later, after they passed through rough waters safely, he wrote, "By the hand of Providence we are now preserved."[5] Except for these brief allusions, Donaldson made no other reference to deity or religious matters in his travel journal. The famous David Crockett, who admitted that he "never made a pretention to Relegion in my life," could recall during periods of migration how "all other friends having failed, I determined then to throw myself on Providence, and see how that would use me." In times of danger, to which Crockett was no stranger, he could talk about being in "a devil of a fix." When his wife Polly died, he even confessed, "It was the doing of the Almighty, whose ways are always right, though we sometimes think they fall heavily on us; and as painful as is even yet the remembrance of her sufferings, and the loss sustained by my little children and myself, yet I have no wish to lift up the voice of

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[4]*Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, edited by Worthington C. Ford et al. (Washington, D.C.: 1904-37), 32:314-320; *Annals of Congress*, 1st Congress, 2nd session, 2 April 1790, 106-109; 4th Congress, 1st session, 1 June 1796, 491-492.

[5]Cited in J. G. M. Ramsey, *The Annals of Tennessee to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (1853; repr., Johnson City, Tennessee: Overmountain Press, 1999), 197, 201.

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complaint."[6] But this overt reference to deity was unusual for Crockett. He used very little religious language in his autobiography and never engaged in the cosmic reasonings or end-of-the-world conjectures of apocalyptic discourse.

When John Sevier, Tennessee's first governor, announced to the legislature the admission of Tennessee to the Union, he lauded the "flattering prospect of peace, happiness and oppulence" and "the blessings and liberties of a free and Independent republic," but for this important event he made no reference to deity or to providential guidance. Sevier, a descendent of Huguenot farmers, occasionally referred to "the smiles of a Heavenly father," "the great being above," or "the propitious hand of Providence" in speeches to the state legislature and other political correspondence.[7] But Sevier never made use of apocalyptic imagery in spite of difficulties for the state like Indian uprisings and the threat of war with France.

Concerning the latter, Sevier warned the legislature in December 1798:

> I am not induced to believe that the dangers threatening the peace and safety of our country is by any means abated or relaxed; on the contrary, I have my fears, that much deception, duplicity and intrigue is carrying on with intention to divide our good citizens in sentiment, create party discord, confuse our councils, and if carried into effect (which I pray God to avert) will finally blast and put an end to these inestimable blessings of liberty and independence gained and acquired by our past struggles with the loss of so much of our most valuable and dearest blood.[8]

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[6]David Crockett, *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett of the State of Tennessee*, edited by James A. Shackford and Stanley J. Folmsbee (1834; repr., Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1973), 37, 99, 125-26.

[7]Robert H. White, ed., *Messages of the Governors of Tennessee, 1796-1821*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Commission, 1952), 17, 26, 58, 91.

[8]Ibid., 47.

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Sevier uttered one of his strongest warnings to the state legislature in this address. The governor was concerned that the gains made by the first settlers of Tennessee might be irrevocably lost. Even so, there was no talk of cataclysmic upheaval and no mention of apocalyptic ruin. By September the following year the situation had improved, and the governor could say, "Emigration and population is daily increasing, and I have no doubt, under the propitious hand of Providence [and] your patronage . . . that our state will become more and more respectable and conspicuous, and the Citizens [will] enjoy all that happiness and comfort this human life in an ordinary course will afford them."[9] Like the governors who followed him, Sevier sincerely viewed divine guidance as useful and helpful.[10] But the situation shifted steadily and unpredictably so as to preclude talk of any end of an epoch or future millennium. Apocalyptic language for most frontiersmen and their leaders was more appropriate for religious rather than political contexts.

For Native Americans, though, social and political changes in the Old Southwest did bring cataclysmic upheaval and apocalyptic ruin–an end to their way of life and removal from their ancestral lands. The permanence of white settlement on tribal lands did not go unnoticed by the Indians, nor had it gone unchecked without response for many, many decades. But their resistance had become fragmented as a result of earlier and ongoing British, French, and even Spanish influences. In addition, the indigenous natives had to face the assault of a United States that was growing and expanding rapidly and pervasively. The federal government picked up where colonial authorities left off

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[9]Ibid., 91-92.

[10]See Appendix E.

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and made repeated treaties with the various tribes. From about 1780 to 1830, large tracts of tribal lands were ceded to the federal government through treaties with the Cherokee at Hopewell (1785), Holston River (1791), and Tellico (1798), with Cherokee and Creek in Dearborn's Treaty (1806), and with the Chickasaw at Old Town (1818).[11]

After the War of 1812, the federal government worked relentlessly to resettle the tribes west of the Mississippi. Favored by speculators who wanted Indian lands, by farmers who feared Indian hostilities, and by missionary groups who wished to "save" the Indians from extinction, official removal policies began under Thomas Jefferson, continued under James Madison, and came to fruition with Andrew Jackson who signed into law the Indian Removal Act in 1830. In the early 1820s, the Choctaw and Creek had signed removal agreements, and part of the Cherokee agreed to removal in the Treaty of New Echota (1835).[12] But a large number of Cherokee held out until federal troops removed them forcibly in the winter of 1838-1839.

During the relocation, the Reverend Daniel Butrick, a Moravian missionary who lived among the Cherokee at Brainerd Mission and accompanied them on their westward trek that began at Ross's Landing near Chattanooga, reflected on the tragic incidents of the previous year. On 31 December 1838, he gave a gloomy, if not prophetic, summation of the year in his journal entry. He penned:

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[11]*Journals of the Continental Congress*, 30:187-190; *American State Papers*, 2, *Indian Affairs* 1:14, 38-44, 54-57, 124-125, 637-638, 698-699; 2:164-166.

[12]*Statutes at Large of the United States of America, 1789-1873*, 7, Indian Treaties, 411-412, 488-489.

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> This morning we were permitted to read the texts for the last day of the year. O what a year it had been! O what a sweeping wind has gone over, and carried thousands into the grave, while thousands of others have been tortured and scarcely survive.
>
> And why? As coming from God, we know it is just. But what have they done to the U. States? . . . For what crime then was this whole nation doomed to this perpetual death? This almost unheard of suffering? Simply because they would not agree to a principle which would be at once death to their national existence.
>
> The year past has been a year of spiritual darkness. We have had but few happy seasons, and as for myself, I have by no means been faithful to my trust. I have wanted faith & love & zeal. A great part of the time my heart has been grieved to hear the awful profanements and see the scenes of wickedness which have been brought before us.[13]

Butrick sensed deeply the pains and hurts of the Cherokee people. At the start of removal, he had felt alone and helpless. Puzzled and filled with questions that had no good answers, he wrote, "[I] feel lonesome, and can only say, Where is my God? . . . Our situation is impossible, is hazardous, and difficult, and we have no sufficiency at all to support or carry us forward." When the process of relocation had begun, he was agitated by the actions of "the removing agent, N. Smith, [who] with the cruelty of a Nero, forced them into boats, into poisoned air, and hurried them away to a land of darkness, and the shadow of death, where they must sicken and die."[14] But Butrick found comfort in his "Heavenly Father" and "Redeemer." He prayed often and offered supplications for the protection and well-being of his Cherokee friends and flock. As

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[13]*The Journal of Rev. Daniel S. Butrick, May 19, 1838 - April 1, 1839*, Cherokee Removal: Monograph One (Park Hill, Oklahoma: Trail of Tears Association, Oklahoma Chapter, 1998), 52.

[14]Ibid., 1, 26.

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Butrick reflected on what he heard and saw, he spoke frequently about death, personal salvation, and the end-of-life or apocalyptic reward of heaven.

Butrick especially was troubled by the death of small children among the Cherokee, and he used language of eternal consequence to give dignity and meaning to their senseless demise. On 8 August, he noted poignantly:

> In the morning some people came from the camps to dig a grave for a little child who died last night. Soon after a woman came to have a coffin made for another child just over the creek, who died this morning. Thus, the poor little children are almost all dying off. Well may Rachel weep for her children, and refuse to be comforted because they are not.
>
> About the middle of the afternoon, the corpse of a little girl was brought from the camps. After the coffin was put in the grave, we all knelt down, and commended ourselves once more to the care of Him who is the Resurrection and the life. I could but weep at the sight of this pleasant and mournful victim for the grave.
>
> As we were leaving the graveyard, we saw the procession bearing to the grave the little boy who died over the creek. We therefore returned again to that place where the dead are now so frequently deposited. There we again wept, and again sought the mercy of our Heavenly Father.
>
> O how distressing to the Cherokees who think so much of the graves of their friends, to be now called to leave so many of their dear little babes in this land of enemies, where they can never hope even to drop a tear on their graves again.[15]

The Reverend's sympathy for the Cherokee adhered to traditional Christian ideas about life, death, the afterlife, and their apocalyptic meanings. When one of the Cherokee known as brother Hawk died, Butrick wrote in his journal, "O how quick the transit from time to eternity, and how sudden the change from earth to heaven. Yesterday he longed

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[15]Ibid., 27-28.

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to be with Christ, . . . and now in the fullness of joy, he triumphs in redeeming love, basking in the sun beams of eternal noon."[16]

But Butrick also was troubled by what he saw as the Indians' proclivity to moral baseness, that is, moral failings by the Reverend's standards. In the struggle between good and evil for the souls of the Cherokee, he lamented the "temporal and eternal ruin of this little handful of Indians" by the federal agents with their "dark rhetoric of hell." He disagreed with the practice of "conjuring over the sick" and compared it to idolatry. After a rough night near Walden's Ridge where the detachment he traveled with was subjected to the swearing and drinking of another group, he thought, "O what a hell must it be to be confined with blasphemers for ever & ever." He pitied above all the plight of the Cherokee who chose to do evil. Near Pikeville in the Sequatchie Valley, what he called the "Vale of Sodom" where "the people were wicked exceedingly," he wrote:

> I could but weep in view of the poor Cherokees, who, on the brink of destruction, seemed yet emulous to excell in those awful practices which, have provoked the Lord to leave them to suffer these evils; and I told some of our dear brethren that if an angel could weep, he must weep in view of such a spectacle.[17]

For Butrick, as for many Protestant missionaries to Native Americans, the crucial matter for the Cherokee during the period of removal was their life-and-death struggle for personal salvation rather than the apocalyptic reordering of their world. For the Indians' themselves, as others would testify later, the Trail of Tears and the removal of the Cherokee from their ancestral lands in the Old Southwest marked a sad, but climactic,

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[16]Ibid., 38.

[17]Ibid., 10, 11, 31, 42-44.

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episode in the westward push of progress or modernity under the crushing weight of capitalistic enterprise, liberal democracy, and Christian civilization. This tragic loss had apocalyptic or end-of-their-world consequences for the Cherokee and subsequent generations of Native Americans.[18]

Another example of abrupt change in the Old Southwest came with Tennesseans' flirtation with independent or non-federated rule in the brief State of Franklin (1785 to 1788) and political alignment with non-British governments in the Mero District (1788 to about 1809).[19] These experiments in political sovereignty reflected the isolated nature of the trans-Appalachian frontier and the influence of liberal republican ideas that had been popular among Deists and "enlightened" thinkers during the Revolution. The constitution of the State of Franklin, for instance, paralleled the federal constitution in that it provided for freedom of worship and the separation of church and state. But the frontiersmen had a strong sense of allegiance to Christian faith and practice, so they restricted public office to those who believed in God and "the truth of the Protestant religion."[20] The provisional constitution, which was disapproved by the convention at Greeneville in November 1785, went even further and prescribed specific tenets of Christian faith for the state's office-holders. Section 3 of the document specified:

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[18]William T. Hagan, *American Indians*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 75-101; Clara Sue Kidwell, Homer Noley, and George E. Tinker, *A Native American Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 163-165.

[19]Samuel Cole Williams, *History of the Lost State of Franklin* (Johnson City, Tennessee: Watauga Press, 1924); John Allison, "The 'Mero District,'" *American Historical Magazine* 1, no. 2 (April 1896): 115-27.

[20]Section 32, cited in Williams, *History of the Lost State of Franklin*, 336.

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> No person shall be eligible or capable to serve in this [the House of Representatives] or any other office in the civil department of this State . . . who will, either in word or writing, deny any of the following propositions, *viz*:
> 1st. That there is one living and true God, the Creator and Governor of the universe.
> 2d. That there is a future state of rewards and punishments.
> 3d. That the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are given by divine inspiration.
> 4th. That there are three divine persons in the Godhead, co-equal and co-essential.[21]

In the end, a majority of the delegates favored a revised version of North Carolina's state constitution over the provisional one that included these explicit Christian sentiments and apocalyptic ideas (e.g., "a future state of rewards and punishments").

Like the earlier Cumberland Compact (1780) that was formed by settlers in the central part of the state,[22] the framers of the State of Franklin began their government with a general sense of dependency upon "Divine Providence" for their well-being and key Christian teachings for their leadership. Rather than any apocalyptic beginning, the political experiment was justified on the basis of expediency and the notion of civilization's progress. For pragmatic leaders such as John Robertson and John Sevier, self-sufficiency in economic matters, safeguarded by a sure transportation route along the Mississippi River to the port of Spanish-controlled New Orleans, and the federal government's promise of protection or lack thereof loomed even larger. But these

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[21]"The Provisional Constitution of Frankland," *American Historical Magazine* 1, no. 1 (January 1896): 55.

[22]See A. W. Putnam, *History of Middle Tennessee or, Life and Times of Gen. James Robertson* (1859; repr., Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1971), 94-102.

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experimental initiatives soon fizzled, even though the tradition of stubborn independence sometimes bordering on rebellion lingered.

For example, during the winter of 1796, William Blount, Tennessee's first United States Senator, and other reckless men ran afoul of federal law in their conspiracy to take by force Spanish Florida and Louisiana. This was the sort of brazen independence, purported to be "criminal" and "scandalous" by the Spanish authorities, that had to be restrained and resulted in Blount's impeachment by the House of Representatives and his expulsion from the United States Senate.[23] Before he could be removed from office formally, Blount retired to Tennessee where he was welcomed wholeheartedly, and the state legislature chose Andrew Jackson to replace him in the Senate. Jackson did not rise to national fame until after his victory over the British during the battle for New Orleans in the early part of 1815. Widely celebrated as a result, Jackson and his supporters profited immensely from the publicity. Perhaps the creativity of Tennesseans in their political savvy might have contributed to the overall movement of the nation from republican to democratic ideas and practices. But this shift, in the minds of most, followed the benefits of divine blessing and providential guidance and did not rise to the level of any apocalyptic significance.

The Old Southwest and the country were ready about a decade later for a different type of president. The decline of elitism and the desire of artisans, merchants, and

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[23]Frederick J. Turner, "Documents on the Blount Conspiracy, 1795-1797," *American Historical Review* 10, no. 3 (April 1905): 574-606; Francis Wharton, comp., *State Trials of the United States during the Administrations of Washington and Adams* (1849; repr., New York: Burt Franklin, 1970), 200-321.

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yeoman farmers for a greater voice in the affairs of government led to the rise of popular politics and the ascendancy of the Democratic Party. In 1824, the famed Jackson ran for president and won the popular vote but not an "absolute majority" of the electoral vote. Four years later, he indisputably won both and became the nation's first president from the trans-Appalachian region. Jackson transcended regional concerns remarkably well while serving as president for two terms, but he brought the brashness and stubbornness of the Tennessee frontier to Washington. Jackson, a slave owner and an aristocrat, actually represented a smaller spectrum of the general populace than his supporters had led the nation to believe. But, like James Polk twelve years later, he energetically pursued policies that favored common people and the country's westward expansion.

As Jackson began his presidency, he revered and aspired to the "public virtue" of his "illustrious predecessors." This type of executive leadership espoused "firm reliance on the goodness of that Power whose providence mercifully protected our national infancy, and has since upheld our liberties in various vicissitudes." Jackson like previous presidents felt encouraged "to offer up my ardent supplications that He will continue to make our beloved country the object of His divine care and gracious benediction."[24] As the nation grew and evolved, presidential speech consistently articulated the "public philosophy" of America's exceptional situation and a sense of God's guidance of it all.

[24]"First Inaugural Address of Andrew Jackson," 4 March 1829, Avalon Project at Yale Law School, 1996, http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalonpresiden/inaug/jackson1.htm (accessed 13 January 2007).

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But presidential rhetoric, as Dante Germino suggests, fell short of "political messianism" or "apocalyptic nationalism."[25]

In his official addresses and letters, Jackson followed this paradigm dutifully and avoided the extremes of apocalyptic rhetoric even when grave danger threatened the nation. In his December 1832 proclamation, Jackson forcefully responded to South Carolina's nullification of the federal tariff and the state's threat of secession and warned, "Disunion by armed force is *treason*." But Jackson ended this resolute edict on a conciliatory note, almost as if he were appealing to his opponents' religious sensitivities. He concluded:

> May the Great Ruler of Nations grant that the signal blessings with which He has favored ours may not by the madness of party or personal ambition, be disregarded and lost; and may His wise providence bring those who have produced this crisis to see the folly before they feel the misery of civil strife, and inspire a returning veneration for that Union which, if we may dare to penetrate His designs, He has chosen as the only means of attaining the high destinies to which we may reasonably aspire.[26]

In the middle of this crisis, Jackson comfortably touted the God-centered notion of the Union's special role as "the only means" to attain "high destinies," but he did not offer any speculations on apocalyptic meanings for the Union's preservation or dissolution.

Another area of quick growth for the Old Southwest and Tennessee involved the economy. After the Nashville Bank opened in 1804, Tennessee prospered from increased

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[25]Dante Germino, *The Inaugural Addresses of American Presidents: The Public Philosophy and Rhetoric* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1984), 15.

[26]James D. Richardson, ed., *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents 1789-1897* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1896-99), 2:654, 656.

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commerce and steady but relatively slow urbanization compared to the eastern seaboard and the industrial North. By the mid-1800s, the state had only two urban areas that could be called cities–Nashville and Memphis–and a few smaller towns–Chattanooga, Clarksville, Murfreesboro, and Knoxville. Population gains from 100,000 in 1800 (two percent of the nation's five million) to about 800,000 in 1840 (five percent of the country's seventeen million) gave the state an expanding pool of laborers.[27] The state's vital economic force, as for most of the South, came from agricultural production and export of corn and wheat, cotton and tobacco, and livestock. The upswing in banking after the War of 1812, in which Tennesseans participated prominently, gave the state a good economic boost. The economy turned sour by the end of the decade as rampant spending and too much debt led to a collapse of the fragile pecuniary system and the Panic of 1819.

In Knoxville, which had lost its status as Tennessee's capital to Murfreesboro in 1818, the Panic caused ill feelings. Creditors and debtors of the capital-deprived "Old State Bank" felt cheated by the creation of a capital-enriched "New State Bank" in Nashville. In eastern parts of the state, the views of many were echoed in "The Bank that Jack Built," a biting satire in the *Knoxville Register*.

> . . . These are the Banks, which the city adorn,
> That gave *Credit* to Rags, all tatter'd and torn,
> By which the fleec'd Farmers, all poor and forlorn,
> And the bamboozled Traders, all shaven and shorn,
> Were robbed of their goods, and their Beef, Pork, and Corn,

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[27] *Compendium of the Enumeration of the Inhabitants and Statistics of the United States* . . . (Washington, D.C.: Thomas Allen, 1841), 70, 103, 370.

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Which they sold for the Rags, all tatter'd and torn
That were issued as money, noon, evening and morn,
By the cunning Directors, that manage the Men,
That own the Bank that Jack built.

These are the *Knowing ones*, * * * *
Who laugh in their sleeves at the losers forlorn,
And buy up the Rags, all tatter'd and torn,
(Refused by the Banks which the city adorn)
That the Farmers and Traders, all shaven and shorn,
Received from their Goods, and their Beef, Pork, and Corn,
When issued as money, noon, evening and morn,
By the cunning Directors, that manage the Men,
That own the Bank that Jack built.[28]

The cadence and crescendo of this satirical composition exuded negative feelings and highlighted the injustices of the new bank to those who felt cheated. The author intended to stir up opposition to the new bank and hinted in the poem at "breaking points" that were typical of apocalyptic thought (e.g., "all tatter'd and torn," "all shaven and shorn"). Some sense of the timelessness of apocalyptic ideas also was exploited (e.g., "noon, evening and morn"). But the author did not mention any divine or providential guidance and did not suggest the possibility of resolve to the situation or any new beginning (e.g., collapse of the financial system, reordering of the banking structure). "The Bank that Jack Built" contained seeds of apocalyptic thought but was not complete in its imagery.

Other opponents of the "loan office" bill that established the new state bank made use of biblical language to emphasize its potential injustice and wrongdoing. Eight members of the state's House of Representatives protested passage of the bill in their letter to the General Assembly. They scolded:

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[28]"Miscellaneous," *Knoxville Register*, 29 August 1820. See Appendix F for the entire poem.

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> But your protestant is of the opinion that this balance of outstanding notes will never be redeemed. . . . Shall the people be taxed to pay this deficiency; shall the public creditors be forced to pay their debts, or shall the plighted faith of the state be forgotten? . . . It is the opinion of your protestant, that the plighted faith of this state will kick the beam. . . . How are the people relieved? They have asked for fish, and you have gave them a serpent; they ask us to bind up one arm, and we strike off the other with a Butcher's cleaver.[29]

The leader of the "loan office" measure, Felix Grundy, was rebuffed in a full-page article by a contributor to Nashville's *Clarion* who used the pseudonym "Hamilton." He retorted, "He who receives such paper, bottomed on such securities, must have a faith in the credit of the state which 'believeth and hopeth all things.'"[30]

Andrew Jackson and his companions were more direct in their words chosen to oppose the "loan office" measure. They wrote:

> Upon an attentive scrutiny of its provisions, it will be found to be extremely deceptious and fraught with the most destructive consequences.
>
> The large emissions of paper, from the banks by which the country was inundated, have been the most prominent causes of those distresses of which we at present complain. They greatly increased the facilities of borrowing money, gave property a fictitious value, and introduced amongst us every species of extravagance and folly.
>
> It would appear . . . that the poison which generated the disease, is here attempted to be administered for its removal.[31]

Notwithstanding the critics, Governor McMinn urged the legislature in special session to pass the "loan office" bill. He spoke just as candidly in favor of the benefits of treasury notes as a "general plan" to relieve "the distresses of the times." He believed differently

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[29]Pleasant M. Miller, et al., Letter protesting passage of Loan Office bill, *Journal of the House of Representatives . . . of the State of Tennessee*, 13th General Assembly, 2nd session (Murfreesborough: G. A. and A. C. Sublett, 1820), 100-101.

[30]*The Clarion and Tennessee Gazette* (Nashville), 31 October 1820.

[31]"Tennessee Bank and Relief Law," *Niles' Weekly Register*, 2 September 1820.

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about the reasons for economic depression. He argued: "Treasures which are now hoarded up to be used in fattening on calamity will be drawn out, and again circulated in the ordinary channels of useful industry, when the schemes of grinding oppression are foiled."[32]

Both sides to the economic debate used this type of rhetoric based on moral and even religious reasons but seldom if ever resorted to end-of-the-world or apocalyptic ideas to make their arguments about economic uncertainties. The prediction of either failure or success with money matters was nebulous, and the consequences in the here-and-now were too dire (e.g., financial ruin, starvation). Most citizens who had spare resources wanted pragmatic not apocalyptic solutions. The state's economic evolution in the long term, as well as the nation's, underwent disturbing ups and downs. The cycle of economic slump with negative spinoffs for business owners, farmers, and common laborers went unforeseen by prognosticators and occurred again two decades later during the Panic of 1838.

More positively, the role of Tennessee in the South's economic progress followed the expansion and improvement of transportation routes in the region. The railroads, which were to play a significant role in the logistics of the Civil War, did not come to Tennessee in a big way until the 1850s. But shipping by water and travel overland made important strides in Tennessee in the early antebellum period. The first settlers had relied on old Indian trails such as Avery and Natchez traces and natural passageways like the

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[32]Message to the General Assembly, 26 June 1820, *Journal of the House of Representatives . . . of the State of Tennessee* (1820), 8, 12.

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Cumberland Gap and the Cumberland and Tennessee rivers. The application of new technologies such as steam power to boats and macadamized materials to turnpikes and roads enhanced these passageways, eased the strains of travel and shipping, and shortened transit times considerably. Tennessee functioned in this way as an important conduit from the eastern seaboard, the Piedmont, and the Gulf of Mexico to the heartlands of the South. The lack of unobstructed rivers and roads also emphasized East Tennessee's relative isolation from the rest of the state and its independent development agriculturally and socially. Tennesseans in eastern parts of the state relied increasingly on connections in the immediate trans-Appalachian locale (i.e., the Blue Ridge Mountains of Carolina and Virginia) and their peripheral areas (i.e., the Piedmont and the Coastal Plains). The state's inhabitants and leaders, however, viewed these advances as the blessings and benefits of providential care.

This ease of transportation across Tennessee into the South's heartlands seemed much different to the luckless African-Americans. Better transportation routes accelerated their relocation by the thousands from the eastern seaboard to the lands of the Mississippi Delta. This followed a general trend, as migration from soil-depleted coastal plantations and farmlands in the East brought possibly a quarter of a million slaves into Tennessee and the new states of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. There the growing of cotton flourished and could be exported more easily along the Mississippi River down to port in New Orleans. In 1808, Congress had prohibited American involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, but this did not deter southern and Tennessee slave-owners from breeding and marketing their human chattel on southern soil.

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Naively unaware of the symbiotic nexus between slavery and the South's socioeconomic vitality, Tench Coxe, a political economist from Philadelphia, had observed over a decade earlier:

> The separate American states (with one small exception) have abolished the slave trade, and they have in some instances abolished negro slavery; in others they have adopted efficacious measures for its certain but gradual abolition. The importation of slaves is discontinued, and can never be renewed so as to interrupt the repose of Africa, or endanger the tranquility of the United States. The steady use of efficacious *alteratives* is deemed preferable to the immediate application of more strong remedies in a case of so much momentary and intrinsic importance.[33]

In the supply-and-demand game for cotton, "efficacious alteratives" notwithstanding, planters simply could not resist the economic profits reaped by their exploitation of slaves, something Coxe should have recognized. This spawned a bitter political struggle between free states and slave states for control of federal legislative bodies–a struggle that would rip apart Tennessee and the nation in the 1850s and 1860s. For the slaves, the end of the transatlantic slave trade and migration to the Mississippi River valley removed them from their coastal roots, degraded their cultural distinctiveness, and brought about an entirely American-born slave population and an American slave culture. All these transformations had important apocalyptic or end-of-their-world consequences for African-Americans and the nation.

Fortunately, there were voices of dissent against slavery at the national level and in Tennessee, primarily the eastern part of the state where smaller farms did not depend as heavily upon slave labor. Other factors such as religious and philanthropic beliefs

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[33]Tench Coxe, *A View of the United States of America in a Series of Papers . . .* (Philadelphia: William Hall and Wrigley & Berriman, 1794; repr., New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1965), 437.

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contributed as well to anti-slavery in both East and West Tennessee. As early as 1819, Elihu Embree, son of a Quaker minister and one of the first iron makers in upper East Tennessee, published the first abolitionist paper at Jonesboro called the *Manumission Intelligencer* and subsequently, beginning in April 1820, the *Emancipator* (Fig. 5.3).[34] From its inception, Embree used his *Emancipator* to critique and condemn slavery on biblical and moral grounds. One contributor, "Modern Listner," likened the situation with the slaves in the South to ancient Egypt and the slavery of Israelites, a disobedience to be punished by "an unerring Providence." Despite his hope that "the co-operation of divine Providence" might yield a workable solution to "the evils of slavery," "Listner" decried "so many living on the gain of oppression, contrary to their better judgement" and feared "the cup, which was once filled for Egypt, and for other criminal nations, will be doubly filled for the ten fold more enlightened, and consequently, ten fold more criminal land of America."[35] Embree and supporters like "Listner" frequently chided the slaves' abusers with apocalyptic threats of eternal doom. In lyrics that castigated "The Slave Holder Leaving the World after Bequeathing His Slaves to His Heirs," the editor sternly forewarned:

> From father to son, is injustice descending–
> The heirs of the parent, thus heirs of the crime;
> That slavery is legal, such men are contending,
> And lab'ring to prove that the right is divine!

---

[34]*The Emancipator (Complete): A Reprint* . . . (vol. 1, nos. 1-7, April-October 1820; repr., Nashville: B. H. Murphy, 1932), 1-112.

[35]Ibid., 3-4.

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THE EMANCIPATOR.

VOL. I.] JONESBOROUGH, APRIL 30, 1820. [No. 1.

EDITED AND PUBLISHED BY ELIHU EMBREE, AT $1 PER ANNUM—IN ADVANCE.

ADDRESS,
OF THE EDITOR.

The EMANCIPATOR will be published monthly in *Jonesborough*, Ten. by *ELIHU EMBREE*, on a fine superroyal sheet of paper, in octava form, at *One Dollar* per annum, payable on receipt of the first number.

This paper is especially designed by the editor to advocate the abolition of slavery, and to be a repository of tracts on that interesting and important subject. It will contain all the necessary information that the editor can obtain of the progress of the abolition of the slavery of the descendants of Africa; together with a concise history of their introduction into slavery, collected from the best authorities.

The constitutions and proceedings of the several benevolent societies in the United States and elsewhere who have had this grand object in view, will be carefully selected and published in the Emancipator.

A correspondence between those socities, and between individuals in different parts of the nation on the subject of emancipation, will be kept up through the medium of this paper by inserting in its pages all interesting communications, letters, &c. that may come to the knowledge of the editor.

The speeches of those have been and are eminently advocating this glorious cause, either in the congress of the U. S. the state legislatures, or in the parliaments and courts of other nations, will be strictly attended to.

Biographical sketches of the lives of those who have been eminent in this cause, will also occasionally find a place in this work.

A portion of this paper is intended to be devoted as a history of the abolition of the African slave trade, in every part of the world, from its first dawn, down to the present times.

In the prosecution of this work the editor professes that he expects (like other periodical editors) to live much upon the borrow; and to make use of such materials as he may find in his way, suited to his object, without being very particular to take up much time or room in acknowledging a loan, unless he may think it necessary, willing that others should use the same freedom with him, & hoping that by offering such a fair exchange, such borrowing will be thought no robbery.

Communications on the subject, and *materials for the work are solicited* and will be thankfully received both from societies and individuals friendly to the abolition of slavery. Such communications, if approved of by the editor, will find a harty welcome in the *Emancipator.*

The Manumission Society of Tenn. in particular, it is expected will afford many tracts on the subject of slavery, which the editor assures them he will feel inclined to respect; and where his judgment should not otherwise dictate, will give them an early and gratuitous insertion. They will find in the Emancipator a true chronicle of the proceedings of that benevolent society as far as the editor is enabled—And for this purpose the clerks of the conventions, and of each branch of the society are requested to forward from time to time true copies of all their minutes, which may not be really improper to publish (and it is hoped there will be none such) together with the names of their members, their places of residence, &c. all which particulars we are of opinion will not be unprofitable to the cause of abolition to be published.

Letters from one individual to another, with the names of both, we think will be often beneficial to be published. If they do nothing more they will shew that all are not asleep nor dumb to the cries of suffering humanity.

Those who have had, or may have law suits on hand for the freedom of such as are unlawfully held in bondage, are desired to forward the true history of the facts, their progress, final decision, &c. with the places of residence and names of plaintiff's and defendant's, with eve-

A.

Fig. 5.3. Elihu Embree's *The Emancipator*. Reprinted in Nashville by B. H. Murphy, 1932.

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Unjustly, they live on the gain of oppression--
  Pretend they are marching the road to the sky,
Give their slaves to their heirs, as legal possession,
  Yet hoping for heaven when e'er they shall die!

But hard! the bell's tolling–the heirs are all mourning,
  The slaves, too, are raving almost in despair;
The mouldering body to dust is returning,
  Convey'd to the tomb, and deposited there!

The heirs, for their parent, no longer are grieving,
  They, of his estate, are each taking his boon;
While he for oppression, and bondage bequeathing,
  Is summoned to judgment, to meet with his doom!!![36]

Apocalyptic warnings like this came from Christian teachings about personal salvation and the individual's reward of heaven or hell. But early advocates of emancipation intuitively sensed the wrath of God's justice threatening the nation and its blessings,[37] although they never presaged the dissolution of the Union in apocalyptic fashion.

Others in the Old Southwest opposed slavery on the basis of philosophical and humanitarian reasons. In 1826, Frances Wright started a biracial utopian community called Nashoba near Memphis in West Tennessee. Wright sought to liberate the slaves of Nashoba by means of common labor and enlightened education and then, as a concession to local supporters, resettle the freed slaves in Africa. Inspired by utilitarian philosophy and utopian ideology, Wright's experiment never attracted enough local support and, after reports about maltreatment of the slaves, collapsed in less than five years. Wright's

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[36]Ibid., 77-78.

[37]See Appendix G and the editor's thoughts after "hearing of the separation of a negro woman and her children."

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vision of a society that treated blacks and whites equally, a sort of secular millennium, was not realized.[38]

Rather than the utopian ideas of Wright and other visionaries, Protestant Christianity ironically played the biggest part in both the approval and the denunciation of slavery. Thanks to Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists, Christianity had come to Tennessee's frontier with the early settlers, and they experienced gains but new schisms with the outbreak of revivals in the early 1800s. But the illusion of an increase in spirituality did not alleviate the burden of slavery's moral turpitude in the state. Protestant ministers, entrenched in the socio-political matrix of antebellum slave-holding culture, were dependent economically and psychologically on the goodwill of their churches in a pluralistic society that had severed formal connections between state governments and any specific Christian church.[39] Clergy out of necessity had to conform to the prevalent pro-slavery outlook, and a lot of churchmen held religious beliefs that justified the practice of slavery.[40]

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[38]For her views, see *A Plan for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery in the United States without Danger of Loss to the Citizens of the South* (Baltimore: Benjamin Lundy, 1825). On the Nashoba experiment, see John Egerton, *Visions of Utopia: Nashoba, Rugby, Ruskin, and the 'New Communities' in Tennessee's Past* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977), 13-35.

[39]See Forrest Church, ed., *The Separation of Church and State: Writings on a Fundamental Freedom by America's Founders* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004); Martin E. Marty, "Living with Establishment and Disestablishment in Nineteenth-Century Anglo-America," *Journal of Church and State* 18, no. 1 (1976): 61-77.

[40]Jack P. Maddex, Jr., "Proslavery Millennialism: Social Eschatology in Antebellum Southern Calvinism," *American Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (Spring 1979): 46-92.

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For those who disagreed, they had the option to move to a free state, and many did just that. After twenty years of rigorous itinerant work in Kentucky and Tennessee, Methodist pastor Peter Cartwright decided to move his family to Illinois in 1824. He reflected later in life on this decision:

> I had seen with painful emotions the increase of a disposition to justify slavery, and our preachers, by marriage and other ways, became more and more entangled with this dark question, and were more and more disposed to palliate and justify the traffic and ownership of human beings, and the legislatures in the slave states made the laws more and more stringent, with a design to prevent emancipation. Moreover, rabid abolitionism spread and dreadfully excited the South. I had a young and growing family of children . . . was poor . . . [and] lands around me were high, and rising in value. . . . Although the thought of leaving thousands of my best friends was severely painful to me, and sometimes almost overwhelmed me, and shook my determination, yet I saw, or thought I saw, clear indications of Providence that I should leave my comfortable little home, and move to a free state or territory.[41]

Cartwright personally and existentially felt the apocalyptic angst of the slavery question, even though he did not use specific apocalyptic terminology. For his own sanity and the benefit of his family, he had to break away from the past (i.e., an end to his old world) and start a new phase of life in a new place. For the whole nation, unfortunately, things were not as easy.

As Cartwright, other clergy, and humanitarians learned by personal experience over a period of time, attempts to refine slavery to genteel standards simply were not effective. In its biblical justifications of slavery, Protestant Christianity in the South and in Tennessee failed to disrupt its gross abuses. Thus, the church failed to live up to the biblical imperatives found in the Golden Rule and the Sermon on the Mount with respect

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[41]Peter Cartwright, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright* (1856; repr., Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956), 165.

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to the slaves and became incapable of educating and truly reforming the hardheartedness of its congregants. An apocalyptic event, a civil war, was necessary to undo what decades of abuse had done and what Protestant Christianity and the federal government could not, or would not, do.

Tennesseans were affected deeply by these events, as they experienced excitement and disappointment that often accompanied times of accelerated change. They were part of an expanding and robust young nation, but quick cultural and societal evolutions brought danger and uncertainty. In the Old Southwest, religious movements reflected the hopes and aspirations as well as the ambiguities and doubts of the era. Political and social thought genuinely adhered to what Germino calls a "God-centeredness" in contrast to a deistic "man-centeredness."[42] Advancement of civilization was the key, and progress that improved the country's infrastructure and society itself was the goal to be attained at any and all costs. Civic leaders seldom raised any apocalyptic concerns about this progress, except those like Buttrick and Embree who sympathized with the plight of African Americans and Native Americans. While they did not voice concern for society's "outcasts" in forthright end-of-the-world language, they did see in light of traditional Christian teachings the struggles of blacks and Indians as a life and death battle for personal salvation. For the problems of slavery and Indian removal, an apocalyptic consciousness and its clear expression both religiously and politically would emerge later.

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[42]Germino, *Inaugural Addresses of American Presidents*, 15.

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CONCLUSION

Apocalyptic or end-of-the-world language came to the Old Southwest with settlers who brought with them Christian beliefs about the material world's eventual demise and a divine ordering of a new mode of existence. The frontier revivals around the turn of the nineteenth century sparked interest in this type of discourse, and the earthquakes centered at New Madrid, Missouri Territory, during the winter of 1811-1812 provoked believers and skeptics to anticipate the imminence of epochal change. Constant political, social, and technological changes in the Old Southwest for the first three decades of the nineteenth century also caught the attention of many who observed in these transformations the role of providential guidance or Manifest Destiny. These events as signs of the times seemed to harken a new day, a new age. But progressive or linear thinking did not give a complete picture of how these uncommon events were being interpreted in apocalyptic terms in the Old Southwest.

Other perspectives in the Old Southwest proved the matrix of apocalyptic rhetoric to be ambiguous and uncertain. Interpretations of the earthquakes, for instance, varied between natural and supernatural causes. Many thought the quakes to be the handiwork of God, but others attributed the upheavals to demonic forces or the devil. Most observers regarded the quakes as "signs" or "wonders," but what was signified could not

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be pinpointed unanimously. The Shawnee Chief Tecumseh strikingly used the quakes to rally confederated resistance to settler encroachment on tribal lands. This was exactly the opposite meaning given to the quakes than that by eyewitnesses and subsequent travelers to the region such as Charles Latrobe who interpreted the quakes as one of the "portents" defining 1811 as "the Annus Mirabilis of the West" and a divine approval on the nation's westward expansion in spite of "the awe-struck Indian."[1] Consequently, no real agreement existed about what the quakes meant. Even if they indicated the end of the world to some, belief in an apocalyptic understanding of the quakes for many settlers soon passed, because the world did not end literally and the quakes did.

A decade earlier during a period of religious apathy (as perceived by Christian clergy), the frontier revivals produced substantial evangelistic success and inspired believers to conclude that the kingdom of God was at hand. Rural camp meetings, patterned initially after the annual Scotch-Presbyterian sacramental gatherings and adopted by Methodist and Baptist leaders, gave thousands of settlers the opportunity to mingle socially and listen to Christian preachers who stirred the masses with apocalyptic themes from the Bible. Outbreaks of unusual bodily phenomena or "religious exercises" such as the "jerks" transcended sectarian loyalties and puzzled revival leaders about their meaning. Like the earthquakes, some thought the bodily sensations came from God, but others judged them to be the work of Satan.

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[1]Charles Joseph Latrobe, *The Rambler in North America, 1832-1833*, vol. 1 (London: R. B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1835), 102, 103.

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On the one hand, the revivals and their apocalyptic implications served to unify those who favored the enthusiasm and the various responses by the masses. On the other hand, the revivals and their commitment to emotive responses to the gospel fell as a sharp axe that divided believers into pro and anti-revival factions. Apocalyptic rhetoric clearly became a divisive factor between "mainstream" Protestants and groups like the Shakers who went beyond traditional notions about the end of the world and emphasized a realized eschatology (i.e., the presence of the kingdom of God and eternal salvation in the here-and-now). More study, though, needs to be done on the outcome of the revivals, their apocalyptic rhetoric, and the "in-house" divisions of several Protestant denominations (e.g., the Presbyterian Church and the Cumberland Presbyterians). But these divisions do highlight the inherent ambiguity of apocalyptic language and some of the unfortunate consequences of its uncertainty.

In one sense, the earthquakes and the revivals could be seen as epoch-making events that merited apocalyptic depiction, because they were cataclysmic or world-shattering in scope. From a different or nonreligious point of view, the apocalyptic nature of these historic events was not so clear or certain. From the mainstream political perspective, for example, neither earthquakes nor revivals seemed worthy of too much attention. The major devastation of the earthquakes occurred far from population centers on the eastern seaboard. The federal government and the country generally paid little long-term attention to the earthquakes except by way of curiosity and as a matter of the

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geological record.[2] The revivals were a religious matter to be left alone by and of little concern to politicians, since they caused no widespread disturbances in society. Religious fervor and excitement shook the churches, but the new round of "great" or spiritual awakenings hardly slowed the achievements and advances of "enlightened" culture and its technological superiority.

What seemed to be missing from the nonreligious rhetoric of this incredible period of American history was any sense of world-shattering, epoch-making change. The language of frontiersmen and settlers, businessmen and politicians, and even visionaries surely reflected the ideas of Manifest Destiny and occasionally hinted at the coming of a secular, utopian millennium. Those who had legitimate reasons to feel angst about the country's good fortune (e.g., Native Americans and African Americans) experienced the full brunt of cataclysmic upheaval in the oppressions they suffered, something most worthy of apocalyptic outcry. Protests with apocalyptic overtones were heard from the Daniel Butricks and the Elihu Embrees of the time, but seldom did they come from the slaves or native peoples themselves.[3] Even so, these critiques to visions of

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[2]Myron L. Fuller, *The New Madrid Earthquake (A Scientific Factual Field Account)*, United States Geological Survey Bulletin 494 (Washington, D.C.: government Printing Office, 1912; repr., Marble Hill, Missouri: Gutenberg-Richter Publications, 1995), 42; Jelle Zeilinga de Boer and Donald Theodore Sanders, *Earthquakes in Human History: The Far-Reaching Effects of Seismic Disruptions* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005), 112.

[3]One possibly insurmountable problem is the paucity of narratives from African Americans and Native Americans, but there are important exceptions (e.g., the Cherokee conversion narratives).

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millennial bliss underscored an important ambiguity of apocalyptic thought, namely, its applicability to antithetical forces in antebellum society.

In the Old Southwest of the early nineteenth century, apocalyptic rhetoric functioned primarily in a religious context but did have limited use in other types of discourse. Given this limitation, apocalyptic rhetoric can be used effectively as a tool to understand the public and private discourse of a society. The difficulty and challenge lies in the inherent ambiguity of such heightened religious language, but even this can be instructive about specific goals and aspirations and their level or perceived level of attainability. Sociologists and historians of American religion will find this to be fertile ground for further study.

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APPENDICES

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APPENDIX A

A call to the people of Louisiana[1]

Come, my friends, and neighbors all,
    Come listen and I'll tell you,
Concerning of the mighty call
    That took place in Louisiana.

On Sunday night, you all may know,
    As we were all a sleeping;
The Lord from heaven look'd down,
    And set the earth to shaking.

Some jumped up, ran out of doors,
    Whilst others follow'd after;
And some they stood all in amaze,
    Crying, Lord, what is the matter?

As for myself, I must confess
    I could but stand and wonder;
Expecting ev'ry moment to hear
    Some louder claps of thunder.

The rest of the night was spent in grief,
    And wishing for the morning;
But little thought, the people had,
    That was the second warning.

As soon as day light did appear,
    The elements were darken'd;

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[1]Martha Aldredge, comp., *A New Selection of Hymns and Spiritual Songs . . . for . . . Camp-Meetings* (Woodstock, New York: n.p., 1832), quoted in Arthur Palmer Hudson, "A Ballad of the New Madrid Earthquake," *Journal of American Folklore* 60, no. 236 (April - June 1947): 149-150.

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I walked out about the yard,
And saw the earth was cracking.

Immediately the shake came on,
Which you will all remember;
The houses reeled to and fro;
The earth it split asunder.

The people gather'd all about,
In places there were many;
The Christians stood with lifted hands,
Lord, spare the Louisiana.

More than six months have past and gone,
And still the earth keeps shaking;
The Christians go with bow'd down heads,
While sinners' hearts are aching.

The great event I cannot tell,
Nor what the Lord is doing;
But one thing I am well assur'd,
The scriptures are fulfilling.

I thought at last these are the times,
That in latter days should follow,
When judgments should pass thro' the land
And bring the days of sorrow.

But if you will go onward still,
And still rush on in sinning;
You need not hope for better times,
For they are now beginning.

The prophets did foretel of old,
That great events are coming;
The Lord Almighty's bringing on
The days of tribulation.

Prepare, before it is too late,
To meet the Lord from heaven;
King Jesus stands with open arms,
To save your souls from ruin.

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APPENDIX B

Thomas Calhoon on the Revivals[2]

"My early religious training threw around me a strong moral influence. My first serious impressions relative to the importance and necessity of religion were produced by a prayer of my mother, in the family, in the absence of my father. I remember she prayed most fervently and devotedly for her children. The same year my father emigrated to Tennessee, there was a camp-meeting at what was called the Ridge Meeting-house, in Sumner county. It was usual for families, on such occasions, to go fifty miles or more in wagons, and remain on the ground four days and nights. My father took his family to that meeting. I was then in my eighteenth year. The day before we set out, there was a dancing party in the neighborhood, and my sister and myself were invited to attend. Such parties were common in that day, and it was not thought wrong to attend them. Our preacher in North Carolina was in the habit of being present at such parties, particularly when they took place at weddings. Just before we were ready to set out to the party, my mother observed to me that we were going to the camp-meeting the next day, and it would not look well to go to the ball that evening. I paused for a moment, and then replied that I agreed with her. We declined going, and I never attended a dancing party afterward.

"Our own family, with several other young people, started on Friday morning for the camp-meeting, and I suppose a company of young persons never felt more careless and playful on arriving at such a place. We stopped about a hundred yards from the pulpit, where the religious exercises were going on. Many sinners were on their knees, crying for mercy. I had never before heard such cries. A trembling at once seized my whole frame, so that it was with some difficulty I walked to the ground where they lay. Shortly after taking my seat, a sermon was delivered which seemed greatly to increase the work of my conviction. My sisters were weeping, and in much distress. There was a great *shaking in the valley of dry bones*. Several ministers from Kentucky were present.

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[2]Thomas Calhoon, Personal Manuscript, quoted in Richard Beard, *Brief Biographical Sketches of Some of the Early Ministers of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church* (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1867), 76-100, at "Thomas Calhoon/Calhoun, 1782-1855," 12 April 2004, http://www.cumberland.org/hfcpc/minister/CalhoonT.htm (accessed 11 June 2006).

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All seemed to partake of the excitement of the occasion. In the meantime, however, my own feelings had subsided, and my heart rose in opposition to the work. My first thought then was, to go into the congregation and bring my sisters away; but I had not courage to undertake it. I urged my mother to interfere; but when she went to them, instead of complying with my request, she began to pray for them. This increased my opposition. I was furious. I would have put an end to the whole affair, if I could have done it. My corrupt nature seemed to have entire control. Some friend asked me to go into the crowd where my sisters were. I refused absolutely. I thought they had hopelessly disgraced themselves. My feelings were indescribable. In process of time, however, the evident distress of my sisters, their tears and cries for mercy, overcame me in some degree; and a friend prevailed on me to go into the crowd where they were. William McGee and Samuel King were talking to them. Just as I took my seat, a proposition for prayer was made, but I refused to go upon my knees. Prayer was soon proposed again, and I bowed on one knee, but rose before the prayer was ended. Prayer was called for a third time, when I fell among the slain, overwhelmed with a sense of my sinfulness and rebellion against God. From that time to the close of the meeting no external object engaged my attention. The salvation of my soul was the engrossing concern. It pleased God to give me such a view of the spirituality of the divine law, of the justice and holiness of its requirement, and of the depth of my own depravity, that my heart sunk within me. I felt that there was not another sinner on earth who had sinned against so much light and knowledge. I was ready to despair, and continued in this state of mind until the meeting closed. I thought I could see in the plan of the gospel the ground of hope for other sinners, but could not understand how a just and holy God could pardon and save such a rebel as myself. I was overwhelmed with a sense of my deeply rooted depravity, and the displeasure of Almighty God.

"The meeting closed on Tuesday morning. I was so overcome by my feelings, that my physical strength in a measure gave way. A sense of guilt, and of the probability of damnation, was like a mountain upon my heart. I had to be hauled home in the wagon. On reaching home, and looking at the house, I felt that I could never enter the door; that I was unworthy of a shelter or a place among Christian people. I walked to the grove, to make an undisturbed effort with God for mercy, if indeed any mercy remained for me but my heart appeared to grow harder and still harder, until it seemed that nothing short of Omnipotence could move it. I made my way back to the yard fence, and from there was conveyed into the house. A dreary night followed; my distress was indescribable. The next evening Mr. Craighead preached at my fathers's house, but the sermon afforded me no relief. Three or four weeks after this time, there was to be a camp-meeting at the Big Spring, in Wilson county–the neighborhood in which I have since lived for many years. In the intermediate time, I occasionally had some gleams of hope that God would bestow mercy at last. Still my bodily strength was very much reduced, and I was scarcely able for my customary duties on the farm. I visited Mr. Craighead, that he might instruct me in what I should do to be saved. He was very kind–encouraged me to hope; but my heart was not relieved. About this time I had a dream. I dreamed that God had pardoned my sins, and that I was a Christian. I awoke in great agitation, and for a moment could hardly

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realize that my experience was but a dream. During the moment I had some enjoyment; but as soon as reason resumed the throne, and reflection took place, all my fancied hopes fled. I felt myself an unpardoned sinner still.

"During the three weeks which intervened between the meetings at the Ridge and at the Big Spring, I do not recollect that there was ever a smile upon my countenance. It was a matter of great astonishment to me to see professors of religion jest and laugh, whilst I with thousands of others around them, was on the road to hell. The time of the meeting at the Big Spring arrived, and I reached there on Friday, with a heavy heart. The word was preached, but my unbelief and hardness of heart brought me to the brink of despair. I retired for the night under a deep impression that the day of God's merciful visitation had closed upon me, that I was a sinner undone for ever. My brother, older than myself, prayed with me and for me that night, though not a professor of religion himself. I arose in the morning and retired to the grove. I felt heavily burdened with the thought that my case, if not already decided against me, was to be decided for heaven or for hell that day. I spent several hours in earnest prayer, without any results except a deeper experience of my utter helplessness, and the impossibility of salvation in any other method than through the abounding grace of God. About nine o'clock in the morning I started back to where the congregation was assembling. About three hundred yards before I reached the place, I suddenly stopped. I hardly know why, but I stopped, looked up and around me with amazement. The glory of God appeared in every thing, and the very leaves of the trees seemed to be tinged with a Saviour's blood. I did not think at first of claiming this as a religious experience, but soon found that I was involuntarily ascribing glory to God for his unbounded goodness and mercy to helpless and perishing sinners. My burden of guilt and condemnation was gone, and hope soon sprang up in my mind that I had received the blessing which I had been so long seeking. Under this impression I turned to meet my brother, who I supposed was coming behind; but the thought immediately came into my mind that I ought to be well satisfied in regard to this matter before I disclosed my feelings to any person. I turned again, and started for the congregation, with a fixed purpose of keeping these things a profound secret until the meeting would close, thinking that I would be able after such an interval to settle the question of my conversion in favor of or against myself infallibly. When I reached the congregation, I was astonished to see the people so little impressed with a sense of the awful presence of Almighty God. I took my seat, and Mr. McGready rose in the pulpit. His appearance was fearfully solemn. A profound silence prevailed. He delivered one of his most impressive and stirring sermons. It was wholly experimental. He took the sinner up in his enmity against God and his hardness of heart. He followed him through all the steps of the process of his return to God. He pointed out many of the strategems used by Satan in so critical a time, for the purpose of misleading and destroying. He finally brought the thoroughly subjugated sinner to the foot of the cross, and to the point of accepting and trusting in Christ, as his only hope of salvation. When he came to this point, I involuntarily spoke out in the congregation and said, 'If this is religion, I have experienced it.' So unexpected an occurrence produced an extraordinary excitement in the congregation. Many sinners wept aloud; others fell to the ground and cried for mercy."

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APPENDIX C

Description of "Jerks" by Richard McNemar[3]

"Nothing in nature could better represent this strange and unaccountable operation than for one to goad another, alternately on every side, with a piece of red-hot iron. The exercise commonly began in the head, which would fly backward and forward, and from side to side, with a quick jolt, which the person would naturally labor to suppress, but in vain; and the more any one labored to stay himself and be sober, the more he staggered, and the more his twitches increased. He must necessarily go as he was inclined, whether with a violent dash on the ground and bounce from place to place like a foot-ball, or hop round, with head, limbs and trunk twitching and jolting in every direction, as if they must inevitably fly asunder. And how such could escape without injury was no small wonder among spectators. By this strange operation, the human frame was commonly so transformed and disfigured as to lose every trace of its natural appearance. Sometimes the head would be twitched right and left, to a half-round, with such velocity that not a feature could be discovered, but the face appeared as transmuted into some other species of creature. Head-dresses were of little account among the female jerkers. Even handkerchiefs bound tight round the head would be flirted off almost with the first twitch, and the hair put into the utmost confusion; this was a very great inconvenience, to redress which the generality were shorn, though directly contrary to their confession of faith. Such as were sieved with jerks were wrested at once, not only from under their own government, but that of every one else, so that it was dangerous to attempt confining them or touching them in any manner, to whatever danger they were exposed, yet few were hurt, except it were such as rebelled against the operation, through willful and deliberate enmity, and refused to comply with the injunctions which it came to enforce."

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[3]"The Great Revival of 1801, 1802, 1803, and the Introduction of Shakerism," from Josiah Morrow, *The History of Warren County, Ohio* (1882; repr., Mt. Vernon, Indiana: Windmill Publications, 1992), transcribed by Arne Trelvik, 20 August 2003, http://www.rootsweb.com/~ohwarren/Beers/III/0267.htm (accessed 9 October 2006).

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APPENDIX D

Apocalyptic Text by Rev. Robert Henderson[4]

"There shall be collected before the throne of God, and before the son of man seated on that August and splendid throne, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, from Adam to his youngest son. Then shall the fates of all men be fixed, irreversibly fixed, never, never, never to change! Then man's ancient habitation, this terrestrial ball with all its ponderous apparatus, will be dissolved in fiery ruin. Then time, old time itself, shall exist no longer. Days shall cease to roll, the sun to shine and hours to be numbered. Then shall all the sufferings, and sorrows, pains, calamities and trials of God's dear children be at an end. The exiles shall be taken home. Then shall the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary be at rest. Then shall the saints of God sorrow and sigh no more. Then shall they complain and groan no more, but soar to heaven and glory, and be forever with the Lord. Then shall they leave the world on fire and ascend to take possession of that glorious kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world."

"Learn how awfully solemn and important that eventful day will be, in which the Lord Jesus Christ will come to judge the world. O! What pomp, what awful solemnity, will attend that day, that dreadful day! Hear the judgment chariot rolling, hear the angel's trumpet sounding, see the sleeping dead arising, see the books of judgment opening, and the dead, small and great, judged out of the things written in the books. May the Lord of his infinite mercy prepare us all for the joys at his right hand, and then bear the judgment down whenever infinite wisdom sees proper. Even so come Lord Jesus. Amen, and AMEN."

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[4]Selected from "Christ the Sacrificial Offering for Sin Coming to Judgment, Heb. 9.28" in Robert Henderson, *A Series of Sermons on Practical and Familiar Subjects*, vol. 1 (Knoxville: Heiskell and Brown, 1823), 256-257, 259.

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APPENDIX E

Selected Religious References in the Messages of the Governors[5]

from John Sevier

Legislative Message (LM) 30 July 1796, Announcement of Statehood
"I have the pleasure of announcing to you, gentlemen, the admission of the State of Tennessee into the Federal Union, a circumstance pregnant with every flattering prospect of peace, happiness and oppulence to our infant State. The period is at length arrived where the people of the South Western Territory may enjoy all the blessings and liberties of a free and Independent republic." (17)

Second Inaugural Address, 22 September 1797
"The Greatest object of my future life will be, to contribute to the Good of my country, and assured as I am of the wisdom and patriotism of this legislature I retire from among you this day with a full persuasion that under the smiles of a Heavenly father the results of your deliberations will strengthen and perpetuate the Great blessings of liberty, laws, and peace." (26)

LM 19 September 1799
"Emigration and population is daily increasing, and I have no doubt, under the propitious hand of Providence, your patronage, the wise and wholesome laws you in your wisdom may think proper to enact, that our state will become more and more respectable and conspicuous, and the Citizens enjoy all that happiness and comfort this human life in an ordinary course will afford them. The poor and distressed claim the first share of your deliberation." (91-92)

[5]Excerpted from Robert H. White, ed., *Messages of the Governors of Tennessee 1796-1821*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Commission, 1952). Page numbers are given in parentheses after each quote.

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from Archibald Roane

<u>LM 23 September 1801</u>
"If we take a comprehensive view of the general government, of which we form a part, we will see with pleasure the prosperous situation in which by the smiles of Divine Providence it is placed."
"Whatever my co-operation . . . –May the Supreme Ruler of Nations, direct to a happy issue all our efforts to promote the happiness of our common country." (107-108)

<u>LM 20 September 1803</u>
"You have been selected . . . to make laws calculated to secure the blessings of liberty and advance the happiness of the people."
"Blessed as we are with fertility of soil, with a population encreasing in numbers, industry and enterprise–favored by heaven with peace and tranquility, and a variety of resources . . . every heart ought to expand with gratitude to our Supreme Benefactor." (132)

from John Sevier

<u>LM 18 September 1805</u>
"The propitious hand of Providence has abundantly blessed our agricultural pursuits with a pleasing prospect of a plentiful supply of all the common and necessary productions of our farms." (189)

<u>LM 29 July 1806</u>
"No additional burthens of taxation need ever be required or imposed on our fellow-citizens, and we may safely contemplate, under the care of Divine Providence, with mild and salutary laws, on always continuing to be a free, happy and independent people." (211)

<u>LM 24 September 1807</u>
"I deeply regret the idea of being again involved in all the horrors of a barbarious unnatural war, but at the same time I am very much consoled by believing and hoping our national government has given no cause for the bringing about the calamity; I pray Heaven may avert the appeal to arms and bloodshed, but should the direful event be inevitable, I shall rest with the fullest confidence, that your patriotism will be such, as to afford all the aid in your power, and that but one sentiment will actuate and inspire us all with a full determination to defend, to the last extremity, our injured and insulted country." (244)

<u>LM 2 December 1807</u>
"Under the propitious hand of Providence, the productions of our farms the last session have been abundantly great." (260)

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<u>LM 18 September 1809</u>
"Permit me, in taking leave of your August body, to express a hope that a benign providence will ever guard, cherish and promote the well-being and happiness of my fellow-citizens of the state of Tennessee." (273)

from Willie Blount

<u>LM 11 October 1809</u>
" . . . a certain portion of citizens much more exposed to the wiles and artifices of evil disposed men than others; this exposure arises out of their local situation; it is not in their power to guard against it without the interposition of your honorable body. To remedy evils is a duty." (284)

<u>LM 17 September 1811</u>
" . . . which situation appears to be such, as almost to require the friendly interposition of the Supreme Being to save them from destruction, or to put their affairs so to rights." (315)

<u>LM 26 September 1811</u>
"Tennessee possesses great internal wealth, high natural advantages compared with other states, and is settled by people of industrious habits, possessing a good share of laudable enterprize, but crampt in their means of execution, by the existence of present temporary external causes and obstructions, within the power of the general government so to controul."
"We only want to exercise the privilege of applying our labors in the business of community, in the way we have a right to expect we should, from our local situation, thus to assist by the hand of art and of industry, the consummation of those natural advantages which were evidently intended for us by the Creator." (346)

<u>LM 7 September 1812</u>
"To the end that . . . the evils of a protracted war may thereby be averted . . . such measures will avert the evils of war and a speedy honorable and permanent peace, the only desirable kind to have will quickly follow."
"Our cause is a good one–I feel satisfied that the people will rally . . . in support of American liberty and independence; which is the birthright of the people of the United States; given to us by our fathers, many of whom stamped the true value thereon by their actions in the revolutionary struggle, and sealed it with their blood, for this their act we should be grateful. I am so and believe you are." (373)

<u>LM 19 September 1815</u>
"The expedition with which the Tennessee troops descended the Mississippi to meet the enemy was never surpassed. The hand of a favorable Providence was surely with them; which, with the best human exertions in any laudable undertaking, is sufficient to ensure success." (420)

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from *Journal of the House of Representatives* 1815

"We are irresistably drawn to tender homage to the ruler of the destinies of nations, whose providential interposition on our behalf has been so conspicuously displayed." (440)

from Joseph McMinn

LM 27 September 1815

"But to him who governs the destiny of states, we owe the utmost reverence and humility for the returned blessings of peace; and to him we ought to offer our united supplications that he would continue to bestow his choicest favors on our happy land."

"In obedience to the voice of my fellow-citizens, I approach the discharge of the duties assigned, impressed with a just sense of their great responsibility, relying on the conducting hand of an unerring Providence, and the cordial co-operation of your wisdom and good will." (447-448, 452)

LM 17 November 1815

"I cannot close this address without making respectful mention of the Divine Goodness manifested to those who have been assembled at this place on public business; especially as regards their health. For although a considerable portion have been indisposed, yet the convalescent are able to travel to their respective places of abode. Which favors, under ordinary circumstances, would seem to demand our united acknowledgements to the Supreme Ruler of the universe–but more particularly when society appeared to mourn under the awful threatenings of the epidemic which for some time prevailed with unabating ardor." (467-468)

LM 15 September 1817

"And while I indulge in expressing my thankfulness to the Divine Benefactor for his benign interposition, I am not unmindful of the great obligation I am under to my fellow citizens for their apparent approbation." (486)

Letter from Governor McMinn to Secretary of State Daniel Graham, 17 September 1818

"When it pleased God to restore me almost to a perfect state of good health, in the most sudden and miraculous manner, and enabled me not only to rise to the agency (10 miles) but to transact the business of my country . . ." (491)

Letter from Governor McMinn to Secretary of State Daniel Graham, 12 November 1818

"Nothing would afford me half the pleasure to that of accomplishing this business the importance of which has become more obvious, since the news of the Chickasaw Treaty, and until that is done my mind will never rest in Peace as to worldly matters, nor can any Human Power stop its progress, tho it may not be the will of the all wise disposer to permit me to see it otherwise than he did the Beloved Father in relation to the Land of promise, and with his will I hope I shall be able to give a Christian assent." (493-494)

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Letter from Governor McMinn to Secretary of State Daniel Graham, 19 November 1818

"Its now confidently believed by my friends that I will affect a total extinguishment of Cherokee title to all their land, east of the Mississippi."

"For my self when I reflect upon the importance of such an event, and that I have to contend single handed with an opposition as formidable as the one in question, I can scarcely be as sanguine as my friends, but if I should succeed, which God grant I may, I shall live and Die under the pleasing belief that his hand led to victory." (494)

LM 20 September 1819

"The evidences of a kind and pervading influence have been greatly multiplied and strongly marked; and the regular and consistent progress of morality and religion, must be a source of real pleasure to every well regulated mind. General confidence in our political liberty is strengthened by time and further experiment, whilst the sources of rational enjoyment, and domestic happiness are every where extended and increased."

"For a continuation of all these things, let us look in humble confidence to that superintending hand, which governs the destinies of men and nations." (524)

LM 17 September 1821

" . . . relying for support on that kind Providence under which the institutions of our country have grown and fluorished, and upon which alone, each individual is taught to depend for all the comforts of life, and for all the means of social enjoyment."

"Many of us must in the course of a very few fleeting years at most, be called to reckon the profit we have made on the talent we received, and happy will be the end of that servant who may have known and done the masters will. The ligaments by which we are bound to this world are yielding in sunder to the silent influence of every moments flight, and the objects by which we were once delighted will be seen and known no more."

"Let it then be our emulation, under the special direction of that divine intelligence to whose beneficience and bounty we refer the enjoyment of every good and perfect gift, to grow in the works of tenderness, forbearance, charity, and benevolence one towards another: Let us endeavour to be good citizens, good neighbors, good brothers and good friends; ever recollecting that perfect goodness is one of the highest attributes of divinity itself." (642, 658)

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APPENDIX F

The Bank that Jack Built[6]

CUT 1st.
This is the *Bank* that Jack built.

CUT 2d.
These are the *Men*, that own the Bank that Jack built.

CUT 3d.
These are the *Directors*, that manage the Men
That own the Bank that Jack built.

CUT 4th.
These are the *Rags*, all tatter'd and torn,
That were issued as *money*, noon, evening, and morn,
By the cunning Directors, that manage the Men,
That own the Bank that Jack built.

CUT 5th.
This is the *Beef*, and the *Pork*, and the *Corn*,
That were bought with the *Rags*, all tatter'd and torn,
That were issued as money, noon, evening and morn,
By the cunning Directors, that manage the Men,
That own the Bank that Jack built.

CUT 6th.
These are the *Traders*, all shaven and shorn,
Who sold all their goods, and their Beef, Pork, and Corn,
For the Rags of the Bank, all tatter'd and torn,
That were issued as money, noon, evening and morn,

---

[6]"Miscellaneous," *Knoxville Register*, 29 August 1820.

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By the cunning Directors, that manage the Men,
That own the Bank that Jack built.

CUT 7th.

These are the *Farmers*, all poor and forlorn,
That sold to the Traders, all shaven and shorn,
The Beef and the Butter, the Pork and the Corn,
That were bought with the Rags, all tatter'd and torn,
That were issued as money, noon, evening and morn,
By the cunning Directors, that manage the Men,
That own the Bank that Jack built.

CUT 8th.

These are the Banks, which the city adorn,
That gave *Credit* to Rags, all tatter'd and torn,
By which the fleec'd Farmers, all poor and forlorn,
And the bamboozled Traders, all shaven and shorn,
Were robbed of their goods, and their Beef, Pork, and Corn,
Which they sold for the Rags, all tatter'd and torn
That were issued as money, noon, evening and morn,
By the cunning Directors, that manage the Men,
That own the Bank that Jack built.

CUT 9th.

These are the *Knowing ones*, * * * *
Who laugh in their sleeves at the losers forlorn,
And buy up the Rags, all tatter'd and torn,
(Refused by the Banks which the city adorn)
That the Farmers and Traders, all shaven and shorn,
Received from their Goods, and their Beef, Pork, and Corn,
When issued as money, noon, evening and morn,
By the cunning Directors, that manage the Men,
That own the Bank that Jack built.

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APPENDIX G

Lamentation on the Separation of a Negro Woman and Her Children[7]

Shall human beings be expos'd to sale,
While children weep, and tender mothers wail,
Shall streaming tears half blind the mother's eyes,
And weeping infants vent their fruitless cries?
Shall children, sever'd from the mother's side,
Her fost'ring care, forever be deni'd?
Expos'd to insult,–doom'd to wear the chain
Of horrid slavery, infamy, and shame!
Shall men, call'd Christians, do this horrid deed,
And cause the heartstrings of their kind to bleed;
Then at the sacramental board record
The dying sorrows of a risen Lord!
Shall men, thus guilty of their brother's blood;
Presume to lift their crimson'd hands to God;
Or hope for mercy, in a time to come,
When all oppressors shall receive their doom!
How would such like to see their brothers dear,
Fore'd from their sight, forever disappear;
Or sisters, wrested from their kind embrace,
To drink the cup of sorrow and disgrace–
Sold off to tyrants, as if they were brutes,
To be dispos'd of as vile fancy suits!
And yet the same they have to others done,
Whose feelings are as tender as their own!
O horrid sight! O wonderful to view!
And yet how many such vile acts pursue;
Wring out the sorrows of their flesh and blood,
And buy and sell the image of their God!

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[7]Elihu Embree, ed., *The Emancipator (Complete): A Reprint* . . . (1820; repr., Nashville: B. H. Murphy, 1932), 78.

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Such hearts as these, sure, harder are than stone,
Relentless at deep sorrow's dying groan,
Cause others hearts with grief and woe to bleed,
And boast performance of the mighty deed!
Sure wealth thus got, but little time can stay,
Such wealth takes wing, and quickly flies away.
And leaves the wretched victims of such gain,
A prey to want, remorse, and guilty shame!
Then O! be wiser! never more transgress,
The rules of Justice, others to oppress;
Lest the same measure to thyself be given
By the all ruling hand of angry Heaven.

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