

The Origins of Millerite Separatism

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CHAPTER 1

HISTORIANS AND MILLERITE SEPARATISM



Early in 1841, Truman Hendryx moved to Bradford, Pennsylvania, where he quickly grew alienated from his local church. Upon settling down in his new home, Hendryx attended several services in his new community's Baptist church. After only a handful of visits, though, he became convinced that the church did not believe in what he referred to as "Bible religion." Its "impiety" led him to lament, "I sometimes almost feel to use the language [of] the Prophecy 'Lord, they have killed thy prophets and digged [sic] down thine [sic] altars and I only am left alone and they seek my life.'"¹ His opposition to the church left him isolated in his community, but his fear of "degeneracy in the churches and ministers" was greater than his loneliness. Self-righteously believing that his beliefs were the "Bible truth," he resolved to remain apart from the Baptist church rather than attend and be corrupted by its "sinful" influence.²

The "sinful" church from which Hendryx separated himself was characteristic of mainstream antebellum evangelicalism. The tumultuous first decades of the nineteenth century had transformed the theological and institutional foundations of mainstream American Protestantism. During the colonial era, American Protestantism had been dominated by the Congregational, Presbyterian, and Anglican churches, which, for the most part, had remained committed to the theology of John Calvin. In Calvinism, God was envisioned as all-powerful, having predetermined both the course of history and the eternal destiny of all humans. By the 1830s and 1840s, however, the series of religious revivals known as the Second Great Awakening had transformed American religion. Now the evangelical Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian churches formed what Paul Conkin describes as the "center" or what I refer to as the "mainstream" of American Protestantism: they were easily the largest denominations; their views set the norm for antebellum religion; and they played an influential role in society. Evangelicals' view of the relationship between humans and God was fundamentally different from Calvinism's. Rejecting predestination, they believed that through popular, emotional worship services, they were able to convince sinners to come to God.³

Hendryx feared that worshipping with his town's "sinful" mainstream evangelical church would threaten his salvation because he was a committed Millerite. A longtime friend of the movement's founder, William Miller, Hendryx was a firm believer that the second coming of Christ to judge mankind and initiate the millennium was imminent. The second coming would occur sometime "on or before 1843," he believed.⁴ Hendryx's premillennial vision of the second coming and judgment was different from the postmillennialism of mainstream evangelicalism. Whereas Hendryx believed that only Jesus's return could initiate the millennium, postmillennialists thought that humans played a

central role in bringing it about.⁵ Their opposing vision of the end times, however, was only one reason for conflict between Millerites and their churches. Hendryx's conviction that the impiety of his community's church was a threat to his salvation stemmed directly from Miller's comprehensive condemnation of mainstream evangelical Protestantism. Millerites self-righteously believed that they had interpreted the Bible accurately. Convinced Millerism was the only path to salvation, they thought that anything opposed to it was sinful. Since most Millerites were disaffected members of "sinful" mainstream evangelical churches, Miller's theology set his followers and their churches on a collision course.

Historians have identified the climax of conflict between Millerites and their churches in the summer of 1843—when a Millerite evangelist named Charles Fitch preached the highly divisive sermon, "Come Out of Her, My People," to his followers in Ohio. Fitch's argument relied upon Revelation 18: 1-5 and 14: 8, which prophesies that since "Babylon the great is fallen...and is become the habitation of devils," then it is necessary for saints to "come out of her...that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues."⁶ Up until this point, the Millerite leadership had interpreted the biblical image of Babylon as referring exclusively to the Roman Catholic Church. And, firmly in line with Protestant tradition, Millerites originally believed that the Papacy embodied the Antichrist.⁷ Fitch's sermon, however, innovatively applied the images of Babylon and Antichrist—which represented everything that was opposed to the ways of God—to all Protestant churches as well. His belief that both the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches represented the Antichrist led him to warn that "if you intend to be found a Christian when Christ appears, *come out of Babylon*, and come out now!"⁸ The only Christians who would be saved during God's imminent judgment were those Millerites who withdrew from their churches, Fitch declared.

Fitch argued that Millerites' salvation depended on their separation from their churches because he believed that the church had been corrupted by "nominal" Christians—those who claimed to be Christian, but did not live "godly" lives—and "corrupt," worldly ministers. Depicting the churches as havens for God's enemies, Fitch's sermon was designed to answer the question that Millerites naturally wondered when faced with such negative characterizations of their churches: should they remain within them or separate? Fitch warned them that only by separating could they live piously in the remaining months before judgment. If they did not withdraw, they should expect damnation. Fitch's radical sermon appears to have had a significant impact. In the subsequent months, most Millerites withdrew from their churches.⁹

Historians have disagreed over whether Fitch's sermon prompted Millerite separatism or whether a year of intensive conflict between Millerites and their churches was ultimately responsible. In his synthesis history *Millennial Fever and the End of the World*, George Knight sees Fitch's declaration as causative. Knight claims that Fitch's scriptural justification for separation was primarily

responsible for most Millerites leaving their churches during the second half of 1843. In their studies of Millerism, historians David Arthur and David Rowe more persuasively portray Fitch's admonition as the climax of an approximately year-long struggle between Millerites and their churches. They argue that Millerites began intensive evangelizing in the summer of 1842. When Millerites' churches responded harshly or indifferently, conflict erupted. They envision the conflict produced by Millerite evangelizing as the most significant cause in explaining Millerite separatism because it created popular support for separation. Fitch's scriptural justification, therefore, was simply a response to popular demand. With confidence that the Bible supported their desire to withdraw, Millerites reluctantly separated from churches that they had originally hoped to convert.¹⁰

As a result of their emphasis on the impact of conflict produced by evangelizing, Rowe and Arthur suggest that Millerism's separatist impulse emerged late in the movement. Although Millerism began to grow rapidly in 1840, they envision the process of separatism as having begun in the summer of 1842. Millerites, they claim, had originally hoped not to separate; it was a position they were forced into adopting by the churches' hostility. Before the summer of 1842, they suggest that Millerite newspapers, general meetings, and itinerant evangelists—institutions necessary for Millerites to evangelize within the churches—had unwittingly laid the foundation for a distinct identity. Even though those institutions played a role in supporting the separate Millerite identity after it emerged in the summer of 1843, according to Arthur and Rowe they were created during a period in which the Millerites wished to remain within their churches.¹¹

Historians have reached a consensus that Millerite separatism emerged both late in the movement and reluctantly, in part because they have uncritically accepted Miller's biased explanation of the process at face value.¹² Miller explained his followers' separation from their churches in a pamphlet entitled, *Apology and Defence*, which was written during the movement's public humiliation after its mistaken belief that October 22, 1844 would be the date of judgment.

Millerites' faced intense ridicule because they set several incorrect dates for the second coming. As the advent approached, Miller changed his original prediction that the second coming would occur "on or before 1843" because other believers in the near advent demanded a more specific date.¹³ Believing the Bible revealed it to be impossible to know the exact date, Miller predicted the second coming would occur between March 21, 1843, and March 21, 1844.¹⁴ When March 21, 1844 came and went without the literal return of Jesus, many Millerites returned to Bible study and uncovered evidence that the second coming would be accompanied with a "tarrying time." Christ, they now believed, would delay his return in order to test Christians' faith.¹⁵ By August of 1844, though, Millerites had grown restless from waiting. Employing a different methodology to interpret biblical prophecy, Millerite evangelist Samuel Snow argued that judgment would occur on October 22, 1844. His date became the orthodox position of the movement for two to three months until it passed

without the second coming. Millerites described the failure of Snow's prediction as the "Great Disappointment." American society responded to each failed prediction by increasing their mockery of the Millerites' gullibility and charging Miller with maliciously deceiving his followers.¹⁶

Against this backdrop of widespread ridicule and accusations of fraud, Miller used *Apology and Defence* to defend his honor and reputation by portraying his movement and his intentions honorably. In order to do so, he countered his critics' charges that he was attempting to create a sect by arguing that his followers' separated from their churches reluctantly after the churches' opposition to Millerite evangelizing produced conflict.¹⁷ When Millerite evangelists began their work in earnest during the summer of 1842, Miller argued that his followers

began to complain that they had not liberty in the churches to present their views freely, or to exhort their brethren to prepare for judgment. Those in the neighborhood of Advent preaching, felt that when they could listen to these glorious truths, it was their privilege so to do. For this many of them were treated coldly, some came out of their churches, and some were expelled... The result [of evangelizing] was, that a general feeling of opposition arose, on the part of the ministers and churches that did not embrace these views, against those who were looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.¹⁸

Although he wished to portray the movement in a positive light, in 1845 Miller was unable to deny that most of his followers had already withdrawn from their churches. The best he could do to respond to the charges that he was creating a sect was argue that separatism had been forced upon his followers by their churches' hostility. Despite this explicit bias, historians have trusted Miller's explanation of his followers' separation as reluctant and belated. Most importantly, Miller's apologetics have contributed to historians' view of the entire movement as inherently opposed to separatism.

Part of the reason that historians have trusted Miller's views in *Apology and Defence* is because they are consistent with the other sources historians most often use to study Millerite separatism. When Millerism began to grow in 1840, Miller and Himes utilized Millerite periodicals to advise their followers not to separate from the churches. In addition, at Millerite evangelists' general conferences, the movement's leaders often insisted that Millerism was opposed to both sectarianism and separatism.¹⁹ Historians have mistakenly relied upon Millerite evangelists' frequent opposition to separatism in the movement's newspapers and records from their general conferences because they are equally as misleading as Miller's explanation of the movement in *Apology and Defence*. As I will explain later in more detail, Miller and his fellow evangelists were a minority of the movement. And their experiences differed from the vast majority of Millerism's rank-and-file believers. Unlike their followers, they opposed separatism because they needed access to evangelical churches in order to conduct their missionary work. This bias undermines the credibility of their views on the movement's separation from the churches.

Since Millerite evangelists produced the vast majority of the movement's written records, historians have relied upon their views to characterize Millerism's relationship to the churches. Whether examining *Apology and Defence*, Millerite periodicals, or the records from evangelists' general conferences, historians' explanations of believers' withdrawal from the churches have mistakenly trusted Millerite evangelists' biased attempt to obscure the movement's separatist impulse.

Historians have also trusted Miller and his evangelists' portrayal of the movement as opposed to separatism because it coheres with the recent trend in the movement's historiography, which depicts Millerism as respectable and consistent with mainstream evangelicalism. Historians' attempt to depict the movement respectably was shaped by the Millerite historiography that came before it.

The movement's ability to overcome the Great Disappointment of October 22, 1844 and evolve into several denominations has made Millerism an essential component of Adventist scholars' explanations of their churches' origins. After the Great Disappointment, the movement fractured due to competing beliefs about how to view the apparent failure of prophecy to be fulfilled. One group of believers, the "literalists," maintained that prophecy foretold Jesus's literal and imminent return to initiate the millennium, but admitted that October 22, 1844 was not its correct date. Disagreements over whether or not the souls of sinners were annihilated at death and different views of the proper organization of a potential Millerite church led the literalist faction to devolve into several different denominations—most notably the Advent Christian church.²⁰

The Seventh-Day Adventist church emerged from the dissenting Millerite camp, which believed that October 22, 1844 was the correct date of judgment. Admitting that they were wrong about the literal nature of judgment, the Seventh-Day Adventists believed that Jesus began to judge mankind spiritually on October 22, 1844. When he finished, he would literally descend to earth to initiate the millennium. Having reinterpreted biblical prophecy to reconcile the failure of their prediction of the world to end, the Seventh-Day Adventists have been able to thrive during the past century and a half. In fact, their current membership approaches twelve million.²¹

Historians from the Advent Christian and the Seventh-Day Adventist churches were responsible for most of the movement's historiography until the 1950s. However, their studies often were uncritical and few situated the movement within the context of the larger society. Instead, they celebrated Miller, and portrayed his followers as normal, everyday Americans. Their apologetics were directly inspired by the desire to rescue the movement's reputation. In the 1920s, Clara Endicott Sears wrote an influential account of the movement, which portrayed Millerites as lunatics. Her account was influential for decades, in part because it confirmed American popular culture's impression of Millerites as crazy.²²

Beginning in the 1950s, however, academic historians from outside the Adventist faith transcended the previous historiography's polemics; the literature they produced both challenged Sears's characterization of the movement and was more sophisticated than the Adventist scholars' accounts. By comparing the movement to mainstream evangelicalism and other alternative religious movements at the time, they were able to show that Millerites were not lunatics; instead, the initial wave of reputable historiography overwhelmingly emphasized the ways that Millerism reflected certain aspects of their contemporary religious culture, or took other aspects of it to their logical conclusions. For instance, Jonathon Butler argues that Millerite premillennialism was largely consistent with reformers' attempts to introduce "strident, sweeping crusades" against America's various social ills. Millerism simply adopted different means to achieve mainstream evangelicalism's goal of perfecting society. Butler, consequently, depicts the movement as only a slight variant on a standard feature of American Protestantism.²³ Butler's argument is representative of the first wave of reputable historiography on Millerism. By contextualizing the movement, it was more scholarly than the Adventist historiography; however, it retained Adventists' attempt to portray the movement as respectable. Historians' portrayal of Millerism as opposed to separatism, then, is a part of this larger historiographical trend downplaying the movement's distinctiveness from mainstream evangelicalism.

By the mid-1990s, academic historians had successfully shown how Millerism was a product of its times, and in doing so they had salvaged the Millerites' reputations. Their stress on the Millerites' normalcy was beneficial because it helped to explain the movement's origins. No longer did the movement appear to have been an aberration composed solely of the deranged. By fully contextualizing it, academic historians have contributed greatly to our understanding of the movement's origins and relationship to society.²⁴

As necessary as these studies have been, they have gone too far in stressing the movement's similarities to the larger society; recently, historians have begun to appreciate the need to adopt a more balanced view that also appreciates the movement's distinctiveness. In the past two decades or so, they have begun to acknowledge that Millerism drew on many aspects of mainstream evangelical society, but their explanations of the movement have stressed what distinguished the two. This shift in the historiography was absolutely necessary, for it is impossible to explain an alternative religious movement without focusing upon its distinctiveness.

By showing how Miller's condemnation of antebellum evangelicalism's "sinfulness" caused rank-and-file Millerites to form separate meetings very early in the movement, my study contributes to this emerging trend in the historiography. In doing so, I attempt to position separatism at the heart of the identity of the vast majority of Millerites. At the same time, my argument goes beyond the work of other historians who are interested in Millerism's distinctiveness. Both Rowe and Ruth Alden Doan's recent assessments of Millerism, for instance, portray the movement as having adopted a set of

beliefs that were an alternative to mainstream evangelicalism without emphasizing the movement's condemnation of the churches. Millerism was not just different than mainstream evangelicalism; it was a worldview that was diametrically opposed to what believers perceived as sinful evangelicalism.²⁵

In addition to emphasizing Millerism's radical condemnation of antebellum evangelicalism, my study is unique within Millerite historiography—and part of an exciting new trend in the history of religion—in the way that it explores Millerism from the perspective of rank-and-file believers. By focusing upon the views and experiences of Millerites who were not leaders in the movement's missionary work, I show that the movement's divisiveness was primarily the result of the agency of its followers—not the churches who rejected them or the leadership which attempted to control them. Because they valued worship more than evangelizing, rank-and-file believers were the ones to act upon the radical implications of Miller's theology. Very early in the movement they created separate "Millerite meetings," which sustained Millerites' distinctive faith and made it possible for them to withdraw from their churches and continue to worship. In Millerism's radical ideology and its separate meetings, we see that the movement's progress toward separating from the churches was shaped primarily by the agency of its rank-and-file members; it was not, as historians have suggested, a reluctant reaction to the churches' hostility.

Since historians normally explain alternative religious movements like Millerism as due to their members' alienation, I will begin my explanation of Millerite separatism by discussing how both the changing nature of nineteenth-century society and mainstream evangelicalism alienated antebellum Americans.²⁶

CHAPTER 2

ANTEBELLUM ALIENATION: THE SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS CONTEXT OF THE MILLERITE MOVEMENT

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The market revolution of the early national and antebellum periods dramatically transformed society. Although historians have debated its timing and extent for several decades, a tenuous consensus exists concerning the market revolution in the nineteenth-century. It is largely agreed that instead of continuing to farm for subsistence or trade with neighbors, as the nineteenth-century progressed, increasing numbers of farmers sold their crops for cash on the market.²⁷ The market revolution was not limited to the farm, however. The antebellum economy also was transformed by the first industrial revolution. Whereas manufactured goods had previously been produced in local

shops by artisans, the innovative techniques of the industrial revolution led to the production of goods in bulk by unskilled workers in factories. Due to the industrial revolution's efficient techniques, goods were produced far more cheaply, the techniques spread, and many artisans were unable to compete with mass production by unskilled workers.²⁸

The market revolution would not have been possible had it not been for developments in transportation and communications; neither farmers nor factory owners would have been able to transport their goods to distant marketplaces had it not been for the growing network of turnpikes, canals, and, eventually, railroads. The period also witnessed the development of higher quality and cheaper printing presses, which made it possible for middle-class Americans to communicate their views. In addition, postal agents traveled along the country's expanding transportation infrastructure, ensuring that Americans' print literature was rapidly disseminated. As a result, a vital national marketplace for both religious and secular print literature developed in antebellum America.²⁹

Historians often explore how these socioeconomic changes alienated antebellum Americans, and inclined them to be attracted to alternative religious movements.³⁰ In his monograph *Crucible of the Millennium: The Burned-over District of New York in the 1840s*, Michael Barkun suggests that the Panic of 1837—in part a product of the expanding market—had an important effect on the worldview of antebellum Americans. He argues that people perceived the economic downturn as a sign that mainstream evangelicalism's unbridled belief in human-inspired progress was illusory. The Panic, therefore, helped convince many people to question the persuasiveness of mainstream evangelicalism and turn to alternative religious movements which articulated a less optimistic assessment of humans' ability to perfect the world.³¹

In *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850*, Whitney Cross explores why the social environment of the newly settled region along the Erie Canal in upstate New York produced concentrated expressions of religious extremism. In the north, the improvements to transportation infrastructure—particularly the Erie Canal—facilitated the migration of large numbers of landless sons of New England farmers to head west for land to support their families. Cross argues that the migration and economic growth following the canal's completion in 1825 set in motion twelve years of rapid social change. Due to the region's improvements in communications and transportation infrastructure, the burgeoning towns of upstate New York became more closely tied to New England, and they quickly abandoned the unrefined culture of the American frontier for the Yankee cultural values of the established northeast. One way that the region rapidly adopted Yankee culture was by valuing education.³²

Cross argues that the educational disparity between the region's religious leaders and the masses was, in part, responsible for widespread religious enthusiasm in upstate New York. The region's ties to New England led to the influx of religious leaders educated in eastern universities. Its

surfeit of religious leaders fomented religious enthusiasm by propagating their innovative theologies in both the pulpit and the religious presses.³³ The region's lay church members, who were "by no means learned, yet able to read their Bibles," also played their part in creating the region's tumultuous religious culture. Their inability to think critically about the theological arguments to which they were exposed made them susceptible to being stirred up by the region's religious leaders.³⁴ Drawing upon Cross's title, the region's heavy exposure to evangelists, who propagated innovative and experiential approaches to religion, is the reason historians designate upstate New York the "burned-over district." During the first half of the nineteenth-century, the region was "burned-over" by the incessant waves of evangelists' fire-and-brimstone sermons.

Both Cross and Barkun identify the domesticity of women in upstate New York as an important factor in making them susceptible to religious enthusiasm. As farmers moved away from subsistence farming, women played an increasingly limited role in the economic life of the family—at least within the middle-class. This change made women "progressively more isolated from the world."³⁵ They compensated for their dull lives and constrained socioeconomic activity by involving themselves heavily in church life, which placed them at the nexus of religious enthusiasm and exposed them to the views of alternative religious movements.³⁶

In addition to the changing nature of society in the antebellum north, mainstream American Protestantism alienated many antebellum Americans and caused them to turn to alternative religious movements. Because the new nation's unbridled optimism did not cohere with the fatalism of Calvinist theology, it declined in popularity during the nineteenth-century. Up until the nineteenth-century, a Calvinist view of salvation shaped the mainstream American denominations of Congregationalism, Presbyterianism, and Anglicanism. Calvinism's belief system was predicated upon an uncompromising commitment to God's omnipotence. To Calvinists, an all-powerful God controlled every aspect of human affairs, including salvation. Their belief in predestination held that God's saving grace was predetermined, irrespective of humans' worth; humans were unable to do anything to affect their salvation. Nor were they ever worthy of God's grace. Calvinists viewed mankind as inherently corrupt, inheritors of Adam's sin. It was God's preordained plan and not man's actions that determined who would be saved during judgment.³⁷ Despite their belief in predestination, Calvinists' maintained that humans also needed to do good works in order to be saved. In Calvinism, a pious life of good works was envisioned as a sign of one's inner faith. If one did not live a pious life, therefore, damnation was certain. Although outer piety did not earn salvation, it made it possible that one was among the "elect" that God had predetermined to be saved.³⁸

In nineteenth-century America, an Arminian view of salvation became far more popular than Calvinism.³⁹ Put simply, Arminianism maintained that humans could choose to come to God and earn their salvation through good works. It was, thus, an optimistic, attractive alternative to Calvinism

because it cohered with antebellum society's belief in the boundlessness of human agency. Consequently, throughout the first half of the nineteenth-century, the Arminian denominations—Methodism, Baptism, and most of Presbyterianism—experienced exponential growth.⁴⁰ Although the traditionally Calvinist churches increased moderately, their growth was dwarfed by the successes of their competitors. As a result, Calvinism lost its grip on the mainstream of American Protestantism.⁴¹

Evangelical churches also grew during the early nineteenth-century because their style of worship was appealing to a wider variety of Americans. The acceptance of lay preachers, who were drawn from the same lower- and middle-class backgrounds as most congregants, helped evangelical worship to be extremely inclusive. Without preachers who were extensively trained in biblical study, their sermons reflected a common person's understanding of the Bible. In addition, lay preachers facilitated the transition from the inaccessible rhetoric and intense rationalism of the colonial Calvinist churches to the evangelicals' highly emotional style of worship. The dramatic cries, shouts, and convulsions that often accompanied preachers' demands that sinners repent and convert, for instance, made worship far more passionate. Although this new approach to worship certainly appealed to many lower- and middle-class white men, it played a particularly important role in bringing large numbers of women and African Americans into the evangelical churches.⁴²

In addition to the attractiveness of evangelical theology and worship, the Arminian denominations of mainstream Protestantism grew considerably because they were "evangelical." The term

gained a rather narrow meaning in the late eighteenth century—[it connoted] an emphasis among Protestants on a crisis-like conversion experience, on a very experiential devotional life, on the winning of converts, and on a very rigorous standard of personal and social purity or holiness.⁴³

Evangelicals' Arminian belief that people could choose to come to God and earn their salvation through good works convinced them to adopt a number of strategies to win converts to Christianity—primarily missionary work and revivals.

The Benevolent Empire is the term that historians use to describe the cooperative efforts of Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists to evangelize and educate American society during the first three to four decades of the nineteenth century.⁴⁴ Although mainstream evangelicalism also attempted to educate Americans about Christianity by establishing local schools, it conducted most of its educational work by distributing vast amounts of print literature. They relied upon the dissemination of religious literature to both convert people and sustain the faith of those who had already converted.⁴⁵

In addition to educating Americans by spreading the Gospel through print literature, the Benevolent Empire sought to evangelize the country by supporting religious revivals. Preachers'

emotional appeals imploring individuals to convert were central to the revivals. And their admonitions often had the desired effect. Before long, revivals became associated with religious extremism because preachers' demands prompted their listeners to undergo conversion experiences that included emotional frenzies such as falling to the floor, convulsing, and shouting. It was difficult, therefore, to experience revivals without being struck by the power of the preachers over their audiences. When preachers demanded that sinners repent and convert, many of them did.⁴⁶

The popularity and success of revivals in early nineteenth-century America also contributed to the decline of Calvinism and the rise of Arminianism. Antebellum revivalists found it difficult to reconcile their trade with the Calvinist view that humans played no role in their salvation.⁴⁷ Therefore, Arminian preachers mostly led the churches that employed revivalism. And, due to the competition between American denominations for converts, most denominations eventually succumbed to revivals' reputation to bring new people into the church. Revivals not only introduced the Arminian view of salvation into many churches; they also successfully won converts to those churches.⁴⁸ By employing revivals to bring large numbers of new Americans into their churches, antebellum evangelicals sought to expand their influence in society and Christianize the nation.

Although evangelicals continued to employ revivals throughout the first half of the nineteenth-century, as time went by they also became increasingly committed to shaping American society through social reform movements. In his monograph, *Revivals and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War*, Timothy Smith argues that before Protestants supported reform they had to abandon a supernatural or transcendent view of God—in which human affairs are predetermined—for an immanent one—in which God worked through human agency to achieve his ends. Their immanent view of God empowered American evangelicals to view themselves as playing a role in ridding the world of sin and initiating the millennium.⁴⁹ Postmillennialism—the belief that evangelicals' missionary work and social reform movements would perfect the world and initiate the millennium—was thus a corollary to their immanent view of God.⁵⁰ These views led many evangelicals to fervently support a variety of reform movements.

Even though evangelicals did not hold a monopoly on the period's social reform movements, they played a central role in many of them. In *American Reformers, 1815-1860*, Ronald Walters argues that "the ideological and organizational foundation for antebellum reform" was laid by evangelical religion.⁵¹ He suggests that evangelicals contributed their beliefs in postmillennialism and social progress to the movements. In addition, reformers' "language was filled with its [evangelical Protestantism's] rhetoric of sin, damnation, and salvation."⁵² At the same time, evangelicals' missionary societies provided reformers with effective techniques to communicate and build a national movement.⁵³ Ultimately, evangelicals played central roles in the antislavery, temperance,

labor rights, and, amongst others, women's rights movements. They also turned to party politics as a way to elect pious politicians who would support their reform efforts.⁵⁴

Evangelicals' engagement with the larger society eventually contributed to their "formalization." Previously, many churches were local institutions. They were poorly funded, run by untrained ministers drawn from the community, and concerned primarily with their members' salvation. Over the course of the nineteenth-century, however, many of the evangelical churches in the American north formalized. They gained more power, wealth, and influence; national institutions arose to control church affairs; and ministers increasingly became educated in evangelical universities. Formalization was a natural product of their involvement in reform movements and missionary work, for they had to raise funds and create powerful institutions in order to support them. In addition, to compete with other denominations in America's pluralistic religious community, the evangelical churches needed an educated, effective ministry. Naturally, this process occurred earlier in the wealthier, established north than in the newly settled regions of the American frontier. In the regions where Millerism thrived—New England and upstate New York—formalization often began as early as the 1820s.⁵⁵

Mainstream antebellum evangelical Protestantism was a worldly faith. It attempted to shape American society by Christianizing and reforming the nation. In addition, the popularity of its Arminian view of salvation was, in part, the result of the new nation's unbridled optimism. Throughout the first half of the nineteenth-century, most antebellum Protestants seem to have been content with evangelicalism's close ties to American society. But, as the century progressed, a distinct minority of disillusioned evangelicals emerged who rejected their churches' worldliness. Millerism was one manifestation of this countervailing trend in antebellum Protestantism.⁵⁶

A number of factors came together in the 1830s and the 1840s to prompt some evangelicals to doubt mainstream evangelicalism's commitment to progress and postmillennialism. The legacy of the turmoil and upheaval of the French Revolution had caused many people to view the world pessimistically.⁵⁷ The economic downturn resulting from the Panic of 1837 then reinforced the impression that progress was illusory.⁵⁸ In addition, by the 1830s, people had begun to believe that human-inspired reform movements were futile.⁵⁹ During the 1840s, some evangelical ministers began directly condemning mainstream evangelicalism because they believed it had prioritized perfecting the world through social reform over sustaining the piety of its own members. Evangelical churches' worldly focus on the temporal goals, it was believed by some, caused them to ignore the spiritual lives of their own congregants.⁶⁰

At the same time as evangelicals began to reconsider their belief in progress, some evangelical ministers began doubting revivals' ability to sustain congregants' piety. As their name implies, the original goal of revivals was to revitalize the church. But over time their overwhelming attention to securing new converts appeared to some to have had the opposite effect. Dissenting ministers began

to argue that revivals undermined the vitality of church life by prioritizing the conversion of sinners over sustaining the spiritual lives of church members.⁶¹ By the mid-1830s, even the period's most famous revivalist, Charles Grandison Finney, had begun to question their ability to revitalize church life.⁶²

Disaffected with mainstream evangelicalism's worldly obsession with progress and its preoccupation with converting the outside world, a variety of alternative religious movements arose throughout the first half of the nineteenth-century to revitalize church life.⁶³ John Humphrey Noyes's Oneida Community, the Mormons, Shakers, Christians (Disciples of Christ), and Anti-Mission Baptists all thrived because they offered unique alternatives to mainstream evangelicalism. They are a testament to antebellum Americans' alienation from society and mainstream evangelicalism. Miller, in other words, lived in a social environment prone to the rise of alternative religious movements.

CHAPTER 3

THE ORIGINS OF THE MILLERITE MOVEMENT

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To explain the origins of the Millerite movement, I will trace Miller's background from his youth through the earliest years in which he attempted to warn the world of imminent judgment.

Miller's family life shaped his educational opportunities during his youth. Born in the western Massachusetts town of Pittsfield in 1782, Miller spent most of his youth on his father's farm in the nearby town of Low Hampton, New York. As the daughter of an educated minister, his mother taught him to read at an early age, and Miller quickly developed an appetite for knowledge. He was particularly intrigued by adventure novels and American history. After he became old enough to work on his father's farm, Miller often stayed up late into the night reading. However, trying to raise sixteen siblings by tending a farm in an unsettled region of New York, Miller's parents did not have the financial resources to provide him with the formal education for which he yearned. All his family was able to spare was his attendance at a local school for three months during the winter. As a result, Miller educated himself and studied in his free time from farming. This pattern persisted throughout his life.⁶⁴

Miller's religious views evolved from his youth through his early adulthood. Although his mother raised him in a religious household, during Miller's adolescence he discarded his faith for deism because his parents and preachers had failed to help him reconcile the inconsistencies and contradictions within the Bible. Like many of his contemporaries, Miller believed that deism presented

a much more rational and orderly explanation of the world than Christianity.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, the extensive reading of Miller's youth had established a lasting piece of his dormant religiosity, which he retained throughout his years as a deist. "The more I read" about human history, he reflected, "the more dreadfully corrupt did the character of man appear."⁶⁶ Believing solely in mankind's innate depravity, however, did not make Miller a Christian; he also needed to believe that God saved humans from sin.

In 1803, Miller left his parent's home and farm and started his own. He married Lucy Smith and moved to her nearby hometown of Poultney, Vermont. Miller quickly became involved in his new town's community. He joined the Freemasons, supported the Democratic Party, and continued to frequent the library whenever possible. Apparently, Miller earned a positive reputation in his community because he was elected the town's constable in 1809. At thirty years old, Miller left his position as a civil servant in Poultney to serve his country in the War of 1812.⁶⁷

An experience during the war undermined Miller's belief in deism and led him to reconsider his religious beliefs. At the battle of Plattsburg in 1814, American soldiers were heavily outnumbered by the British and occupied an inferior tactical position. When Miller survived the battle in what he was convinced was a miraculous American victory, he could imagine no explanation other than divine intervention. Convinced that God had saved his life, Miller no longer found deism credible—for God's intervention in human affairs directly undermined the deist conception of a dispassionate God who governs through natural laws. Miller, as a result, left the war questioning his deism.⁶⁸

Shortly after returning from the war to run his deceased father's farm in Low Hampton, New York, Miller's conversion experience convinced him to believe in Christianity and inspired his newfound spiritual life predicated upon Bible reading. Perhaps knowing that he had been questioning deism, some of Miller's pious friends tried to involve him in church life by asking him to read the Sunday sermon at worship when the town's minister was away. As a respected member of the community, Miller obliged. During one reading, he was overwhelmed with emotion:

Suddenly, the character of a Saviour was vividly impressed upon my mind. It seemed that there might be a Being so good and compassionate as to himself atone for our transgressions, and thereby save us from suffering the penalty of sin. I immediately felt how lovely such a Being must be; and imagined that I could cast myself into the arms of, and trust in the mercy of, such an One. But the question arose, How can it be proved that such a Being does exist? Aside from the Bible, I found that I could get no evidence of the existence of a Saviour, or even of a future state... I saw that the Bible did bring to view just such a Saviour as I needed; and I was perplexed to find how an uninspired book should develop principles so perfectly adapted to the wants of a fallen world. I was constrained to admit that the Scriptures must be a revelation from God.⁶⁹

Miller's conversion experience established an intimate, spiritual relationship between him and Christ, and it convinced him of the Bible's inerrancy. Bible reading, he explained, formed the basis of his new spiritual life.

When Miller's deist friends reminded him of his previous reservation about the Bible—that it was full of inconsistencies—their challenge convinced Miller to study the Bible to prove its inerrancy. In response to their attempt to undermine his faith, Miller resolved to “harmonize all those apparent contradictions” in the Bible or he would remain a deist.⁷⁰ By “harmonize,” Miller meant that he sought to prove that the Bible was the work of an omnipotent creator by uncovering how it revealed the course of human history. This was an overwhelming task for most antebellum American Protestants who could read but were not well educated. They acknowledged that as the inerrant word of God the Bible mapped out the course of human history and predicted the end of the world. But many were unable to comprehend its inaccessible language and images, much less “harmonize” the connections between prophecy and human history into a coherent whole. Unable to understand the Bible, their faith seemed incomplete. Upon his conversion, Miller was certainly one of these earnest Christians, who believed in the Bible but did not understand it in its entirety.

Miller, therefore, approached his Bible study as a committed Christian who was determined to justify his faith by proving its inerrancy. In his journal article “Skepticism and American Faith: Infidels, Converts, and Religious Doubt in Early Nineteenth-Century America,” Christopher Grosso claims that since Miller renounced Christianity due to the Bible's inconsistencies during his youth, he needed to harmonize its disparate parts in order to believe in God.⁷¹ However, Miller's resolution that he would revert to deism if he failed to harmonize the Bible was largely rhetorical. It was his way of expressing his certainty that he would succeed. Miller already had his conversion experience and it had proved to him the reality of an omnipotent God, who communicated to humans through the inerrant Bible.⁷²

Miller believed it was possible to harmonize the Bible because of his Calvinist beliefs. Raised by a Baptist mother around the turn of the nineteenth-century, Miller's earliest religious teaching surely exposed him to Calvinism.⁷³ However, that did not necessitate his acceptance of Calvinism after his conversion experience. It is likely, though, that Miller's “miraculous” experience of God's divine intervention during the war inclined him to accept the Calvinist belief in God's omnipotence when he eventually converted. Either way, it is clear from Miller's lectures that he implicitly equated the Bible's teachings with Calvinism. Due to his Calvinist worldview, he was convinced that the inerrant Bible contained God's plans for the course of human history.⁷⁴

Convinced it was possible to uncover God's plans for human history in the Bible, Miller resolved to learn them. This goal caused him to focus his reading on the prophetic books of Daniel and Revelation: what better way to prove the Bible's inerrancy than by uncovering the events it predicted? His intensive study of biblical prophecy quickly convinced him of his belief in the near advent. As early

as 1818, after only a year or two of biblical study, he had concluded that “on or before 1843” Jesus would literally return to initiate the millennium.

Miller reached his belief that judgment would occur “on or before 1843” by relying entirely upon the Bible. He interpreted prophecy by identifying key passages of scripture and then interpreting their images’ meanings using clues found in the images’ other references in the Bible. Although he employed multiple strategies to show how the Bible predicted that judgment would occur in 1843, he most frequently drew upon Daniel 8: 13-14. In the passage, Daniel reveals that “the sanctuary” will “be cleansed” in “two thousand three hundred days” because it will take that long for “the vision concerning the daily *sacrifice*, and the transgression of desolation, to...be trodden under foot.”⁷⁵

After introducing the passage to his audience, Miller’s next task was to explain the figurative meaning of its symbols. The sanctuary of Daniel 8: 13-14, he clarified, refers to the church. He interpreted “cleansed” quite literally to mean judgment. Miller located Daniel’s “vision concerning the daily sacrifice and the transgression of desolation” in Daniel 9: 24:

‘Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people, and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the *vision* and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy.’⁷⁶

The language in this passage is remarkably similar to how antebellum Protestants viewed Jesus’s sacrifice on the cross: it was intended “to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness.” As a result, Miller suggested that the “daily sacrifice” in Daniel 8: 13-14 is a reference to Jesus’s death and resurrection. Taken as a whole, then, the passage’s figurative meaning indicates that judgment will occur 2300 days after Daniel’s vision predicting Jesus’s death and resurrection.

The next step in Miller’s interpretation of Daniel 8: 13-14 was to use the Bible to learn the date of Daniel’s vision. Miller did not view the days mentioned in biblical prophecy literally; instead, by examining other passages in the Bible, he claimed that in biblical prophecy days are intended to signify years.⁷⁷ For example, the seventy weeks (490 days) between Daniel’s vision and Jesus’s resurrection should be understood as 490 years. Miller found Daniel’s vision in the book of Ezra 8: 31, which dated it “457 years before the birth of Christ.” He then goes on to explain that since Jesus was “33 when he died,” if one adds 457 to that, it “will make 490 years.”⁷⁸ Miller, therefore, was able to claim that he relied solely upon the Bible to confirm that Daniel’s prophecy of a period of seventy weeks (490 years) between Daniel’s vision and Jesus’s resurrection was accurate.

Having established that Daniel’s vision occurred 457 years before the birth of Jesus, Miller’s calculation for the year of judgment was simple. He believed that Daniel 8: 13-14 predicts that the

judgment of mankind will occur 2300 years after Daniel's vision. 2300 years after 457 B.C. places judgment in 1843 A.D.⁷⁹

Despite believing he had unlocked the timing of God's judgment of mankind, Miller spent the next five to seven years "weighing the various objections which were being presented to" his mind because he was not absolutely certain.⁸⁰ It was not until 1825 that he claimed to have been fully convinced of his interpretation of prophecy. In the meantime, he continued to read his Bible, check his calculations, and test all of the objections that he could imagine.⁸¹

In 1825, Miller began to experience the pressing urgency to warn the world. "If the end was so near," he felt that "it was important that the world should know it."⁸² Believing most American Protestants held unbiblical beliefs and were living "impious" lives, he feared for their damnation. When God returned to judge mankind, they would suffer eternal punishment. The need to warn the world was particularly pressing because he originally believed that sinners could not be converted after 1840.⁸³ As the one to decipher biblical prophecy, Miller felt that God had chosen him to convince Christians to repent and transform their lives in anticipation of the second coming.⁸⁴

Despite Miller's perceived duty, he took extremely gradual steps to warning the world. It was not until 1825 that he began to share his findings.⁸⁵ And, from then until 1831, Miller was hardly warning the world; instead, he informally corresponded with local ministers to implore them to warn their congregations.⁸⁶ Because Miller's appeals to neighboring ministers were largely unsuccessful, the pressure on him to overcome his personal fears and evangelize grew. In his memoirs, he recalled that during these early years he failed to find many "who listened with any interest. Occasionally, one would see the force of the evidence; but the great majority passed it by as an idle tale. I was, therefore, disappointed in finding many who would declare this doctrine."⁸⁷ Unable to find many existing ministers to preach his cause and believing the world unprepared for judgment, the pressure intensified for him "to go out as a public teacher."⁸⁸

There are several likely reasons that Miller delayed his decision to publically preach his belief in the near advent. Miller was a humble person, who did not see himself worthy of the role of prophet, and feared the opposition he knew he would elicit.⁸⁹ It is also possible that he remained uncertain of his interpretations. Miller's early letters so frequently insisted to friends and family that he is "more and more confirmed in" his belief in the near advent that Miller gives the impression that he is still trying to convince himself of his views.⁹⁰

In the fall of 1831, Miller claims to have had an epiphany in a dream, which convinced him that he was capable of preaching his views in public. However, his newfound confidence was highly qualified: he would preach only if a minister invited him to do so. Fittingly, an invitation came shortly after his dream. Therefore, Miller traveled to Dresden, Vermont in August of 1831 to deliver his first public sermon. He was so effective that the congregation asked him to stay a week. When he

returned home from that stint, he had received another invitation. By the time he fulfilled this next request, Miller's regular public preaching had officially begun, as he was invited to preach in multiple towns in the surrounding area before coming home. But, at this point, the invitations were coming as the result of word of mouth. Things changed dramatically for Miller when he was convinced to allow his views to be published in a local newspaper.⁹¹ In fact, that event proved to be the first of two pivotal events in Miller's progress toward building a movement. With his views widely published in early 1832, Miller received an "unbroken stream" of requests to preach.⁹²

By 1835, he was fulfilling so many requests from local churches for his preaching that he decided it was necessary to request a license to preach from the Baptist church. He received one with the endorsements of forty-two local ministers—twenty-one of whom recommended him because they believed his particular views on the second coming. Four of the others recommended him because they believed his views "worthy to be known and read of all men."⁹³ Even more tentatively, the remaining seventeen ministers affirmed that they "do cordially recommend the above, and its bearer, Brother Miller."⁹⁴ By the middle of the 1830s, therefore, Miller had achieved some notoriety for his views throughout New England—at least among its class of ministers. Some of them were supportive of his views, and others who did not believe him clearly did not view him as a major threat.

The support that Miller received from ministers during the 1830s was due to his ability to foment revivals and promote conversions; at that time, Miller was not convincing widespread numbers of people to believe in the near advent. Miller's doomsday sermons, apparently, had put the fear of God into many sinners. Many had responded to his demands for repentance, but only by converting to Christianity.⁹⁵ Most of his converts during his preaching in the 1830s did not confess their belief in the near advent. Other obstacles hindered his attempts to spread belief in the near advent. Miller's ability to communicate his views to large numbers of people was constrained during the 1830s by the natural limitations of his travels. And, although he could write letters to newspapers to communicate his views, he did not have access to his own printing press with which to disseminate his teachings more widely.

Miller was able to overcome these limitations to his missionary work with the help of Joshua V. Himes. When Miller preached in Boston in the winter of 1839- 1840, he converted Himes to Millerism. Himes was a member of a Christian church in the city and active as a leader of various social reform movements. Upon belief in the near advent, however, Himes devoted his energies to helping Miller warn the world of imminent judgment. The two complemented each other well. Whereas Himes deferred to Miller on the movement's theological positions, Miller deferred to Himes on how to organize the movement's missionary work.⁹⁶

Historians generally recognize Himes's decision to join the movement as its turning point because he expanded Millerism's missionary reach, brought thousands more people into the

movement, and launched the movement into the national spotlight.⁹⁷ In his biographical journal article, “Joshua V. Himes and the Cause of Adventism,” Arthur argues that Himes transformed the movement by introducing Millerism “to the major cities,” hiring workers and placing them at “strategic outposts,” and creating newspapers, camp meetings, revivals, a large tent, massive visual charts, and book depots to facilitate the communication of Miller’s ideas.⁹⁸ Most significantly, Arthur claims that Himes raised the financial support that made all of these efforts possible.⁹⁹ Wayne Judd agrees with Arthur about why Himes was so central to the movement: “without Himes, Miller might have remained simply another obscure figure predicting the end of the world.”¹⁰⁰

Instead of remaining relatively obscure, within three to four years, Millerism became a vital alternative religious movement in New England and upstate New York. Most historians believe that the movement’s total number of followers reached at least the figure that Miller estimated—50,000.¹⁰¹ The credit that historians have given to Himes for establishing the movement’s popularity is certainly warranted; however, George Knight rightfully recognizes the roles that hundreds of other Millerite evangelists played in building the movement.¹⁰²

Although 50,000 is by no means a small number of followers, it must be acknowledged that the movement’s popular reception was mixed. At the same time as Millerite evangelists succeeded in introducing the movement to the nation, they largely failed to build a movement outside of New England and upstate New York.¹⁰³ And, as is evident in the harsh criticism that he faced in the evangelical press, Miller failed to win over most of his fellow evangelicals.

It is only possible to estimate that Millerism reached 50,000 members because the movement did not possess institutions that tabulated its membership. Generally, historians have defined Millerites by their shared belief—they believed that the advent would be literal and imminent. My paper, however, argues that the Millerite identity constituted those whose belief in near advent prompted a transformed spiritual life. For one to be a Millerite, therefore, belief needed to compel one to live a pious life in preparation for judgment. Sometimes, Millerites’ belief caused them to evangelize, attend general meetings, or write letters to Miller. As Rowe explains in his essay, “Millerites: A Shadow Portrait,” it is only when Millerites performed these “public actions” that historians are able to identify them.¹⁰⁴ However, more often believers’ transformed spirituality manifested itself in informal, separate Millerite meetings. The meetings were the most frequent way that the majority of the movement’s rank-and-file members lived their faith in public. But, since they were informal gatherings, there are no records from which to compile membership. The movement’s decentralized institutional framework makes it impossible to calculate how many people’s lives the movement transformed.

Because historians can only identify those Millerites who publically acted in support of the movement, it is possible to use the background of the movement’s evangelists to speculate on the

denominations from which Millerites were drawn. After identifying the denominational background of 174 Millerite evangelists, historian Everett Newton Dick found that Millerites most frequently joined the movement from the following churches: Methodist (44.3% of the movement's evangelists), Baptist (27%), Congregationalist (9%), Christian/Disciples of Christ (8%), and Presbyterian (7%).¹⁰⁵ The movement, therefore, was both interdenominational and heavily evangelical.

The beginning of Himes's involvement with Millerism in 1840 is the perfect time to begin to study Millerites' relationship to their churches because it was then that the movement began to enlist the vast majority of its 50,000 evangelical and interdenominational members. To do so, I will first turn to the message in Miller's lectures concerning antebellum evangelicalism.

CHAPTER 4

THE IDEOLOGICAL ORIGINS OF MILLERITE SEPARATISM



Nathan Hatch's *The Democratization of American Christianity* provides the methodology that I use in this section of my paper to uncover the views of rank-and-file Millerites. He characterizes the antebellum period as an era in which "populist religious leaders were intoxicated with the potential for print" literature to help them build mass movements that challenged the established clergy.¹⁰⁶ Hatch explores the print literature the leaders produced "to enter minds unlike our own, to explore the assumptions, beliefs, and rhetorical strategies of obscure Americans who played significant roles in the religious affairs of the nation."¹⁰⁷ He, therefore, studies "popular religion" by focusing upon the "elites...who rose to leadership positions in religious movements."¹⁰⁸ This approach to understanding antebellum popular religion requires Hatch to assume that the movements' leaders expressed views that resonated with the masses. And, in most cases, Hatch is absolutely right: the leaders would not have been popular had they not expressed the views of the rank-and-file members who joined their movements.

Although Miller's reactionary public explanation of separatism portrayed the movement as opposed to separatism, his theology can provide insight into the radicalism of rank-and file Millerites because it was dramatically different from his public pronouncements on separatism. The former was far more radical, condemning the churches for their "sinfulness," and portraying them as a threat to people's salvation. Rather than his public pronouncements on separatism, which were designed to appease critics, Miller's theology is a useful source for uncovering his followers' views because it was what convinced people to join the movement. Their belief in the near advent implicitly affirmed their support for Miller's theology.

The widespread dissemination of Miller's nineteen standard lectures in the 1840 pamphlet, *Evidence from Scripture and History of the Second Coming of Christ About the Year 1843; Exhibited in a Course of Lectures*, makes it possible to explore how Miller's theology shaped the views of his followers. The lectures' publication in 1840 was part of the movement's expansion under Himes. By sending them throughout the country (often for free), Miller and Himes established an informal canon of Millerite texts. Potential believers throughout the country, therefore, were exposed to the same ideas. With a hard copy, they had the opportunity to peruse them at their own convenience, with the Bible in hand. The same was true for those who attended his lectures. It was common for people to become intrigued by Miller after hearing him speak, and then become convinced of his views after studying his lectures on their own.¹⁰⁹ Further codifying the centrality of these nineteen lectures to the movement, their publication provided Miller's cohort of fellow evangelists with easy access to his views. As with Miller, the several hundred or so Millerite evangelists surely deviated from the written transcripts while giving lectures. However, Miller's interpretation of prophecy relied upon specific passages of biblical prophecy, particular meanings of the images contained within them, and fixed historical events to confirm the fulfillment of prophecy. It would have been impossible, therefore, for the other Millerite evangelists to deviate too far from Miller's lectures while continuing to preach his message.

In his lectures, Miller's interpretations of biblical prophecy interwove his criticism of mainstream evangelicalism with his explanations of his own views. In fact, Miller found it difficult to express his own views without simultaneously castigating mainstream evangelicalism. That is why his pedantic explanations of biblical prophecy were able to articulate an extensive critique of antebellum evangelicalism. To believe in Millerism, therefore, was not just to adopt views that differed from the mainstream; it was to view the beliefs and lifestyle characteristic of mainstream evangelicalism as ungodly. Historians Rowe and Doan have explored how Millerism offered antebellum evangelicals with an alternative set of beliefs—ones that both restored the central elements of Calvinist theology and rejected the churches' engagement with the world. However, they have not stressed the explicit criticisms of the evangelical churches that accompanied Miller's presentation of his own views. My study, therefore, goes beyond those of Rowe and Doan. Instead of portraying Millerism as different from mainstream evangelicalism, it portrays Millerism as inherently opposed to it.

The “Sins” of Mainstream Evangelicalism

The divisiveness of Miller's theology stemmed from his belief that anything that was opposed to what he understood as the word of God was sinful.¹¹⁰ Having grounded his two central theological beliefs—Calvinism and premillennialism—confidently in the Bible's straightforward teachings, Miller

portrayed mainstream evangelicals' Arminianism and postmillennialism as sinful. Sinners, Miller claimed, "are those who are ignorant of the righteousness of God, and go about (as the apostle [Paul] says) to establish their own righteousness."¹¹¹ Miller predicted that mainstream evangelicalism's support for Arminianism would have grave consequences. Because the churches failed to acknowledge that "it is God [who] does the work" of salvation, Miller argued that they "will be punished seven times."¹¹² Likewise, Miller believed that postmillennialism was opposed to scripture and thus sinful. Since his lectures were designed to prove a premillennial view of the second coming, he often concluded them by bluntly and assuredly proclaiming, "the popular views of the spiritual reign of Christ—a temporal millennium before the end of the world... are not sustained by the word of God."¹¹³

Miller also condemned the "impious" pietism of evangelicals. Pietism is "the vision that "guides" the Christian's "life in this world in preparation for living with God."¹¹⁴ In Miller's eyes, the Bible did not just specify the theological beliefs one should hold; it also prescribed how Christians should behave. Miller believed that humility was atop the Bible's list of ethical demands. However, by encouraging human agency at the expense of God's omnipotence, Miller claimed that postmillennialism and Arminianism had made Christians far too arrogant. His verbal attacks on evangelicals frequently described them as "haughty, self-righteous, and ungrateful."¹¹⁵ Their Christian humility, he insisted, had been undermined by their "pride" and obsession with "popularity."¹¹⁶ For Miller, evangelicals' arrogance was sinful because it denied God's omnipotence, elevating humans—at least in their own eyes—above the all-powerful role held by God.

Due in part to Miller's belief that evangelicals were "haughty," he depicted their "arrogant" attempt to perfect the world through social reform and missionary work as ungodly. To Miller, evangelicals' attempts to perfect the world through their own agency circumvented God's purification of the world during the second coming. Equally important, Miller argued that evangelicals' engagement of the world undermined their churches' spirituality. During the antebellum era,

the church became very earthy, having her worldly policy, and...attending more to the outward concerns, and the worldly part of religion, than to inward piety and graces of the spirit, looking more for *forms* and *ceremonies*, than for the *life, power, and spirit* of the religion of Jesus, spending much of their time in building elegant chapels, gorgeous

temples, high places to educate their ministry, and adorning them with pictures and pleasant things.¹¹⁷

In other words, Miller portrayed the antebellum evangelicalism's worldliness as having caused it to ignore the inner spiritual lives of its congregants. Although the antebellum church professed to be Christian, he believed that it did not manifest its piety.

Elsewhere, Miller invoked the images of the Pharisees and Sadducees to charge the churches for failing to sustain their congregants' spirituality. In his lectures, Miller often depicted the antebellum church as full of "hypocrites."¹¹⁸ In the context of antebellum American Protestantism, hypocrisy was a reference to the Pharisees and the Sadducees—the infamous Jewish sects which rejected Jesus's divinity.¹¹⁹ As with many Christians, Miller interpreted their denial of Jesus's divinity as having betrayed the Pharisees and Sadducees' impiety. They outwardly professed piety, but by not believing in Jesus they supposedly revealed that they were not truly devout. As Miller claimed in Lecture XVII: to love the Lord you must anticipate his return.¹²⁰ He, therefore, compared evangelicals to Pharisees and the Sadducees to condemn them for failing to manifest inner faith.

In addition to his attacks on the "pretentious" faith of the antebellum evangelical church, Miller specifically charged evangelical ministers with the same "sin."¹²¹ But this was just one manifestation of Miller's anticlericalism. Not surprisingly, Miller resented the vast majority of ministers' rejection of his interpretation of biblical prophecy. When their interpretation of the Bible differed from his, he explained it as due to them substituting their own, worldly views for the "word of God"—behavior Miller viewed as worthy of the tagline "bold in sin."¹²² According to him, Arminianism was the belief that best demonstrated how evangelicals had distorted the "truthful" teachings of the Bible.¹²³

Miller was certain to condemn ministers' character as well as their theology. Self-righteousness, arrogance, and worldliness supposedly characterized the vast majority of evangelical ministers, and those who did commit these "sins" were too afraid to condemn them in their peers.¹²⁴ In addition to depicting antebellum evangelical ministers as hypocrites, Miller characterized them as having been "lukewarm"—both images suggested that ministers' inner piety was a pretense.¹²⁵

Having perceived ministers as living unholy lives, it should not be surprising that Miller also condemned them for failing to establish ethical church communities. According to Miller, antebellum ministers' "impiety" caused them to fail to maintain rigid standards for believers' behavior. Drawing upon Paul's admonitions to sinners in 1 Corinthians, Miller rhetorically asks his audience:

had the servants of Christ at the present day the power of the apostles to discern the spirits by which we are governed, how many in this congregation would blush when '*fornicator*' is mentioned! How many '*covetous*' would hide their faces! How many '*idolaters*' would bow their heads, or '*railers*' would begin to murmur at the plainness of the speaker! How many '*drunkards*' would not have staggered into this house! And how many '*extortioners*' would have staid at home!"¹²⁶

Continuously tempted by sin, Christians needed constant attention—even pressure—to keep them on the right path. Miller, therefore, chastised ministers for not demanding that their congregations

behave in a “Christ-like manner.” He depicted pious ministers as integral to individuals’ ability to lead a holy life; impious ones, on the other hand, allowed their congregants to be led astray by sin.

Ultimately, Miller condemned both ministers and the church for the same “sins.” Both betrayed their “impiety” through Arminianism, postmillennialism, arrogance, worldliness, hypocrisy, and the lack of a spiritual life. Therefore, when God returns to cleanse the church of its sinners at judgment, Miller believed that many ministers would be damned.¹²⁷ Prophecy foretold that “false professors and hypocrites” would gain entrance to God’s earthly kingdom—the church—but not his spiritual one during the millennium. In fact, Miller even speculated that only one in ten ministers would be saved.¹²⁸

Miller’s condemnation of the church and its ministers portrayed evangelicals’ prospect of salvation as extremely dim if they remained within their “corrupt” churches. He explicitly argued that ministers’ “heretical” beliefs and lack of spirituality had “shut up the kingdom of heaven against men.”¹²⁹ Miller preached that fellowship in a worldly evangelical church led to one’s damnation. Since he simultaneously depicted ninety percent of ministers as leading “impious” congregations, Miller’s theology warned the majority of his audience that their ministers and churches were a threat to their salvation.

Miller did not believe it was possible to save the church or its ministers because his close attention to biblical prophecy taught him that most ministers would be damned and that the church would not be “cleansed” until judgment.¹³⁰ They were doomed to be damned for doubting Millerism.

Damnation for Doubters of Millerism

Most ministers and their churches had “shut up the kingdom of heaven against men” because they doubted belief in the near advent. In Lecture XIX, Miller explained that he believed a “false doctrine” to be one which “will deny, ridicule, or try to do away some prominent doctrine of the Bible.”¹³¹ That is why he condemned Arminianism and postmillennialism; he did not believe that they were biblical beliefs. However, Miller did not simply condemn evangelicals for their own “misguided beliefs”; their greatest “sin” was rejecting Millerism. Convinced that Jesus’s imminent second coming was foretold in the inerrant word of God, Miller divisively argued that those who did not believe in the near advent would be damned for ignoring “God’s word.”¹³²

By adopting a variety of strategies to portray doubting the near advent as sinful, Miller placed this divisive belief at the heart of the Millerite identity. He often drew upon figures from the Bible, who were damned for doubting the word of God, to assert the certainty of damnation for doubters of the near advent. Miller concluded Lecture XVI by reminding his audience that “the antediluvians believed not. The citizens of the plain laughed at the folly of Lot. And where are they now?” Miller rhetorically

enquired. They are “suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.”¹³³ Similarly, Miller recalled that the “old world... thought Noah was a maniac; but the flood came, and they were reserved in chains of darkness unto the judgment of the great day.”¹³⁴ Miller appealed to the Bible’s lessons to warn people that doubting the Bible—Millerism—spelled damnation.

Miller also warned that doubters of Millerism would be damned by arguing that saints must anticipate Jesus’s return. He depicted the anticipation of judgment through belief in Millerism as a sign of one’s inner piety. If one did not look forward to the second coming, he or she, like the Pharisees and the Sadducees, supposedly revealed that their inner piety was pretense.¹³⁵

Finally, Miller argued that doubters were going to be damned because they lived “sinful” lives. Assuming that sin naturally accompanied disbelief in the near advent, he frequently cautioned Christians against being caught unprepared for judgment. He warned Christians who were living “sinful” lives that God “will come in an hour that we think not, and cut us off, and appoint our portion among hypocrites and unbelievers, where shall be weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth.”¹³⁶ Without belief in the near advent and experiencing the concomitant fear of impending judgment, he claimed that evangelicals were leading “sinful” lives that would result in their damnation.

The Transformative Impact of Belief in the Near Advent

Having portrayed disbelief as “sinful,” Miller argued that believing in the near advent was necessary for salvation. He presented Millerism as the impetus for a transformed spirituality. It would undermine the “sinful” beliefs and lifestyles characteristic of mainstream evangelicals because it was a Bible-centered, God-fearing faith, which was centered upon human depravity, humility, and repentance.

Believing that mainstream evangelicals’ “sinful” beliefs resulted from their ignorance of the Bible, Miller positioned Bible reading at the heart of the transformative impact of Millerism. During his lectures, Miller often argued that his audience should read the Bible and study it on their own. In the introduction to the pamphlet containing his lectures, Miller explained to his readers that he “conscientiously” desires “that this little book may be the means to incite others to study the Scriptures, and to see whether these things be so, and that some minds may be led to believe in the word of God.”¹³⁷ He presented Bible reading, therefore, as necessary for one’s belief in the near advent.¹³⁸

Despite the necessity for believers to read the Bible, Miller recognized that it was often “dark, mystical, or obscure” to those who attempted to read it.¹³⁹ That had been his experience during his youth; his deist views were the direct result of his inability to harmonize the Bible.¹⁴⁰ In addition, he knew that the book of Revelation was particularly difficult. Miller recognized that it “has been called by

thousands a sealed book; and many a dear saint, while in this imperfect state of vision and knowledge, has wept much, because they could not read and understand the book.”¹⁴¹ The Bible’s obscurity presented a problem for his ability to convince other people of his views.

Miller claimed to believe that his audience was capable of overcoming the difficulties of biblical prophecy to comprehend the Bible’s “truth.” Speaking to his audience in Lecture XI, Miller explained that while reading the Bible, earnest Christians could be hopeful of understanding it because they could expect to experience a moment of illumination, which would shed light onto the Bible’s consistency and help the reader to understand what was previously incomprehensible.¹⁴² In an experience similar to the conversion experience, Miller suggested that the divine light would guide people to see the truth.¹⁴³

Miller’s lectures, however, belied his professed faith that the divine light would guide ordinary Americans to an understanding of his views of biblical prophecy; instead, they were designed as a step-by-step guide to reaching his precise views on the second coming. They advised that people follow his exact methodology: Miller selected the passages of scripture for study; he explained the figurative meanings of key images; he provided the timing of historical events that confirmed the Bible’s portents; and he showed how the biblical depictions of the end times corresponded to the 1830s and 1840s. Miller was honest about wanting people to study the Bible on their own. But, he was fooling himself when he claimed to wish that their studies would test his conclusions. Instead, Miller’s lectures were designed to lead people to confirm his views.

By helping people to see God’s plans for human history, Miller hoped his lectures would undermine the “sinful” beliefs of mainstream evangelicalism and help believers acknowledge their dependence upon God. Uncovering God’s plans for human history necessitated belief in an omnipotent God. With that foundational belief established, believers were likely to adopt its logical corollaries: predestination, human depravity, and free grace. Studying the biblical prophecies, then, was likely to elicit a Calvinistic view of mankind’s dependent relationship upon God. The believer in the near advent would be forced to reject the attractive and popular “heresies” of Arminianism and postmillennialism as unbiblical.

Miller also believed that the recognition of one’s dependence upon God would spark repentance and a transformed spirituality in believers in the near advent. Just as studying the prophecies would lead naturally to “pious,” biblical beliefs, realizing the reality of impending judgment would spur believers to live piously in the remaining months before judgment. In one of his written addresses to his followers, he tied the “complete revolution” that has occurred in believers’ lives to their willingness to study the Bible. Bible reading, Miller claimed, rekindled believers’ “faith and hope.”¹⁴⁴ The “complete revolution” or “new conversion” that often resulted from belief in God’s imminent judgment

makes perfect sense. Not surprisingly, the immediacy of judgment led believers to ensure that their spiritual lives were dedicated to Christ.

The Millerite identity encompassed both of these transformative experiences: believing in imminent judgment transformed both the theological beliefs and pietism of Millerites. Historians often struggle to define Millerites because they often disagreed over the exact timing of Jesus's return.¹⁴⁵ Were Millerites those who agreed with Miller's original belief that the second coming would occur "on or before 1843" or were they those who adopted the broader belief that judgment was imminent?¹⁴⁶ This debate, however, has mistakenly focused exclusively on belief as the criterion for whether or not one was a Millerite. One way around this disagreement is to recognize that Millerites' Calvinism taught them that one was not a saint without accompanying good works. As a result, the Millerite identity should encompass both one's beliefs and works. In order to be a Millerite, then, one's belief in the imminent millennium had to inspire a "new conversion" or "complete revolution" in one's spiritual life.

Millerite historiography, however, has not attempted to incorporate a transformed spiritual life into the Millerite identity. For example, in *Thunder and Trumpets*, Rowe does not stress the pietistic aspect of Millerism because he characterizes the movement as antiformalist. Millerites, he claims, rejected the church's authority to tell people how to live a godly life. Instead, he believes that they supported the right of individuals to interpret scripture and determine their own path to salvation.¹⁴⁷ In Rowe's eyes, belief was all that bound Millerites together. Although it was often the case that Millerite leaders did not unrealistically seek complete control over their distant followers, in his lectures Miller broadly identified the characteristics of "pious" preparation for Christ's return. In addition to the ethical values that should shape believers' lifestyles, Miller presented certain characteristics of communal worship as "godly."

Miller's vision of worship drew heavily from the Calvinist tradition's emphasis upon sustaining an ethical church community through repentance. Calvin believed that worship was "the human response to the Word."¹⁴⁸ It was, therefore, the way that humans communally manifested their inner faith. The sermon was at the heart of the weekly service. Each week, the minister selected a text from the Bible, explicated its meaning, and applied it to his congregants' lives to teach them what constituted a godly life. In addition to the sermon's role in edifying the congregation, Calvinists reserved two other speeches—the minister's opening confession and the pastoral prayer—for inspiring repentance. Repentance was also at the heart of the infrequent communion services. To take the Eucharist, Calvinists believed that one must be morally pure, so that he or she could "commune without fear of divine wrath."¹⁴⁹ This fear, coupled with their infrequency, heightened the seriousness attributed to the ritual. To ensure that one accepted the bread and wine worthily, congregants needed to "submit to careful self-examination" in the week before.¹⁵⁰ Two

complementary themes, then, characterized Calvinist worship: it was designed to inspire repentance and sustain the congregants' pious lifestyles. The two, in fact, went hand-in-hand.

These elements of Calvinist worship made their way to America through the Atlantic migration. Although slight deviations arose in American Calvinists' worship, the major themes remained central: both Puritan Congregationalists and Presbyterians employed "infrequent communion services," required "soul-searching" beforehand, and "rigorously excluded those they deemed unprepared."¹⁵¹ Repentance remained a way to foster outer piety. That remained the case for most American Protestants throughout the eighteenth-century.¹⁵² But, this changed with the widespread popularity of revivalism.

Revivals challenged traditional worship by prioritizing the goal of increasing church membership through conversions of the ungodly to sustaining the congregation's faith. Worship, therefore, became preoccupied with those outside of the churches, rather than its existing congregants. Although revivals originated as a supplement to traditional Sunday worship, eventually the focus on conversion began to shape weekly worship.¹⁵³ This transformation is consonant with the shift that Curtis D. Johnson identifies in *Islands of Holiness: Rural Religion in Upstate New York, 1790-1860*. He finds that the nineteenth-century revivals caused "individualist notions of salvation and sanctification" to prevail "over the older communitarian ethos."¹⁵⁴ By the 1840s, most of those evangelical churches shaped by revivals had abandoned the belief that patient, humble, and communal worship was necessary to live a pious, godly life. Instead, they believed that one could become Christian in the blink of an eye. Just as Millerism attempted to retain the Calvinist view of salvation in the face of Arminianism's popularity, it clung to a traditional (communal) form of worship in the midst of revivalism's individualism.

Miller believed that evangelical ministers' sermons did not honor God. In a rare act of empathy with the experiences of his followers, Miller acknowledged why his movement was opposed to evangelical sermons:

'I know your faith, your love, and hope, to be rooted and grounded on the word of the Almighty; you are not dependent on the wisdom or commandments of men; many, if not all of you, have examined for yourselves; you have studied, and found true, what at first was only reported unto you; you have found the Bible much more precious than you have before conceived; its doctrines to be congenial...I fear not that you can ever be satisfied with the views of our opponents; their manner of explaining Scripture is too carnal to satisfy the devoted child of God.'¹⁵⁵

“Carnal” was one of the terms that Miller used to refer to the evangelical churches’ worldliness. It connoted the sin of placing one’s self before God. Miller’s address, therefore, suggested that evangelical ministers’ sermons were often worldly and self-righteous. Implicitly drawing upon the Calvinist tradition, Millerites believed that sermons should be designed to inspire people to repent to God; however, they believed that evangelical sermons were doing the exact opposite.

Due to Millerites’ and evangelicals’ inherently opposed views of the sermon, it should not be surprising that Miller was forced to acknowledge his followers’ dissatisfaction with them when explaining Millerite separatism. In *Apology and Defence*, he suggested that Millerites “began to complain that they were not fed by their ministers” during the period between the summers of 1842 and 1843.¹⁵⁶ By acknowledging the hostility as having arisen then, Miller could portray his followers’ discontent as a reaction to their churches’ hostility. However, Millerites’ opposition to “carnal” evangelical worship was at the heart of their alienation from their churches; in fact, it was one of the factors that drove them to Millerism in the first place. Therefore, it is likely that his followers felt alienated from their churches’ worship services due to grievances that existed before widespread evangelizing produced conflict. Their disaffection with their churches’ “impious” worship was not solely a reactionary response to their hostility to Millerism; it was also a product of Millerites’ own agency. Miller did not acknowledge it, but his theology was, in many ways, responsible for Millerites’ discontent with their ministers’ sermons. His views created a movement that viewed itself as opposed to “carnal” sermons.

Disaffected with their ministers’ sermons, Millerites faced a choice: they could either separate from their churches or tolerate the loss of one of their central pieces of worship.¹⁵⁷ Deprived of the opportunity to worship communally in a fulfilling, “pious” manner, Millerites viewed evangelical worship as an obstacle to their salvation. “Ungodly” sermons, however, were just one way that evangelical worship threatened Millerites’ attempts to sustain their newfound spirituality.

Again drawing upon Calvinist worship, Miller believed that communal worship should emphasize repentance through prayer. Although Miller’s lectures were ostensibly revivalistic in their attempt to convince his audience of his views, they also prescribed an ethical life that emphasized the necessity for repentance. Belief in the near advent, Miller believed, fostered repentance because it required a faith predicated upon Bible reading. “Examine the truth and evidence of Scripture,” Miller recommended, so “that we may see clearly our state and standing as it respects our character toward God and our hope in his future aid, promises, and blessings.”¹⁵⁸ Since Miller believed that the Bible clearly reveals one’s dependence upon God, he thought it would help believers to “see our sins, and feel the need of help, to know our weakness, and trust in his strength—in one word, to repent and believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ.”¹⁵⁹ Repentance, however, was perceived as impossible without

living a life that was filled with prayer.¹⁶⁰ Indeed, Miller made it clear that only those who prayed to express repentance for their sins could hope to be saved.¹⁶¹

Millerites believed that evangelical worship hindered their attempt to repent to God during communal worship because it was not, principally, concerned with eliciting its members' prayers to God for their sins. The transition to a revival-based form of worship within the evangelical churches distracted their attention away from fostering their congregants' repentance. We can see this effect in the evangelicals' approach to the second major ritual in evangelical churches—the Eucharist. With the conversion experience at the heart of evangelicalism, it became the sign of whether or not one was godly. As a result, evangelicals' conviction that they were saved through their conversion experience obviated the necessity for spiritual soul-searching and repentance in the days leading up to the service. Perceiving evangelicalism as primarily concerned with converting those outside of the church, Millerites believed that their churches had neglected their own piety.

With worship equally as important as faith in the Calvinist tradition, mainstream evangelicals' "ungodly" approaches to the sermon and Eucharist posed a threat to Millerites' salvation. In an address to his followers, Miller confirms his belief that both faith and good works are necessary for salvation:

If we believe we shall soon stand before the judgment seat of Christ, will it not prompt us to have our work done and well done? so that we be not ashamed before him at his coming. If we believe the prophets, shall not our faith be manifested by our works?¹⁶²

To fulfill the demand of Miller's theology that believers manifest their faith in worship, Millerites needed to find opportunities to worship separately from their evangelical churches.

Evangelists and Rank-and-File Millerites

The other central component of Millerite pietism created a rift in the movement that had important consequences for Millerite separatism. In addition to repentance-based worship, Miller prescribed suffering for Christ as the other way for believers to manifest their inner faith. In Miller's eyes, repentance and the recognition of one's dependence upon God for salvation engendered humility. In addition to "pious," "godly" worship, he claimed that Millerites must also manifest their humility by suffering for God. In that sense, they were aspiring to Jesus's example. Having likened antebellum America's impious hostility to Millerism to the first-century opposition to Jesus's proclamation of the Gospel, Miller explained that for believers to model their lives on Jesus, they needed to be willing to profess "his name before men" and accept the temporal repercussions. To do

so, they were supposed to both publically acknowledge their belief in the near advent and evangelize.¹⁶³

Only a minority of Millerites actively evangelized, however. To be certain, some people took Miller's warning not to hide one's influence from the world to heart, and turned to itinerant preaching as the best means to truly aspire to Jesus's model of suffering for one's faith. But even though Miller praised the itinerants' sacrifice, they were a distinct minority within the movement. Itinerancy was difficult work. It presented physical, financial, social, and emotional obstacles. Miller's own evangelizing, in fact, was often hindered by physical illness; it took a major toll on his health and often kept him at home.¹⁶⁴ Older believers, therefore, were unlikely to evangelize as itinerants. In addition, many believers—particularly men—had families for which they had to work in order to provide financial support. Although women itinerants existed, itinerancy was stigmatized because it separated them from their "domestic sphere" and led to their engagement with men's public sphere. For both genders, evangelizing required considerable emotional fortitude. One needed to be a good public speaker, extremely familiar with the Bible, and entirely certain of one's convictions. Indeed, Miller's early reluctance to preach publically suggests that confidence in both his ability as a preacher and in the veracity of his message were obstacles to his decision to evangelize.

Due to the difficulties of itinerant preaching, more people sought to fulfill their duty to proclaim God's word to the world by attempting to convert their individual congregations. However, some of the difficulties with itinerancy applied to evangelizing within one's congregation as well. While attempting to proselytize one's own congregation was less physically and financially demanding, it required a high level of familiarity with the Bible, considerable certitude in Miller's interpretation of prophecy, and emotional fortitude. Perhaps most significantly, the prospect of either form of evangelizing ensured the scorn of one's community.¹⁶⁵

Although he argued that intensive evangelizing was the ideal, Miller recognized that not all of his followers could overcome these obstacles to publically proclaiming the near advent. In his 1842 pamphlet, "An Address to Believers in the Second Advent Near, Scattered Abroad," Miller explicitly acknowledged that evangelizing set one apart from the norm.¹⁶⁶ In the address, Miller described "those dear servants who are willing to publish the news of a coming Savior" as "Messengers of Christ," and then addressed them separately from mere believers in the near advent. His address was designed to encourage the Messengers. As a fellow evangelist, he understood the hardships that came with evangelizing to a largely indifferent, and often hostile, world. Thus, he reiterated the signs of the times to affirm their faith and then reminded them that their salvation was imminent.¹⁶⁷ When he addressed the mere believers, Miller made clear that he viewed the Messengers in higher esteem. He admonished the believers to support them, both emotionally and financially, because of the evangelists' greater sacrifices.¹⁶⁸

Indeed, evangelists' hardships made them a distinct minority in the movement. George Knight, who focuses his synthesis history of the movement on the experiences of evangelists, concedes that we cannot know for certain the number of Messengers who took up preaching and publishing Miller's views. Nevertheless, he reports that estimates ranged from four hundred to two thousand.¹⁶⁹ At the very most, then, Messengers constituted four percent of the movement.¹⁷⁰ I refer to their counterparts as "believers," "members," "followers" and "rank-and-file Millerites" interchangeably.

Despite their minority status within the movement, Millerite historiography has treated the experiences of "Messengers of Christ" as representative of the movement's rank-and-file membership. For example, the central argument of Knight's recent synthesis history asserts that

the vital conviction that thrust the Millerites into the flow of history was a deep certainty...that Christ was coming soon and that they had a personal responsibility to warn the world of that good yet fearful news. In short, they saw themselves as a prophetic people with a mission to present a message that the world desperately needed to hear.¹⁷¹

In Knight's eyes, intensive evangelizing—whether as an itinerant or to one's local community—shaped *the* Millerite identity. Because his explanation of Millerism is interested in explaining how evangelists were able to build a vital movement and reach so many people with their message, it is appropriate for him to focus his explanation of the movement on evangelists' experiences.

However, to explain a subject like separatism—which was shaped by the decisions of all Millerites—it is necessary to focus on the beliefs and experiences of the movement's rank-and-file because they were the vast majority of members. When historians have trusted Millerite evangelists' explanation of separatism, therefore, their explanations have accounted for the views of a distinct minority of the movement. Because rank-and-file believers experienced the movement differently, taking into account their worldview and experiences transforms our view of Millerite separatism.

Evangelists' "Christian duty" to warn the world of Jesus's return shaped their conciliatory approach to the churches and opposition to separatism. Like Miller, when evangelists preached Miller's message, they needed access to the churches in order to convert people to their views. Seeing this as their way of living their faith, they viewed their work with the utmost importance—after all, it was their path to salvation. They, therefore, had practical motivations to downplay the movement's distinctiveness. Even while they preached views that were inherently opposed to the churches, they often ignored the divisive implications of those beliefs. For this reason, evangelists consistently opposed separatism.

Because rank-and-file Millerites were not responsible for evangelizing, they were free to adopt the radical view of the churches that Miller's theology prescribed. For them, worship—not evangelizing—was at the center of their spiritual lives. They demanded an intensive, communal religiosity that one could only achieve through worship with other Millerites who had undergone the same transformed experience of belief in the near advent. Isolated in rural towns and stuck worshipping with indifferent congregations, rank-and-file Millerites felt that their salvation was threatened by their churches' "impious" worship. Whereas evangelists opposed separatism, rank-and-file Millerites believed that they needed to worship separately from their churches to live a penitential life devoted to God.

Millerism's Appeal

As a way to conclude this section on the ideological origins of Millerite separatism, it is necessary to consider why Miller's theology was appealing to people. Due to the fact that Millerites seem to have come from a variety of different socioeconomic backgrounds, it is likely that his religious message—and not socioeconomic factors—are largely responsible for believers' decision to join the movement. Social scientists typically explain religious movements that believe in the imminent end of the world as the product of believers' low socioeconomic status. With Millerism having thrived during the economic downturn following the Panic of 1837, it is tempting to view Millerism's appeal as due to its followers' hope of escaping economic deprivation. Nevertheless, in "Millerites: A Shadow Portrait," Rowe shows that Millerites were drawn from a variety of different professions and social classes.¹⁷² Socioeconomic factors, therefore, are unlikely to explain the movement's appeal. Recently, historians have begun to explain Millerites' decision to join the movement as due to Millerism's differences from mainstream evangelicalism. Doan suggests that Millerism was attractive because of its Calvinism and Rowe shows how it appealed to those who disagreed with the formalization of mainstream evangelical churches.

My study attempts to contribute to historians' growing interest in the movement's distinctiveness by showing that Miller's condemnation of antebellum evangelicalism is a necessary part of the explanation of the movement's appeal. Miller's criticisms of evangelicalism played a pivotal role in convincing his audience to consider his alternative religious vision. His diatribes were central to his lectures. They went hand-in-hand with his presentation of his own views. Perhaps more importantly, they were the most accessible aspect of his speeches. Whereas Miller's explication of biblical prophecy could often be pedantic and difficult to follow, his condemnation of mainstream evangelicalism was straightforward and direct. His diatribes, therefore, were often what drew people in, allowing them to be exposed to Miller's alternative beliefs. As a movement of alienated

evangelicals, part of Millerism's appeal was that Miller gave voice to people's criticisms of their churches.

Millerism's transformative spirituality is also important in explaining the movement's appeal. Devotional Bible reading shaped Millerites' spiritual lives. It is clear that some earnest Christians joined the movement after growing disillusioned with the Bible. They knew how to read, and had been admonished by their preachers that Bible reading should play a central role in their piety. However, because they were unable to understand it, they had doubts about the Bible's inerrancy. By providing people with a step-by-step guide for interpreting biblical prophecy, Miller was able to convince people to revere the Bible as God's word. Bible reading, therefore, became a part of the more intensified spiritual life that often accompanied belief in the near advent.¹⁷³

Millerites' intensified spirituality also manifested itself in their joyous anticipation of the near advent. By presenting his beliefs as "Bible truth," Miller convinced his followers that their belief in the "truth" allowed them to expect to be saved.¹⁷⁴ However, more frequently, his followers went beyond the expectation of salvation. Instead, their joyous anticipation of the millennium suggests that they were convinced of their salvation.

The joyous anticipation of judgment helped make Millerism appealing because it mitigated the harshness and psychological uncertainty of Calvinism. Believing in human depravity and predestination, Calvinists adopted the rigorous belief that they could do nothing to earn their salvation. How, then, could they know whether or not they would be saved? The Puritans, America's most rigorous Calvinists, resolved the psychological turmoil that often resulted from one's inability to affect their salvation through Covenant Theology—the doctrine which held that pious members of the church could expect their salvation. If they manifested their inner faith through a pious life, Puritans believed that pious church members could anticipate that they were among the elect.¹⁷⁵ Millerism had the same effect as Covenant Theology; by convincing Millerites that they held the true interpretation of the Bible, it allowed them to expect that they would be saved.

At the same time as Millerism mitigated the severity and uncertainty of predestination, it affirmed Calvinism's comforting belief that an omnipotent God controlled human history. During the changing nature of antebellum society, belief in an omnipotent God reassured many people who were troubled by the uncertainty of their lives. With an omnipotent God in control of human history, they were comforted to know that his plan for human history ensured their salvation and eternal bliss.

Ultimately, the reasons that Miller's theology was attractive—his condemnation of antebellum evangelicalism and believers' transformed spirituality—placed the separatist impulse at the heart of Millerism. People were drawn to Millerism because of the beliefs that made his theology divisive.

CHAPTER 5

RANK-AND-FILE BELIEVERS AND THE ORIGINS OF MILLERITE SEPARATISM

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In the preceding sections of the paper, I have attempted to uncover how rank-and-file believers in the near advent viewed their churches before the summer of 1842. Assuming that they would not have joined the movement had they not subscribed to Miller's theology, I have speculated that they agreed with Miller's message compelling them to separate from their churches in order to be saved. However, as Miller's own views on separatism make clear, one's beliefs do not always determine one's actions. Often, practical considerations affect the extent to which people fully realize the beliefs they hold. Indeed, we know that most Millerites did not withdraw from their churches until the second half of 1843. Consequently, this section of my paper will consider whether or not Miller's radical condemnation of the antebellum churches resonated with rank-and-file believers and the extent to which their ideology shaped their relationship to their churches before the summer of 1842.

To explore the views and experiences of the movement's rank-and-file members, I utilize a common group of primary source materials from the movement in a new way. Historians have often utilized Miller's correspondence to discuss his views, but they have not considered how the letters written to him by rank-and-file believers provide insight into their lives. By doing so, my study is a part of a new trend in American religious history. Rejecting the assumption that religious leaders always spoke for their followers, historians of religion have begun to explore the experiences of common Americans. Because Millerite historians have not distinguished between the movement's leadership and its rank-and-file members when explaining Millerite separatism, my study explores a previously unexplored aspect of the movement.

Rank-and-File Millerites' Radical Ideology

It is possible to reconstruct rank-and-file Millerites' ideology because people often proclaimed their faith to Miller. Examining letters written to Miller by rank-and-file believers reveals that Miller's radical condemnation of the churches resonated with many of his early followers. Those who believed in the near advent shared Miller's Calvinism, joyously anticipated their salvation, experienced the transformative impact of belief in the near advent, agreed with his condemnation of the churches as "sinful," and yearned to worship "piously" with others who believed in the near advent.

Believers expressed their agreement with a variety of different elements of Calvinism. Rank-and-file Millerites affirmed to Miller that they believed the Bible to be the inerrant word of God.¹⁷⁶ The most common way that believers expressed their Calvinism to Miller, though, was by acknowledging human depravity. For instance, John F. Simonds of Waterton, Pennsylvania opened his letter to Miller by thanking him and the Lord for belief in the near advent. Belief, he claimed, “has wrought this great work in my sinful and polluted heart which is so undeserving of the least of God’s goodness and mercy.”¹⁷⁷ Millerites’ recognition of their own sinfulness also manifested itself in their humility before God. Isaac Fuller explained to Miller that witnessing those in his town who were “willfully ignorant” of Millerism makes him “feel to confess my own neglect with shame and pray God to forgive and help me for the futer [sic].”¹⁷⁸ Despite believing in the near advent, Fuller acknowledged that as a worthless sinner, his hope for salvation was in God’s hands.

At other times, though, Millerites’ letters expressed how Millerism mitigated the harshness of human depravity and predestination by convincing believers to anticipate their salvation. A.D. Low’s letter to Miller expressed believers’ outlook on judgment:

‘search me O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts’ and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead in the way everlasting. Still I ‘look for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.’¹⁷⁹

By asking God to “lead in the way everlasting,” Low implies that he believed God to be in control of his salvation. Nevertheless, his belief in Millerism caused him to look forward to Jesus’s return to judge mankind.

Believers anticipated judgment because they thought that the transformed spiritual life that accompanied Millerism was a sign of their election by God. E. Spencer of Colchester, Vermont wrote to Miller explaining that “no subject can be introduced which will produce so much solemnity as that preached by Br. Miller.”¹⁸⁰ Spencer’s observation of the seriousness people associated with the near advent closely paralleled Miller’s demand that believers constantly engage in “holy conversation.”¹⁸¹ However, more often than sober religious reflection, belief in the near advent produced joy.¹⁸² Believers claimed that they felt the most joy they had felt in their entire lives, sometimes insisting that the feeling was so intense that it could not be described. “The Lord brought me two weeks ago,” W.M. Prior of Boston, Massachusetts explained to Miller, “O! if I could write it. I was carried away...my mind and body were departed as it were, And O! the Glory of God that I saw the Glorious morn of [Jesus]...”¹⁸³ Whether through joyous anticipation for Jesus’s return or solemn religious conversation, believers affirmed that intensified religiosity accompanied one’s conviction that Jesus’s return was

imminent. They implicitly understood this newfound spirituality as a sign of their election. Consequently, they anxiously anticipated their salvation.

In addition to the views directly associated with the near advent, believers' letters to Miller affirmed his condemnation of the antebellum churches. Believers explained that their condemnation of the churches was due, in part, to their differing beliefs about progress and salvation. Millerites' Calvinist view of salvation led them to castigate the Arminianism in their churches, and their disbelief in human-inspired progress before judgment caused them to condemn their churches' postmillennialism.¹⁸⁴

They also depicted the churches using the same imagery as Miller. Shortly after hearing him speak, John Willey of Boston wrote to Miller to express his agreement that the church is indeed in a "Laodicean state."¹⁸⁵ Miller used the biblical image of the church's "Laodicean state" as a way to describe a church that professed to be Christian, but belied its inner piety by failing to manifest its faith with action. This, Miller and Willey agreed, would lead to the church's damnation.

Indeed, rank-and-file believers wrote to Miller to explicitly express their belief that the church was sinful. Jacob Tewkesbury of Calais, Vermont acknowledged Miller's depiction of the churches as sinful, but in his own way. He argued that just "as Adam did transgress the law of God. So did the church transgress the convariant [sic] of God."¹⁸⁶ Despite his slight deviation from Miller's view of God's judgment of mankind, Millerite Jerome Ball of Bridgeport, Connecticut went so far as to argue that the churches—not the earth—would be literally consumed by flames during judgment. The churches, he claimed, were too susceptible to public opinion, greedy, and wealthy. They supposedly failed to adhere to biblical Christianity's humility and suffering, and its ministers were "corrupt." These "signs of iniquity" in the denominations, Ball explained to Miller, ensured their condemnation by God. He believed them to be damned because they had put their own concerns before God's commandments.¹⁸⁷

Although Ball included ministers' corruption as one component of his list of the churches' "sins," other believers wrote to Miller to single out their ministers' supposed sinfulness. Their criticisms universally condemned their ministers for failing to believe in the near advent.¹⁸⁸ L. M. Richmond from Lebanon, New York lamented that "in this day of darkness and delusion we wish for light vainly may we look for it from the great body of professors for they are continually crying, 'peace + safety' + say with the rest of mankind, 'where is the promise of His coming[?]'"¹⁸⁹ For ministers to proclaim the "light," Richmond believed they must warn of the immediacy of judgment. Similarly, C. L. Kitten explained his condemnation of the clergy as resulting from his realization after studying Miller's lectures that ministers' disregard of the imminent millennium was "contrary to the word of God."¹⁹⁰ As Kitten and Richmond's letters illustrate, believers' condemnation of their ministers revealed that they

believed Miller's interpretations of prophecy to accurately reflect the word of God. Therefore, when their ministers rejected Millerism, believers perceived their ministers as sinful.

Believers' conviction that they possessed the "truth" manifested itself in self-righteous arrogance. In letters to Miller, believers frequently described Millerism as "Bible religion," the "true religion," and the "religion of Christ."¹⁹¹ Their sense of moral superiority, apparently, was reinforced by the style with which Miller presented his views. Fellow believer Henry Dana Ward wrote Miller a scathing letter criticizing the caustic way that he condemned those who disagreed with him:

We need not arm in self defence [sic]; we need not throw back the enemies [sic] darts, though we could with a vengeance: we need not judge any man; we need not attack any established sects, nor institution of men. We need not speak evil of the church, or the ministry, or the Bible society, or the Temperance cause.¹⁹²

Ward, it seems, was in the minority of Millerites who felt that they should not criticize those who disagreed with them because his letter went on to ask Miller to "exert your great influence in subduing the passions, & restraint in the vexed spirits of others."¹⁹³ Miller's followers, it seems, exhibited the self-righteousness that came with believing one's convictions to be the truth.

As self-righteous believers that Millerism was the true interpretation of the Bible, rank-and-file Millerites often expressed frustration and fear that their churches' "impiety" was a corrupting influence on their spiritual lives. Gilbert Gladding, a believer from Providence, Rhode Island, mocked a prayer in one of his church services because it expressed belief in postmillennialism. He explains that it "all most [sic] makes my Blood run cold to think it mutch [sic] more to offer sutch [sic] a prayer."¹⁹⁴ For him, worship with the "ungodly" was nearly intolerable.

By writing to Miller to argue that the Bible taught that saints should not worship with sinners, Lydia M. Richmond went further than Gladding's disdain for his evangelical church's prayer. Drawing upon 2 Corinthians 6: 14-15, she reminded Miller that "we are expressly told 'not to have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness...' for 'what corner hath Christ with Belial [the devil], or what part hath he who believeth with an infidel."¹⁹⁵ Richmond used 2 Corinthians to remind Miller of a lesson from the Bible: the pious should not worship with sinners. Richmond, therefore, was willing to admit what Miller's practical considerations prevented him from acknowledging—that Millerites, possessing *the* accurate interpretation of the Bible, should cut ties with their "impious" churches because they threatened their salvation. Since Miller did not admit that his theology compelled separation, Richmond used other evidence in the Bible to try to convince him.

At the same time as rank-and-file Millerites viewed their churches as a corrupting influence, they sought fellowship with the like-minded. The transformed spirituality that came with belief led believers to yearn for opportunities to worship with others whose lives had also been transformed by

Millerism.¹⁹⁶ Although it was true that many believers who had already heard his lectures wrote to Miller because they wanted him to return to convert the rest of their congregations, it is clear that others requested his return because they wanted to worship with another believer in the near advent. Ira Fancher's request, for instance, warned Miller not to "pass by without calling for I want to take hold of your hand once more in this world."¹⁹⁷ Henry Frost, exclaimed to Miller that he "should rejoice at the thought of meeting you once more on the earth... do come if it is possible."¹⁹⁸ And, similarly, L. D. Fleming of Portland, Maine wrote on behalf of the Millerites in his community, informing Miller that they "are longing to see you here again."¹⁹⁹

The letter of Lucy Wainwright, a believer from Burlington, Vermont, expressed one of the major reasons that Millerites valued worshipping with each other. "I feel some comfort in reading my bible [sic] and those that appear to live nearest to God is the company I desire to be with," she explained to Miller.²⁰⁰ Viewing the churches as corrupted with the "sinful," Millerites wished to worship with others who were "pious." Whereas their churches were concerned with worldly affairs and they glorified the dignity of humans, Millerites sought to worship with their kin because only then were they able to glorify God, lament their innate depravity, and ask God for forgiveness of their sins—in other words, only when worshipping with other Millerites were they able to live the type of spiritual life they believed was necessary for their salvation.

The letters written by Miller's followers affirmed the central pieces of his theology: Calvinism, the transformative impact of belief in the near advent, the condemnation of the antebellum churches for their "sinful" ignorance of Millerism, and the belief that repentance-based worship with the pious was necessary for saints to manifest their faith. These inherently divisive beliefs did not necessitate their withdrawal from the churches, however. As historians of Millerite separatism have shown, evangelizing was sometimes a way that Millerites responded to "sinful" churches. And, Millerites' beliefs clearly did not immediately shape their actions because it was not until the second half of 1843 that most Millerites withdrew from their churches. It is now necessary, therefore, to examine the progress that Millerites made toward separating before the summer of 1842.

The Isolation of Rank-and-File Millerites

Rank-and-file Millerites' progress toward separatism was shaped by their minority status in largely hostile congregations. They were minorities because of the limitations of Millerite evangelists' missionary work and the weaknesses of Miller's interpretation of scripture. In addition to those who were not persuaded by Miller's interpretations, many people rejected Millerism without carefully considering his theology. Both those with fundamentally different views of God and the millennium, as

well as those who feared judgment, rejected Miller's views immediately. Consequently, opposition to Millerism spread wherever the movement existed.

Nevertheless, it is clear that some people had an open mind about Millerism and sought information about his beliefs. During the early years of the movement, Miller received numerous requests for him to preach from congregations that were interested in his views, but decidedly uncommitted to them.²⁰¹ For example, Abel Brown, a Baptist from Northampton, Massachusetts, explained that he was interested because he had heard that Miller's interpretation of biblical prophecy relied solely upon the "word of God"—that was something that Brown "cannot know too much" about.²⁰² His request suggests that those who shared Miller's basic Calvinist views of God's omnipotence and the Bible's inerrancy were interested to determine whether or not his interpretation of biblical prophecy was accurate.

The widespread dissemination of Millerite print literature in 1840 was one way that Miller's views were communicated to interested people in distant congregations. But, it was often unable to convert entire congregations. Miller's correspondence reveals that his print literature largely convinced believers who remained a minority within congregations that rejected Millerism. Many of the letters that were written to Miller to request him to preach his views in local congregations indicated that several people within their congregation already believed in the near advent. It is likely, therefore, that Millerite print literature had reached the town, convinced several people, and that those people made Miller's views known to the congregation. However, before they could believe in Millerism, the congregation needed to know more. Their requests for Miller to preach indicate that print literature had not been successful in converting entire congregations.²⁰³

The other major tactic Millerite evangelists employed to warn the world—their own itinerant preaching—was also often unsuccessful in convincing majorities of congregations to believe in the near advent.²⁰⁴ Miller frequently received letters requesting his preaching from members of congregations that he had already visited. As early as March of 1840, the First Baptist Society from Portsmouth, New Hampshire requested that Miller return for a second time, even though he had already given a "full course" of lectures.²⁰⁵ His preaching, apparently, had not been effective enough the first time. Other requests are more explicit. Believer E. Spencer from Colchester, Vermont requested Miller's return to his congregation because he "could do twenty fold more good now than before."²⁰⁶ Similarly, a third request from Sherman Kellogg for Miller to return to Montpelier, Vermont attempted to convince him to return by claiming that there was more "good" to be done in the town.²⁰⁷ The believers who wrote to Miller to request him to preach in their towns were destined to remain minorities within their communities unless he or another evangelist was able to return.

Although many communities needed additional preaching to convert large numbers of people to Millerism, Miller and his evangelists were often unable to return to places they had already been.

Miller frequently admonished his followers to evangelize because he was receiving multiple requests for him to preach, and he knew that he did not have the time to return to places he already had visited. Consequently, Miller tried to convince the minority communities of believers within each town to evangelize on their own. However, the frequency of requests for him to preach a second and third time confirms that evangelizing presented numerous difficulties believers could not overcome. The prophecies were intricate, public speaking was difficult, and people were not confident enough to convert their congregations. Instead of convincing their congregations themselves, many believers begged Miller to return. The immediacy of the millennium and natural limitations, however, meant that Miller did not have the time to return.²⁰⁸ Without an evangelist to explain Miller's interpretation of prophecy, many congregations remained indifferent to Millerism, and Millerites remained a minority within their churches.

By paying attention to Miller's letters, the records from meetings that Millerite evangelists convened to organize their missionary work, and the newspapers that the movement's leadership published, historians have portrayed Millerites' attempts to warn the world as a success story. Miller and his fellow evangelists' efforts are often depicted as frenetic and ceaseless. They employed all of the resources that the transportation and communications revolutions placed at their disposal. Through itinerancy and the dissemination of print literature, they embarked upon a mission to warn the world of Jesus's imminent return. Historians, for example, often cite the figures that Miller tabulated to keep track of the number of communities in which he evangelized in order to dramatize the reach of Millerites' missionary work. "I have preached about 4,500 lectures in about twelve years, to at least 500,000 different people," Miller reflected in 1844.²⁰⁹

The letters written to Miller, however, reveal that Miller and his fellow evangelists were unable to communicate their views to everyone that was interested. And their evangelizing was often unsuccessful in the towns that they were able to visit. The failures of Millerite evangelists are just part of the reason, though, that Millerites remained a minority in their churches.

The weaknesses of Miller's interpretation of prophecy help explain why only minorities of those congregations interested in Millerism converted to his beliefs. Miller's inability to clearly express his interpretation of prophecy to audiences prevented him from convincing more people of his views. Whether they had heard him speak or read his lectures, Miller frequently received letters asking him to clarify his arguments. One writer from Boston reminded Miller that "in a lecture delivered by you at Chardon St. on Sunday Eve...you...stated that 1843 would be the six thousandth and first year from the creation." He then went on to ask if Miller "would take occasion to explain further on that subject" because he was "somewhat in the dark as to the dates from which the conclusion is drawn."²¹⁰ He was not the only one who was confused during Miller's lectures, and it is likely that for every person who wrote to ask Miller to clarify his views, there were others who did not write.²¹¹ The

difficulty of clearly communicating his views to potential believers who were genuinely interested in his interpretation of prophecy, therefore, was a major obstacle to increasing believers in the near advent.

More often, however, people wrote to Miller to express their disagreement with his interpretation of prophecy.²¹² Sometimes they challenged a particular interpretation of Miller's. Henry Jones, for instance, wrote to Miller to express the common view that the Jews must return to the holy land before the millennium could occur.²¹³ One critic even challenged Miller because he took a verb in the past tense and turned it into the present tense.²¹⁴ In addition, critics took objection to his prediction that the Antichrist—the Roman Catholic Church—would be destroyed in 1840. C. Noble of Boston wrote to rhetorically ask Miller, “has antichrist been destroyed?... Has he not both temporal and spiritual power to this day?”²¹⁵ The criticism over the unfulfilled demise of the papacy was just one manifestation of a larger pattern—challenges to Millerism over unfulfilled “signs of the times.”

Miller's belief that the Bible predicted a considerable number of cataclysmic events would occur during the end-times was a major weakness in his interpretation of prophecy. He was convinced that God's wrath at the “corrupt” church would be unleashed around the year 1840, and it would produce political strife, further divisions within the Christian sects and denominations, an unprecedented revolution, and anarchy. Furthermore, not only was the Papacy going to dissolve and lose its power, humans would no longer be capable of being saved.²¹⁶ Having been so specific about the events that needed to occur before judgment, Miller set himself up to be criticized by those who sensibly realized that many, if not all, of the events predicted had not been fulfilled. Indeed, Miller often received letters from people challenging his interpretation of prophecy by pointing out that necessary “signs of the times” had not occurred.²¹⁷

Although some people were attracted to Millerism because it provided them with a way to make sense of the Bible, many others who thought carefully about his interpretation of biblical prophecy found that it was irrational. Historian Eric Anderson has examined the implications of Miller's prediction that the Gospel period—the time during which people could be converted to Christianity—would expire in 1840. Because the continued success of revivals revealed that the Gospel period had not ended and Millerites continued to believe, Anderson's essay concludes by suggesting that people believed in the near advent because they wanted to believe—not because the system was rational and credible.²¹⁸ The letters people wrote to Miller to challenge the “signs of the times” suggest a similar conclusion. Those who believed in Millerism did so because they wanted to. They agreed with Miller's condemnation of evangelicalism and they sought the more intense spiritual life that accompanied belief in Millerism. Those who joined the movement, apparently, were able to ignore its irrationality. Many other people, however, found Millerism unpersuasive. Even when people were willing to hear Miller's views and consider his interpretations, Millerism's irrationality limited the

movement's growth to those who wanted to believe. The irrationality of Millerism thus played a major role in keeping Millerites a minority within their congregations.

Millerism's irrationality only prevented people from believing after careful consideration of his interpretation of prophecy; it is likely that many more people opposed Millerism because they held different assumptions about the nature of God and the millennium.²¹⁹ Some people ignored Miller's views because they believed that there "will not be a personal, but a spiritual reign."²²⁰ Congregationalist Minister, Mr. Bushnell, for instance, vehemently challenged Millerism by arguing that "nothing could be more INEXPEDIENT, OR A PROFOUNDER AFFLICTION THAN A LOCALLY DESCENDED, PERMANENTLY VISIBLE SAVIOUR... We have no want then of a locally related, that is, of a bodily resident Saviour."²²¹ Alternatively, John Humphrey Noyes, founder of the utopian Oneida Community, challenged Miller's view of the millennium by describing it as "based on that old desperate delusion of Christendom—the denial that he has already come."²²² Universalist minister Moses Stuart echoed Noyes's views by suggesting that the millennium came during the first century.²²³ Those with established views about God or the millennium that fundamentally differed from Miller's were likely to disregard his interpretation of prophecy without much consideration.

Fear was equally influential in convincing people to reject Millerism outright. In a letter to his sister, Miller explained his early difficulties in convincing people of his views as due to the fact that "some are afraid of it."²²⁴ Similarly, *The Pittsburgh Gazette* linked people's fear to their unwillingness to consider Millerism:

the truth is, as we apprehend, that many of those who are so indecorous and vituperative in their denunciations of Miller, are in fearful trepidation, lest the day being so near at hand, 'should overtake them unawares,' and hence, like cowardly boys in the dark, they make a great noise by way of keeping up their courage, and to frighten away the bugbears.²²⁵

Miller explained that people were afraid of believing in the near advent because it was "a doctrine so contrary to the human heart, so opposed to all the received opinions of the community."²²⁶ Many people reflexively opposed Millerism's belief in the imminent second coming because they feared damnation.

Ultimately, it is wrong for historians to solely focus on evangelists' success in building a movement. It is equally important to consider the factors that limited Millerism's growth. As committed as Millerite evangelists may have been, Miller received numerous requests to preach that were not filled. Even when evangelists were able to visit a town, one visit was often not enough. Interested believers needed constant exhortation, and most Millerites did not preach the doctrine. Many of those who were exposed to Miller's interpretation of prophecy found it irrational and unconvincing. Finally,

Millerism's growth was severely limited by some people's fear of judgment and others' different assumptions about God and the millennium. It would be an exaggeration to describe the movement as a failure, but its growth was seriously hindered by these factors. Most Millerites, consequently, remained a minority within their churches.

The Churches' Early Opposition to Millerism

Because people viewed Millerism as irrational, feared judgment, and held different assumptions about God and the millennium, Millerism created opposition wherever it spread. The traditional explanation of Millerite separatism claims that opposition to Millerism arose when Millerite evangelizing intensified between the summers of 1842 and 1843. With increased evangelizing, Millerites grew in number and their negative reputation spread. Evangelicals responded by preventing discussion of the subject, prompting Millerites to withdraw. Historians' explanation is useful for explaining why the interested, but undecided, segment of the evangelical community eventually rejected Millerism. When evangelizing intensified in the summer of 1842, many curious onlookers became familiar with Miller's views for the first time. Upon recognizing the irrationality of his interpretations, they joined existing opponents. But, historians' explanation does not account for the opposition that existed before then. Opposition to Millerism was present wherever the movement spread because of the divisiveness of Miller's views. Indeed, examining Miller's correspondence reveals that churches' opposition to Millerism arose well before the summer of 1842. At the same time, the letters written to him challenge historians' emphasis that evangelizing was what provoked opposition.

During 1840, there were some early signs that opposition had erupted between Millerites and their churches. In July, Miller wrote a letter to Joshua V. Himes that vehemently denied the charges made against him in a newspaper that he was attempting to form a new sect.²²⁷ By August, ministers in Lowell, Massachusetts rallied against Millerism by preventing discussion of the subject in their churches.²²⁸ Lewis Hicklin, an evangelist in Newport, Rhode Island, wrote to Miller to tell him that he was continuing to warn the world of imminent judgment despite his town's hostility to him and his message.²²⁹ And, Miller's son explained to his father that in January of 1841 "much opposition among professed Christians...to the doctrine of Christ's second personal coming" already existed in Low Hampton, New York.²³⁰

Letters written to Miller during 1841, however, provide greater insight into the causes of early opposition to Millerism. In March 1841, L.D. Fleming from Portland, Maine wrote to Miller that "there is evidently a great (or I fear) increasing bitterness against the doctrine of the Kingdom at hand." He

then explained the increasing bitterness as due to the fact that “conviction is spreading.”²³¹ Indeed, Chilian Wines from Vergennes, Vermont told Miller that while believers were increasing in number within his congregation, the clergy and the church’s wealthy members already opposed it.²³² Fleming and Wines both suggested that as belief spread during the movement’s early years, opposition to Millerism arose simultaneously.

Other letters explained to Miller that the doctrine itself—not evangelizing—was the cause of opposition. In February of 1842, Sarah Marsh cited disbelief of Miller’s interpretation of biblical prophecy for opposition in her town.²³³ Alternatively, Gilbert R. Gladding of Providence, Rhode Island lamented, “those that profess to love the Lord [are] so unwilling to” consider belief in the near advent”.²³⁴ Gladding saw opposition as due to people’s outright rejection of Millerism. Most likely, they were either too afraid to believe or their assumptions about God and the millennium were so fundamentally different that they rejected Millerism immediately.

While Millerism grew in 1842, opposition continued as well. In February, D. P. Pike from Boston reported to Miller that the growth of Millerism during the previous two years had clearly worried the clergy: “G. Skinner...has been lecturing against it” and “one of the ministers in town have [sic] published a sermon against it.”²³⁵ Whereas in Lowell in 1840, ministers had opposed Millerism by refusing to allow preachers in their churches, by 1842 ministers in Boston were actively speaking against it. In May of 1842, Charles F. Stevens from Fair Haven, New Jersey explained to Miller that “in these times...almost every body is dealing out their invectives and ridiculing the doctrine which you advocate and circulating all manner of foolish sotires [sic] to descstroy [sic] the influence of the doctrine.”²³⁶ There is evidence, therefore, to suggest that opposition to Millerism was widespread well before the summer of 1842—when historians have suggested it intensified. Miller’s correspondence also suggests that evangelizing was not the ultimate cause of opposition: the churches opposed Millerism because of the divisiveness of Miller’s theology.

The churches’ early hostility to Millerism played an important role in the movement’s progress toward separation. If the churches had accepted Millerism, there would have been no reason for believers to separate. Historians, however, have been mistaken to portray separatism as primarily a reaction against the churches’ opposition because Millerites joined the movement possessing an ideology that was diametrically opposed to them. The divisiveness of Miller’s theology did not just elicit opposition from the churches; it also inspired believers to separate from their churches.

Millerite Meetings

Miller’s correspondence reveals that shortly after he evangelized in their town, his followers in Portland, Maine; Providence, Rhode Island; and Lowell, Massachusetts formed separate meetings to

worship with each other. The letters written to Miller suggested that worshipping apart from their churches was central to believers' spirituality. Their decision to create an institution to sustain the distinctive Millerite identity was the first of his followers' two major steps toward their separation from their churches in the second half of 1843.

At the same time as Millerites were minorities in hostile congregations, the interdenominational nature of the movement often created minority communities of Millerites within towns' several denominations. When Miller or another evangelist visited a town to preach, it was a major spectacle. That was why Millerites eventually procured a tent for their revivals: they needed more space than most single congregations could offer.²³⁷ Viewing themselves as interdenominational, Millerites welcomed members from all of the churches in town to come to their meetings—not to mention “infidels” and others who were not church members.²³⁸ Some of their revivals, therefore, were reported to have achieved audiences as large as one or two thousand people. Millerites' inclusiveness did not help them to convince hundreds of believers at each meeting, however. Many people came simply because Millerism was notorious, and they were curious.²³⁹ And, although Miller's lectures were known to convert as many as two hundred people to Christianity, most of the new converts did not believe in the near advent. Millerites' inclusivity, therefore, often scattered the minority communities of Millerites throughout all of the towns' denominations.²⁴⁰ This was clearly the case in Portland, Maine; Providence, Rhode Island; and Lowell, Massachusetts.

At the request of L. D. Fleming, a minister in Portland's Christian church, Miller and several of his fellow evangelists held a series of revival meetings from May 11 to May 23, 1840 that converted many people to Christianity, but left Millerites a minority within the town's churches.²⁴¹ Fleming claimed that Miller converted “between one and two hundred,” and his lectures led to the creation of “prayer-meetings... in every part of the city, by the different denominations.”²⁴² Furthermore, Miller's revivals created “excitement” and “solemnity on the minds of the people.”²⁴³ Fleming was excited because this boded well for the prospect of Millerism taking hold in the town. However, apparently only some of the new converts accepted Millerism; most of them converted to Christianity without believing in the near advent.²⁴⁴

With the exception of those in Fleming's Christian church, Portland's Millerites responded to their churches' indifference to Millerism by forming separate meetings. Fleming's Christian congregation was quite rare in being entirely committed to Millerism. In June, Fleming wrote to Miller that “our meetings [in the Christian church] are all for such doctrine [the near advent]. We live and breath [sic], with none to moless [sic].”²⁴⁵ Fleming emphasized that there were “none to moless” his congregants because he valued worshipping with the like-minded, and he knew that it was a rare privilege to do so. The other churches in town (he only identified the Baptists) were more typical than Fleming's Christian church in that they were not fortunate enough to have a Millerite minister and a

congregation full of believers in the near advent. The believers within those churches responded to their isolation in indifferent congregations by creating separate “Miller meetings,” where they were able to come together to celebrate the imminent return of the Lord.²⁴⁶

Historians have failed to appreciate the significance of Millerites’ decision to form separate meetings. Because they were commonly used by antebellum Protestants to supplement traditional Sunday worship services, separate prayer meetings appear to have been one way that the movement was consistent with the mainstream religious culture. However, interpreting them as congenial to mainstream evangelicalism misleadingly ignores the meetings’ divisiveness: the lay Baptists in Portland formed separate meetings because they were disaffected with their churches. Miller had preached in their town and convinced them that judgment was imminent. When their church and minister made clear that they did not believe in his message, Millerites formed separate meetings to nurture and sustain their distinctive identity. As with all Millerites, they did so because they yearned to worship with the like-minded. Instead of listening to Miller’s message that they evangelize their churches in order to worship with other Millerites, they turned away from them to worship amongst themselves. As early as the summer of 1840, Millerites in Portland had taken the first step toward separating from their churches.

The minority communities of Millerites in Providence, Rhode Island’s congregations also came together to worship in separate meetings early in the movement. Miller came to the town to lecture on the near advent before April of 1841. His labors were somewhat successful; he converted a few believers from several of the town’s denominations. One of them, Brother Jameson, was inspired to become an itinerant evangelist. At the time of rank-and-file believer Gilbert R. Gladding’s letter to Miller in April, Jameson was out of town preaching. Gladding anticipated Jameson’s return because he promised that he would convene interdenominational Bible readings devoted to the near advent. In the meantime, however, Millerites from Providence’s several denominations had already convened twice to worship together. Gladding told Miller that he greatly enjoyed the separate meetings and lamented that his church was indifferent to Millerism. Having been able to experience the joys of worshipping with other Millerites, he sought their fellowship whenever possible.²⁴⁷

As with Portland and Providence, Millerite evangelizing in Lowell, Massachusetts produced an interdenominational set of believers in indifferent congregations. Miller preached in Lowell during the movement’s early years—in both May and June of 1839. Although he befriended fellow believer and minister of the Christian church, Timothy Cole, once again his message reached across the town’s denominational boundaries. In addition, Miller’s missionary work was aided by the succession of several other Millerite evangelists. It seems that they were somewhat successful as well. Cole’s letter to Miller reports that between the summers of 1839 and 1840 three times as many people came to believe in the near advent. The movement’s success, however, was sharply curtailed by the

opposition of the town's clergy. As early as the summer of 1840, the only minister that allowed Millerites to speak was the one from the Freewill Baptist church. He, however, allowed Millerite evangelist, Brother Jones, to preach only "if he don't [sic] go too far and is not too certain that Christ will come."²⁴⁸ Although Miller's correspondence does not reveal the numbers of believers in the near advent in Lowell, there must have been a large enough presence to spark opposition from the clergy. Yet, the letters written to Miller imply that believers remained in the minority.²⁴⁹

Before long, the interdenominational set of believers also formed separate meetings in Lowell. Whereas in Portland, the Christian minister L. D. Fleming did not invite the Baptists who were minorities in their churches to worship with his congregation, all Millerites in Lowell came together in the Christian church, where they held separate meetings "on Friday evening to discuss the subject of Christ[']s second coming."²⁵⁰ With the churches and their ministers clearly opposed to Millerism as early as May of 1841, most Millerites in Lowell did not attempt to convert them. After all, they saw the futility of Dr. Jones's attempts. Instead, their participation in the Millerite movement was shaped by communal worship with other believers.

The separate meetings of rank-and-file Millerites in Lowell were essential to their spirituality and viewed as necessary to their salvation. Although the meetings were open to those who were interested in Millerism, it is clear that their primary purpose was to support believers in their convictions. "The saints who do believe," Cole explained to Miller, "grow stronger and stronger" as a result of their meetings together. As we have seen, one of the effects of believing in the near advent was a transformed spiritual life. Worshipping with other Millerites, Cole implies, was how believers experienced the intensified spirituality that accompanied Millerism. By communally worshipping, they were able to feel "one with Christ." Even more importantly, their "pious," penitent, interdenominational worship helped them to believe that they were truly "disciples of Christ."²⁵¹ Perceiving judgment to be imminent, rank-and-file Millerites' separate meetings were viewed as an indispensable part of preparing to meet the Lord.

Although there is admittedly limited evidence of it, Miller's correspondence with Josiah Levy illustrates another likely way that Millerite prayer meetings played a vital role in believers' spiritual lives. Levy concluded one of his letters to Miller hoping that he "shall not Backslide from it [belief in the near second advent]. I pray to God to keep me in the faith of the Gospel."²⁵² Earlier in the letter, Levy acknowledged that he had faced considerable opposition from people in town to belief in the near advent. And he intimated that on several occasions it had caused him to question his belief in the near advent. It is impossible to be certain, but, since the majority of Millerites were minorities in hostile churches, it is likely that they also occasionally doubted the reality of the near advent. Worshipping with other Millerites was an opportunity to communally reinforce their beliefs and sustain

their convictions. There is no way to know for certain if Levy's experience is representative. However, since it is unlikely that many people were as honest as Levy to admit to Miller that they feared backsliding, it makes sense that there is limited evidence of it.²⁵³

Either way, subsequent developments in Lowell confirmed that Millerites' separate meetings were extremely important to them. Within five months of their creation in May of 1840, the interdenominational Millerite meetings had ended within the Lowell Christian church. Cole changed the Friday night meetings from ones devoted exclusively to the near advent to general prayer meetings. He did so, apparently, because he and several other influential people in the church had quit believing in Millerism. Levy, who reported this news to Miller in October of 1841, explained in a November letter why he thought that people in Lowell backslid. He suggests, in short, that they had become distracted by "worldly" concerns.²⁵⁴ Cole, for instance, decided in 1841 to build a house.²⁵⁵ His decision was interpreted by Levy and other rank-and-file believers in the near advent as a sign of his betrayal of his inner faith. Why would someone who truly believed that the world would come to an end in 1843 or 1844 build a new house, they reasoned. One's actions, they recognized, must manifest one's inner faith.

Rank-and-file believers' concern that Cole ended their meetings makes it clear that the believers in Lowell felt that worship with other Millerites was crucial to their spirituality. Taking matters into their own hands, Cole's decision prompted "the friends of the doctrine [to] feel like coming out from the different Churches and holding a meeting by themselves."²⁵⁶ It is not clear from the historical record whether or not the Millerites in Lowell withdrew from their churches at the end of 1841. What is clear, though, is that they highly valued their prayer meetings as essential to their salvation.

Since the separate meetings in Portland, Providence, and Lowell sustained a message that was diametrically opposed to their churches, they were an important first step toward separating. Although separatism did not begin in earnest until the second half of 1843, as early as 1840 and 1841 many Millerites had one foot outside of their churches' door. Indeed, it was a necessary first step. With worship crucial to Millerites' identity, they needed to establish vital separate meetings before they could separate.

There is reason to believe that rank-and-file Millerites in towns other than Portland, Providence, and Lowell also created separate prayer meetings as the first step toward separating from their churches. To begin with, most Millerites joined the movement after being exposed to the same beliefs—those codified by Miller's publication of his nineteen standard lectures. In addition, most of them were minorities in churches in towns that contained several denominations. Having experienced an intensified spiritual "conversion" and desiring to worship with other believers, it is likely that most Millerites joined with their fellow believers from their towns' other denominations in meetings separate

from their churches. The movement's inclusiveness and anti-sectarianism, therefore, was a major factor in its progress toward separatism.

Historians have not ignored the establishment of separate prayer meetings; however, they have not fully grasped their significance either. Arthur, the foremost historian of Millerite separatism, explained the movement's early progress toward separating from the perspective of the movement's leadership. Before 1842, the Millerite leadership laid the foundation for separatism by establishing general conferences, publishing newspapers, and recruiting itinerant preachers. They did so, however, without the intention of separating. In the midst of this narrative, separate meetings have been portrayed as a minor piece of the institutional framework for the separate Millerite identity that eventually emerged after conflict over evangelizing forced the Millerites out. Separate meetings unintentionally, and eventually, sustained the distinctive Millerite identity when it emerged later in the movement.²⁵⁷

The separate meetings, though, were different from the institutions Millerite evangelists created to warn the world of imminent judgment. Rather than an institution designed to further the movement's engagement with the world, separate meetings were created by rank-and-file Millerites in order to sustain their own faith. They yearned to worship with their fellow Millerites because they believed it essential to their salvation. Most importantly, instead of requiring a positive relationship to the churches, the separate meetings were the location in which rank-and-file Millerites began to realize the full implications of the radical views that Miller articulated in his theology.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

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Historians are right that the vast majority of Millerites began to withdraw from their churches in the summer of 1843. The underlying reasons for their separatism, however, are far more complicated than they have acknowledged. It has been my aim in this paper to argue that the process was not the reluctant and belated product of conflict over evangelizing. Instead of separatism having been a position that Millerites were forced to adopt, I have positioned it at the heart of rank-and-file Millerites' identity. In doing so, I have argued that the movement was more radical and more influenced by its rank-and-file members than commonly believed.

I have taken a largely ideological approach to showing the centrality of the separatist impulse to Millerism. First, I examined the messages Miller expressed in his theology. They can provide insight

into the mindset of the movement's rank-and-file members because Miller's lectures were what convinced them to join the movement. Joining Millerism implied that they agreed with his theology. When cross-referenced with the views that followers communicated to Miller, it is possible to confirm that Miller's message that separatism was necessary for believers' salvation resonated with his followers. Letters written to Miller also reveal that his followers began to act on Miller's separatist ideology earlier than historians have acknowledged. They formed separate meetings that sustained their distinctive faith and laid the foundation for their eventual separation.

One way to gauge the radicalism of their ideology is to compare it to Fitch's 1843 sermon, "Come out of Her, My People"—which reflected believers' views when Millerites began withdrawing from their churches. Fitch's central argument was that Millerites should separate from their churches because they were corrupt; fellowship with them would cause Millerites to be damned. Because Fitch's sermon was designed with the explicit purpose of justifying separatism, it was far more blunt than the separatist impulse in Miller's lectures, which interwove his condemnation of the churches with his interpretation of prophecy. Nevertheless, the rationale for separatism so thoroughly permeated Miller's theology that it would have been difficult for his followers not to view it as a central piece of the movement. In the end, the only major difference between Fitch's sermon and Miller's theology is Fitch's directness. Instead of portraying separatism as a necessary implication of belief in the near advent, Fitch argued explicitly for it. The limited differences between Miller's theology and Fitch's sermon suggest that ideologically the separatist impulse was always at the heart of the Millerite identity.

The radically divisive ideology that was inherent to Millerism raises a crucial question in explaining the process of Millerite separatism: if their views truly compelled them to separate in order to be saved, why did it take until the summer of 1843 for Millerites to begin to withdraw? Several likely reasons explain why Millerites who joined the movement during 1840 or 1841 did not immediately withdraw from their churches.

Both the immediacy of judgment and the prospect of believers' congregations converting to Millerism were likely to have convinced some Millerites to tolerate their churches' "impiety" and remain within them during the movement's early years. With only a couple of years until judgment, some Millerites may have felt that they could stand remaining within their churches because the amount of time before judgment was relatively short. In addition, because fellowship with other Millerites was important to them, others may have refrained from separating because they hoped that their congregations would come to believe in Millerism. This, in part, explains why some Millerites engaged in informal evangelizing within their congregations or invited Miller to preach. To worship with other Millerites, they needed to remain within their churches long enough that they could

bring new people to the cause. As opposed to the committed, even selfless, evangelizing of itinerants, these Millerites evangelized to their congregations as a means to an end—they sought a group of Millerites in their churches with whom they could worship. Their decision to remain within their churches was only temporary, therefore. It did not permanently shape their identity because it was destined to end when they became convinced that their churches disagreed with Millerism. When they gave up hope that their congregations would believe, they had no reason to remain within their churches.

As we saw in Portland, Providence, and Lowell, however, many Millerites did not actively evangelize, and the churches' early opposition to Millerism convinced many believers in the near advent that evangelizing was pointless. In those instances, other forces must have kept Millerites within their churches.

It is likely that most Millerites remained within their churches during the movement's early years because withdrawing from church life would have disconnected them from their town's social world. Even though belief in the near advent convinced them that members of their churches would be damned, their newfound belief was unlikely to have dissolved believers' longstanding personal ties to members of their congregations—at least not right away. Separatism created the difficulty of living one's life isolated from one's community. Naturally, the prospect of separation was more bearable the nearer it was to judgment. For those who became convinced as early as 1840, 1841, or 1842, therefore, separatism was a significant obstacle. Ideologically, Millerism demanded separation. But practical considerations caused Millerites to adopt gradual steps.

Separate prayer meetings provided Millerites with an opportunity to remain connected to their community at the same time as they lived a "pious," spiritual life with their fellow Millerites. Millerite meetings nurtured their faith, fostered their ability to live a penitent life devoted to God, and prevented them from backsliding into disbelief. Surrounded by an indifferent world, it was likely that many Millerites considered renouncing their beliefs. Millerite meetings, therefore, played the vital role of sustaining rank-and-file believers' spirituality during the beginning of the movement. They were a manifestation of the movement's separatist impulse, but in an abbreviated form. Separate meetings allowed Millerites to experience the benefits of separation without the hassles of withdrawing from society. Rather than the institutions that Millerite "Messengers" created to evangelize, separate meetings were the most important institution in the movement's progress toward fully withdrawing from their churches.

By the time the churches' opposition to Millerism intensified in the year between the summers of 1842 and 1843, therefore, Millerites already possessed an ideology that compelled their separation, and they had taken the first of two major steps toward withdrawal. The prospect of their churches' conversion to Millerism and the desire to remain connected to their community had caused them to

remain within their churches. When intense conflict nullified these practical considerations, many rank-and-file Millerites took the second step and willingly withdrew from their churches—fully realizing the implications of Miller’s theology.

By not appreciating the divisiveness of Miller’s theology and the significance that Millerite prayer meetings played in rank-and-file believers’ spiritual lives, historians’ accounts of separatism have stressed that it was a position that Millerites adopted reluctantly. However, exploring the origins of Millerite separatism from the perspective of the movement’s rank-and-file membership suggests that separatism was at the heart of the Millerite identity.

The Millerites’ determination to overcome the social obstacles to separation, withdraw from their churches, and realize the full implications of their ideology is a testament to the causative role that theology plays in inspiring alternative religious movements. Even if Miller’s interpretation of scripture was not fully rational, it was convincing to many antebellum Americans who were thoroughly disaffected with their churches’ spiritual lives and feared for their salvation. They supported Millerism because it spoke to their grievances, and his theology eventually inspired them to separate from their churches so that they could ensure their salvation when God returned to initiate the millennium.

Rank-and-file Millerites’ intense commitment to his theology also helps to explain why some members of the movement overcame the internecine debate surrounding the “Great Disappointment” to form the vital and long-lasting Seventh-Day Adventist church. Although the Great Disappointment forced his followers to admit that Miller’s exact prediction was wrong, Millerites attempted to retain as much as possible from his original beliefs. But they could not agree on how to understand the Great Disappointment; two factions quickly arose to reorganize the movement around a reformulated version of Millerism. The “spiritualists,” who eventually formed the Seventh-Day Adventist church, believed that Jesus began to spiritually judge mankind on October 22, 1844. Admitting that they had been wrong that judgment would occur literally on October 22, 1844, the spiritualists maintained that Jesus would return to literally initiate the millennium when he finished judging mankind in heaven. The opposing faction of “literalist” Millerites rejected the belief that Jesus began to spiritually judge mankind on October 22, 1844. Instead, they admitted that they were wrong to set an exact date for judgment and reverted to Miller’s originally vague belief that Jesus’s literal return to judge mankind and initiate the millennium was imminent.

Further disagreements between the spiritualists and literalists culminated in the two factions’ formal separation. Whereas the literalists were motivated by the immediacy of judgment to build institutions to continue to evangelize, the spiritualists—believing that judgment had already begun—did not believe it possible to convert new people to their views. The spiritualist faction further distinguished itself from the literalists by believing in annihilationism—the view that the souls of the damned were annihilated during God’s judgment. The literalists, on the other hand, thought that the

souls of the damned were condemned to suffer eternally in hell. The spiritualists' annihilationism precipitated the conflict that irrevocably set the two factions in separate directions. The conflict over how to view the souls of the dead led the literalists to convene the Albany Conference of 1845. At the conference, while building the institutional foundation that led to the establishment of the Advent Christian Church, the literalists rejected fellowship with the spiritualists due to their irreconcilable views.

During the 1850s, while their counterparts became embroiled in disagreements that led to the creation of several distinct denominations, the spiritualists adopted a coordinated set of beliefs that formed the basis for the Seventh-Day Adventist church. Because many Millerites joined the movement from the Seventh-Day Baptist church, which believed that observing Saturday as the Sabbath was a biblical commandment, they incorporated Sabbatarianism alongside premillennialism as two of their central beliefs. In addition, the spiritualists' Baptist backgrounds led them to continue practicing adult baptism by immersion in water. Despite establishing a series of common beliefs—a reformulated version of Millerism, annihilationism, Sabbatarianism, and adult baptism—the spiritualists did not create the Seventh-Day Adventist church until they adopted one more essential belief.

The spiritualists' reinterpretation of scripture to believe that people could still be saved led them to form the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. After reexamining the Bible and finding evidence that it was still possible to save souls while Jesus was judging mankind in heaven, the spiritualists began building institutions to conduct their evangelizing. By the early 1860s, they were collecting funds, supporting itinerant preachers, forming general conferences, and distributing newspapers. In May of 1863, at a general conference meeting, they formed the Seventh-Day Adventist church to coordinate their missionary work. Their commitment to evangelizing only increased over time. At the end of the twentieth-century, the Seventh-Day Adventist church possessed nearly twelve million believers. Although they were forced to reinterpret Miller's original prediction, the spiritualists' lasting commitment to his premillennial vision of the end times speaks to the vitality of Miller's message. Indeed, in the twenty-first century it continues to shape their identity; Seventh-Day Adventists continue to anticipate Jesus's imminent return to initiate the millennium when he finishes judging mankind in heaven.²⁵⁸

In addition to laying the foundation for one of modern Protestantism's vital denominations, Millerism helped to shape the future of mainstream American Protestantism. Due to the visibility of Miller's views on the premillennial advent, his failed prediction confirmed nineteenth-century mainstream evangelicals' disbelief in premillennialism. As a result, throughout the second half of the nineteenth-century, mainstream evangelicalism remained firmly committed to postmillennialism.²⁵⁹

Millerism also helps to explain a subsequent development in American Protestantism; its reaction against a worldly church foreshadowed conservative evangelicalism in the twentieth-century. After realizing the devastating impact of the late nineteenth-century's second industrial revolution on the lives of America's impoverished working class, many evangelicals attempted to use social support programs to help improve the lives of the poor. Evangelical churches justified their support of reform movements through the "Social Gospel" ideology, which explained their commitment to social reform as a necessary manifestation of Christian morality. At the beginning of the twentieth-century, then, the relationship between evangelicals and American society was similar to the one of their predecessors in the first half of the previous century. During both eras, evangelicalism was a worldly faith. Just as worldliness inspired Millerites to react against mainstream antebellum evangelicalism, the Social Gospel motivated the early twentieth-century conservative evangelical movement. They both sought to revitalize the church because they perceived its spirituality to have been corrupted by its engagement with the world. Instead, they believed that the church should withdraw from the world and focus on sustaining their members' spirituality.

As a highly similar precedent, Millerism reveals important characteristics of American Protestantism that can help to explain twentieth-century conservative evangelicalism. A half-century or so before conservative evangelicals drew upon the Bible to challenge the Social Gospel, Millerism demonstrated the potential for innovative religious leaders to refer to the authority of the Bible to justify an alternative religious movement that challenges the status quo. The Bible, Millerism showed, can be used by the disaffected to justify their alternative beliefs. Even more significantly, Millerism helps to explain twentieth-century conservative evangelicalism because it showed the potential for the mainstream church's worldliness to alienate its own believers and inspire alternative religious movements. In fact, the conflicts between mainstream Protestantism and both Millerites and twentieth-century conservative evangelicals suggest that competing impulses are at the heart of Christianity. At the same time as Christianity compels some people to devote their lives to helping others, it motivates others to withdraw from the world so that they can escape its "sins" and live piously with other faithful Christians.²⁶⁰

1 Truman Hendryx to William Miller, April 11, 1841.

2 Ibid.

3 Paul Conkin, *The Uneasy Center: Reformed Christianity in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina University Press, 1995), 45-48, 62, 97-98, 114, 261.

4 Sylvester Bliss and Apollos Hale, *Memoirs of William Miller: Generally Known as a Lecturer on the Prophecies, and the Second Coming of Christ* (Boston: Joshua V. Himes, 1853), 79; William Miller, *William Miller's Apology and Defence* (Boston: Joshua V. Himes, 1845), 12; Isaac C. Wellcome, *History of the Second Advent Message and Mission: Doctrine and People* (Yarmouthe, Maine: I. C. Wellcome, 1874), 177, 222. Whereas Miller's calculations placed the second coming "on or before 1843," the Millerites' first and second general meetings agreed that Millerites were those who believed that the advent was "near at hand."

5 Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America: 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 285.

6 Fitch's sermon, as common in antebellum Protestantism, drew from the King James Version of the Bible. Revelation 18: 1-5: "And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, 'Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies.' And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, 'Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities.'" And, Revelation 14: 8: "And there followed another angel, saying, 'Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.'"

7 George R. Knight, *Millennial Fevers and the End of the World: A Study of Millerite Adventism* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1993), 157-158; William Miller, "Lecture VIII: Solomon's Song," in *Evidence from Scripture and History on the Second Coming of Christ About the Year 1843; Exhibited in a Course of Lectures* (Boston: B.B. Mussey, 1840), 120.

8 Knight, 154; David T. Arthur, "Millerism," in *The Rise of Adventism: Religion and Society in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America*, edited by Edwin S. Gaustad, (New York: Harper & Row: 1974), 167. Because all of the historiography focuses on Fitch's sermon as the climax of Millerite separatism, I decided that it was unnecessary to conduct extensive primary research on it. Instead, I have relied upon other historians' accounts of it to frame my original research—which focuses on the early years of the movement to contextualize Fitch's declaration and explain the origins of Millerite separatism.

9 Knight, 153-155; Arthur, "Millerism," 165-168.

10 Knight, 154-155; Rowe, *Thunder and Trumpets: Millerites and Dissenting Religion in Upstate New York, 1800-1850* (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1985), 101-115; Arthur, "Millerism," 162-163, 170-171. To be fair, Knight acknowledges that the message "hit at the right time" because "Millerites were being thrown out of their churches." However, Knight's interpretation differs because he identifies Fitch's theological rationale as the most important cause of separation; whereas Rowe and Arthur see the conflict over evangelizing as most significant.

11 Rowe, *Thunder and Trumpets*, 95-115; Arthur, "Millerism," 162-163; Ruth Alden Doan, *The Miller Heresy, Millennialism, and American Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 119-141. Doan provides a variant interpretation. Instead of suggesting that conflict erupted in the summer of 1842 simply over evangelizing, she attributes that conflict to time-setting. Doan argues that Millerites' abandonment of their vague belief that the advent was "near at hand" for the specific year of 1843 as the date for judgment made them evangelize more urgently. Nonetheless, in *The Miller Heresy*, Millerites' intensified evangelizing in the second half of the 1842 remains the driving force behind their separation from their churches. Arthur provides an example of how historians have portrayed Millerites

separatism as reluctant during its earliest years. He argues that the First General Conference “represented a further step in the identification of an Adventist people. Yet the conference organizers were careful to reassure all onlookers that they were not attempting to form a new organization.” Because Arthur trusts the accounts of the movement’s leadership, he believes their claims that they were not attempting to separate and form a new organization. The resulting portrayal of the movement unrealistically downplays its distinctiveness.

12 David Arthur, “‘Come Out of Babylon’: A Study of Millerite Separatism and Denominationalism, 1840-1865,” (PhD diss., University of Rochester, 1970), 16, 21, 24, 41; Doan, 119-141; Whitney Rogers Cross, *The Burned-over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (Utica, New York: Cornell University Press, 1950), 298-302; Everett Newfon Dick, *William Miller and the Advent Crisis, 1831-1844* (Berrien Springs, Michigan: Andrews University Press, 1994), 33; Stephen D. O’Leary, “Reading the Signs of the Times: A Topical and Dramatistic Analysis of the Logic of Apocalyptic Advocacy” (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1991), 9.

13 Wellcome, 218.

14 Bliss, 172.

15 Knight, 161-166.

16 Ibid., 217-245.

17 Miller, *Apology and Defence*, 1. Miller’s unpersuasive explanation of his movement’s separation from their churches is part of *Apology and Defence*’s larger goal of portraying all aspects of his life and movement respectably. Miller even acknowledges the defensive nature of his statement on its opening page: “As all men are responsible to the community for the sentiments they may promulgate, the public has a right to expect from me, a candid statement in reference to my disappointment in not realizing the Advent in A.D. 1843—4, which I had confidently believed. I have, therefore, considered it not presumptuous in me to lay before the Christian public a retrospective view of the whole question, the motives that actuated me, and the reasons by which I was guided.”

18 Ibid., 23-24.

19 Wellcome, 177; Arthur, “‘Come out of Babylon,’” 13, 16, 18-21; Arthur, “Millerism,” 154-172.

20 Knight, 283-293.

21 Ibid., 236-242; 245-247; 295-325; 327-342.

22 Sears, *Days of Delusions*.

23 Jonathon M. Butler, “The Making of a New Order: Millerism and the Origins of Seventh-day Adventism,” in *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Ronal L. Numbers and Jonathon M. Butler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 191; Ernest R. Sandeed, “Millennialism,” in *The Rise of Adventism*, edited by Edwin S. Gaustad (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 108; Stephen D. O’Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse: A Theory of Millennial Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 126; Cross, 317; Ronald D. Graybill, “The Abolitionist-Millerite Connection,” in *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Ronal L. Numbers and Jonathon M. Butler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 139-152.

23 Rowe, *Thunder and Trumpets*, 95-118; Doan, 54-57.

24 Gary Land, "The Historians the Millerites: An Historiographical Essay," in *William Miller and The Advent Crisis*, by Everett Newfon Dick (Berrier Springs, Michigan: Andrews University Press, 1994), xiii-xxviii.

25 Rowe, *Thunder and Trumpets*, 95-118; Doan, 54-57.

26 Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1972), 473.

27 Allan Kulikoff, "The Transition to Capitalism in Rural America," in *The William and Mary Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (1989): 120-144; Charles Grier Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America: 1815-1846* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Winifred Barr Rothenburg, *From Market-Places to a Market Economy: The Transformation of Rural Massachusetts, 1750-1850* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992); *The Market Revolution in America: Social, Political, and Religious Expressions*, edited by Melvyn Stokes and Stephen Conway (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996); Gordon S. Wood, "The Enemy is Us: Democratic Capitalism in the Early Republic," in *Journal of the Early Republic* 16 no. 2 (1996): 293-308; Christopher Clark, "Rural America and the Transition to Capitalism," in *Journal of the Early Republic* 16, no. 2 (1996): 223-236; Richard Lyman Bushman, "Markets and Composite Farms in Early America," in *The William and Mary Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (1998): 351-374. The historiographical debate over the timing and extent of the so-called "market revolution" in early America is too technical and extensive to cover here. For the purposes of my study of Millerism, however, it suffices to note that most historians of the early American economy agree that farmers increasingly produced for sale on the market during the nineteenth-century, and that their movement away from self-sufficiency produced important changes in their daily lives.

28 Sellers, 3-33.

29 Howe places the transportation and communication revolutions at the heart of his synthesis history of the period.

30 Ahlstrom, 473.

31 Michael Barkun, *Crucible of the Millennium: The Burned-over District of New York in the 1840s* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 117-

32 Cross, 55-77.

33 *Ibid.*, 80-82, 101.

34 *Ibid.*, 93, 109.

35 Barkun, *Crucible of the Millennium*, 118.

36 Cross, 88.

37 When discussing God, Jesus, and "mankind," I often use masculine pronouns because it is consistent with the modern conventions of religious scholarship and it allows me to express myself succinctly. Nevertheless, because I appreciate academia's concern with the masculine bias inherent to the English language, I have attempted to use gender-neutral language whenever possible.

38 Ahlstrom, 379; Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990), 213-218; Conkin, 48-50.

39 Ibid., 48, 62.

40 Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, "Turning Pews into People: Estimating 19th Century Church Attendance," in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 25, no. 2 (1986): 180-192. Finke and Stark suggest that church "adherence" (membership figures amended by a ratio to include children) grew from 10% of the American population in 1776 to 34% in 1850. Since the three major evangelical denominations—Methodists (11.3% of the American population), Baptists (6.6%), and Presbyterians (3.9%)—contained the largest percentages of the American population, it is clear that they were primarily responsible for religion's growth. Keeping in mind that the American population also grew during this period, the 24% increase is even more impressive. And, Finke and Stark's figures only estimated church members. Within the evangelical churches most responsible for this growth, church membership was dependent upon having a conversion experience and adhering to rigid social mores. As a result, many antebellum Americans attended church on a regular basis without being official members.

41 Conkin, 37; Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), 17; Finke and Stark, 180-192.

42 Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1989), 125-192; Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, 164-193.

43 Conkin, 114.

44 Ibid., 138-141.

45 Daniel Paul Nord, *Faith in Reading: Religious Publishing and the Birth of Mass Media in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 7; Mark Schantz, "Religious Tracts, Evangelical Reform, and the Market Revolution in America," in *Journal of the Early Republic* 17, no. 3 (1997): 425-466; Wayne Edison Fuller, *Morality and the Mail in Nineteenth-Century America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), xi; Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *Mission for Life: The Story of the Family of Adoniram Judson, the Dramatic Events of the First American Foreign Mission, and the Course of Evangelical Religion in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Free Press, 1980); Candy Gunther Brown, *The Word in the World: Evangelical Writing, Publishing, and Reading in America, 1789-1880* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

46 Conkin, 125-128.

47 James E. Johnson, "Charles G. Finney and a Theology of Revivalism," in *Church History* 38, no. 3 (1969): 338-358. By explaining how Finney developed his theology after his experience fomenting revivals, Johnson's study is able to show how revivalism and Arminianism often went hand-in-hand during the nineteenth-century. As Millerism shows, it was possible to interpret the interaction between preacher and sinner as the means by which God offered his saving grace, but this was not the norm in the nineteenth-century.

48 Conkin, 130-137.

49 Smith, 152, 141-142.

50 Howe, 285.

51 Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers, 1815-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 24.

52 Walters, 37.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid., 81, 127-129; Smith, 185, 188, 219; Jama Lazerow, *Religion and the Working Class in Antebellum America* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 14; Teresa Ann Murphy, *Ten Hours Labor: Religion, Reform, and Gender in Early New England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); Blanche Glassman Hersh, *The Slavery of Sex: Feminist-Abolitionists in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978); Keith E. Melder, *The Beginnings of Sisterhood: The American Women's Rights Movement, 1800-1850* (New York: Schocken Books, 1977); Richard Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1993), 277-278, 305-

55 Rowe, *Thunder and Trumpets*, 74-91; Hatch, 193-209; Conkin, 88-89.

56 Julia Mitchell Corbett, "Religion in the United States: Notes Toward a New Classification," in *Religion and American Culture* 3, no. 1 (1993): 91-112. Based upon Corbett's article, I refer to Millerism as an "alternative religious movement" and describe it as a manifestation of "countervailing" trends that differed from the "prevailing" patterns of mainstream evangelicalism.

57 Sandeen, 108.

58 Barkun, *Crucible of the Millennium*, 117-119; O'Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse*,

59 O'Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse*, 98; James Moorhead, "Social Reform and the Divided Conscience of Antebellum Reform," in *Church History* 48, no. 4 (1979): 428-429. By studying Finney's theology, Moorhead explains the failure of antebellum evangelicals' reform movements: evangelicalism created "a vast reservoir of moral anxiety and a boundless commitment to do good," but its practical suggestions for how to go about reforming the world suffered from severe limitations.

60 Mark Y. Hanley, "The New Infidelity: Northern Protestant Clergymen and the Critique of Progress, 1840-1855" in *Religion and American Culture* 1, no. 2 (1991): 205, 209.

61 James Bratt, "Religious Anti-Revivalism in Antebellum America," in *Journal of the Early Republic* 24, no. 1 (2004): 72-75.

62 James E. Johnson, 348.

63 James D. Bratt, "The Reorientation of American Protestantism, 1835-1845," in *Church History* 67, no. 1 (1998): 52-82; Mark Y. Hanley, *Beyond a Christian Commonwealth: The Protestant Quarrel with the American Republic, 1830-1860* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Howe, 285-324. Bratt identifies Millerism as one of the alternative religious movements to which antebellum Americans turned because they perceived their churches' spirituality as lax.

64 Bliss, 3, 10-16, 19.

65 Ibid., 1; Miller, *Apology and Defence*, 2-3.

66 Bliss, 23.

67 Ibid., 17-30.

68 Ibid., 52-53.

69 Ibid., 66-68.

70 Miller, *Apology and Defence*, 5-6.

71 Christopher Grasso, "Skepticism and American Faith: Infidels, Converts, and Religious Doubt in the Early Nineteenth Century," in *Journal of the Early Republic* 22, no. 3 (2002): 465-508.

72 William Miller, "Introduction," 8; James W. Davidson, "Searching for the Millennium: Problems for the 1790's and 1970's," in *The New England Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (1972): 241-261; Eric Anderson, "Millerite Prophecy: A Case Study in 'Striking Fulfillment,'" in *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth-Century*, edited by Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathon M. Butler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 78-91.

73 Bliss, 4-5.

74 Miller, "Lecture XVII: On the Punishment of the People of God Seven Times for their Sins," 251; Doan, 54-57.

75 Daniel 8: 13: "Then I heard one saint speaking, and another saint said unto that certain *saint* which spake, How long *shall be* the vision *concerning* the daily *sacrifice*, and the transgression of desolation, to give both the sanctuary and the host to be trodden under foot?"; Daniel 8: 14: "And he said unto me, Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed."

76 Miller, "Lecture III: The Two Thousand Three Hundred Days," 52; Daniel 9: 24.

77 Miller, "Lecture III: The Two Thousand Three Hundred Days," 51.

78 Ibid., 53.

79 Ibid., 53-57.

80 Bliss, 82.

81 Ibid., 63, 65, 79, 83; Miller, *Apology and Defence*, 12.

82 Ibid., 13.

83 Bliss, 100; Miller, "Lecture XV: The Seven Last Plagues, or Seven Vials," 227- 228; Miller, "Lecture XVII: "On the Punishment of the People of God for their Sins Seven Times," 263. Eventually, during his lectures Miller translated the urgency that he felt to warn the world to his followers to convert: "this may be the last moment the Holy Spirit will ever strive; it may be the last moment of reason; it may be the last moment of life; it may be the last moment of time; and you unprepared! O God, reform these blinded souls, 'who will not be reformed by thee, nor by these things,' or everlasting punishment will be their doom."

84 William Miller, "An Address to Believers in the Second Advent Near, Scattered Abroad," *Views of the Prophecies and Prophetic Chronology, Selected from Manuscripts of William Miller with a Memoir of His Life* (Boston: Joshua V. Himes, 1842), 55-56.

85 Bliss, 83.

86 Ibid.

87 Ibid.

88 Miller, *Apology and Defence*, 16.

89 Wayne R. Judd, "William Miller: Disappointed Prophet," in *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 25; Knight, 43.

90 Miller to Hendryx, October 1, 1832.

91 Miller to Hendryx, January 25, 1832.

92 Miller to Joseph Atwood and Bolton L., May 31, 1831; Miller to Hendryx, August 9, 1831; Miller to Hendrx, January 25, 1832; Miller to Emily Miller, March 27, 1832; Bliss, 97-99; Knight, 37; Rowe, *Thunder and Trumpets*, 19.

93 Bliss, 121.

94 Ibid., 122.

95 Miller to Hendryx, April 2, 1836; Miller to his son, November, 17, 1838.

96 Wellcome, 82-84; Knight, 67-93; David T. Arthur, "Joshua V. Himes and the Cause of Adventism," in *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 36-58.

97 Knight, 75; Judd, 27; Rowe, *Thunder and Trumpets*, 17-38; Arthur, "Joshua V. Himes and the Cause of Adventism," 36-37.

98 Arthur, "Joshua V. Himes and the Cause of Adventism," 36.

99 Ibid., 37.

100 Ibid., 17-38; Judd, 27.

101 Miller, *Apology and Defence*, 22-23; David Rowe, "Millerites: A Shadow Portrait," in *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 7.

102 Knight, 113-144.

103 Bliss, 99; Louis Billington, "The Millerite Adventists in Great Britain, 1840-1850," in *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 59-77.

104 Rowe, "Millerites: A Shadow Portrait," 4-5.

105 Dick, 166.

106 Hatch, 11, 12. Although his study does not discuss Millerism in detail, he depicts Miller as one of the period's populist religious leaders.

107 Ibid., 11.

108 Ibid., 12.

109 John Andrews to Miller, April 5, 1841; Chilian Wines to Miller, November 21, 1841; William Shepherd to Miller, May 9, 1842.

110 Miller, "Lecture II: The First Resurrection," 34-35.

111 Miller, "Lecture on the Times and Its Duties," 105.

112 Miller, "Lecture XVII: On The Punishment of the People of God Seven Times for their Sins," 254.

113 Miller, "Lecture I: Titus ii. 13," 24; Bliss, 72; Miller, *Apology and Defence*, 6-7.

114 Rowe, *Thunder and Trumpets*, 70.

115 Miller, "Lecture XVIII: Solomon's Song," 280-281.

116 Miller, "Lecture X: The Epistles to the Seven Churches of Asia, Considered As Applying to the Seven Periods of the Gospel Church," 153.

117 Miller, "Lecture IX: The Epistles to the Seven Churches of Asia, Considered As Applying to the Seven Periods of the Gospel Church," 137.

118 Miller, "Lecture X: The Epistles to the Seven Churches of Asia, Considered As Applying to the Seven Periods of the Gospel Church," 153; Miller, "Lecture XIX: Signs of the Present Times," 284.

119 Miller, "Lecture XIX: Signs of the Present Times," 284.

120 Miller, "Lecture XVII: On the Punishment of the People of God Seven Times for their Sins," 273.

121 Miller, "Lecture X: The Epistles to the Seven Churches of Asia, Considered As Applying to the Seven Periods of the Gospel Church," 157; Miller, "Lecture XII: The Seven Seals, As Representing the Events to the End of Time," 102; Miller, "Lecture XIX: Signs of the Present Times," 283-284.

122 Miller, "Lecture IV: Daniel ix. 24," 72, 74.

123 Miller, "Lecture X: The Epistles to the Seven Churches of Asia, Considered As Applying to the Seven Periods of the Gospel Church," 157-158.

124 Ibid., 153.

125 Ibid., 157.

126 Miller, "Lecture IX: The Epistles to the Seven Churches of Asia, Considered As Applying to the Seven Periods of the Gospel Church," 131-132; 1 Corinthians 6: 9-10: "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall

not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners shall, inherit the kingdom of God.”

127 Miller, “Lecture II: The First Resurrection,” 38.

128 Miller, “Lecture X: The Epistles to the Seven Churches of Asia, Considered As Applying to the Seven Periods of the Gospel Church,” 157-158.

129 Miller, “Lecture VII: Daniel’s 1260, 1290, 1335 Days Explained,” 102.

130 Miller, “Lecture III: The Two Thousand Three Hundred Days;” 39-58; Miller, “Lecture XVI: The Parable of the Ten Virgins,” 241; Miller, “Lecture I: Titus ii. 13,” 24. The same prophecy—Daniel 8: 13-14—that points to Jesus’s return in 1843 also suggests that his return will “cleanse” the church of sinners.

131 Miller, “Lecture XIX: Signs of the Present Times,” 299.

132 Miller, “Lecture VII: Daniel’s 1260, 1290, 1335 Days Explained,” 101.

133 Miller, “Lecture XVI: The Parable of the Ten Virgins,” 249.

134 Miller, “Lecture III: The Two Thousand Three Hundred Days,” 58.

135 Miller, “Lecture XVII: On The Punishment of the People of God Seven Times for their Sins,” 263.

136 Miller, “Lecture I: Titus ii. 13,” 19.

137 Miller, “Introduction,” 8.

138 Wellcome, 69, 221, 227. Similarly, Wellcome’s short biographical sketches of high-profile Millerites’ decisions to believe in the near advent stresses that after being exposed to Miller’s views for the first time, they read scripture on their own to confirm Miller’s interpretation of prophecy.

139 Miller, *Apology and Defence*, 12.

140 Ibid., 2-3.

141 Miller, “Lecture XII: The Seven Seals, As Representing Events to the End of Time,” 176.

142 Miller, “Lecture XI: The New Song,” 161.

143 Ibid.

144 Miller, “An Address to Believers in the Second Advent Near, Scattered Abroad,” 58.

145 Miller’s prediction that it would occur “on or before 1843” was vague; many people wanted a more specific date.

146 Rowe, “Millerites: A Shadow Portrait,” 1-7.

147 Rowe, *Thunder and Trumpets*, 74-79.

148 Conkin, 188. For my background information on Protestant worship, I rely on the chapter “Reformed Worship” in Paul Conkin’s *The Uneasy Center*.

149 Ibid.

150 Ibid.

151 Ibid., 193.

152 Ibid., 195.

153 Ibid.

154 Curtis D. Johnson, *Islands of Holiness: Rural Religion in Upstate New York, 1790-1860* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1989), xi.

155 Bliss, 173-174.

156 Miller, *Apology and Defence*, 23-24.

157 Conkin, 188-189.

158 Miller, “Lecture X: The Epistles to the Seven Churches of Asia, Considered As Applying to the Seven Periods of the Gospel Church,” 154.

159 Ibid.

160 Miller, “Lecture XI: The New Song,” 165.

161 Miller, “Lecture XII: The Seven Seals, As Representing Events to the End of Time,” 188-189.

162 Miller, “An Address to Believers in the Second Advent Near, Scattered Abroad,” 62.

163 Miller, “Lecture XII: The Seven Seals, As Representing Events to the End of Time,” 181; Miller, “Lecture X: The Epistles to the Seven Churches of Asia, Considered As Applying to the Seven Periods of the Gospel Church,” 146.

164 Judd, 30; Joseph H. Sherwin to Miller, November 23, 1840.

165 William G. Morse to Miller, March 28, 1842.

166 The address was included in the pamphlet, *Views of the Prophecies and Prophetic Chronology, Selected From Manuscripts of William Miller with a Memoir of His Life*, which was published in 1842. However, Miller’s address reveals that it was originally written in 1840. He, therefore, had recognized the division between evangelists and rank-and-file believers from early in the movement.

167 Miller, “An Address to Believers in the Second Advent Near, Scattered Abroad,” 61-64.

168 Ibid., 64.

169 Knight, 113-144.

170 To reach the figure of four percent, I used Miller's estimate that 50,000 people belonged to the movement and 4,000 for the total number of evangelists. I, therefore, have used the highest estimate for evangelists and a low estimate for total followers. Despite being gracious with my figures, evangelists remained a distinct minority.

171 Knight, 23-24.

172 Rowe, "Millerites: A Shadow Portrait," 7.

173 Miller, "Introduction," 8.

174 Bliss, 78.

175 Conkin, 49.

176 Isaac Fuller to Miller, January 31, 1840; Samuel S. Leighton to Miller, March 2, 1840; Abel Brown Jr. to Miller, June 1, 1840; Jacob Miller Jr. to Miller, January 3, 1841; Unnamed to Miller, January 25, 1841.

177 John F. Simonds, August 7, 1840; Jacob Miller Jr. to Miller, January 3, 1841.

178 Isaac Fuller to Miller, January 31, 1840

179 A.D. Low to Miller, September 15, 1840. Low's letter indicated that he was from Addison, which means he was either from Vermont or Connecticut.

180 E. Spencer to Miller, August 3, 1840.

181 Miller, "Lecture 1: Titus ii. 13," 25.

182 John F. Simonds to Miller, August 7, 1840; W. M. Prior to Miller, December 12, 1840; Gilbert R. Gladding to Miller, April 15, 1841; Chilian Wines to Miller, November, 21, 1841; Sarah M. Marsh to Miller, February 24, 1842; William Shepherd to Miller, May 9, 1842.

183 W. M. Prior to Miller, December 12, 1840

184 Hendryx to Miller, April 11, 1841; J.H. Wright to Miller, July 20, 1841.

185 John Willey to Miller, March 23, 1842.

186 Jacob Tewkesbury to Miller, January 2, 1842.

187 Jerome D. Ball to Miller, January 20, 1842.

188 Timothy Cole to Miller, August 19, 1840; C. L. Kitten to Miller, February 6, 1841; Chilian Wines to Miller, August 18, 1841; D. Burgess to Miller, December 31, 1841; L.M. Richmond to Miller, April 29, 1842.

189 L.M. Richmond to Miller, April 29, 1842.

190 C. L. Kitten to Miller, February 6, 1841.

191 Lyman Lovewell to Miller, February 14, 1840; John F. Simonds to Miller, August 7, 1840; Gladding to Miller, April 15, 1841; Charles F. Stevens to Miller, May 6, 1842.

192 Henry Dana Ward to Miller, August 29, 1841.

193 Ibid.

194 Gladding to Miller, April 15, 1841.

195 Lydia M. Richmond to Miller, May 29, 1842; 2 Corinthians 6: 14: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?" 2 Corinthians 6: 15: "And what concord hath Christ with Be'li-al? or what part hath he who believeth with an infidel?"

196 W. M. Prior to Miller, December 12, 1840; William S. Miller to Miller, March 15, 1841.

197 Ira Fancher to Miller, April 13, 1842.

198 Henry Frost to Miller, March 6, 1840.

199 L.D. Fleming to Miller, June 27, 1840.

200 Lucy Wainwright to Miller, January 1, 1841.

201 Daniel Wilcox to Miller, January 4, 1841; J. S. McCollom to Miller, October 16, 1841; Julius C. Blodgett to Miller, November 30, 1841; Unnamed to Miller, December 27, 1841; Isaac Barker to Miller, January 28, 1842.

202 Abel Brown Jr. to Miller, June 1, 1840.

203 Henry Frost to Miller, March 6, 1840.

204 John Andrews to Miller, April 5, 1841.

205 Hall Varrell and Joseph M. to Miller, March 13, 1840.

206 E. Spencer to Miller, August 3, 1840.

207 Shermon Kellogg to Miller, January 5, 1842.

208 Leighton to Miller, February 12, 1840; Lyman Lovewell to Miller, February 14, 1840; Miller to Leighton, February 20, 1840; Leighton to Miller, February 21, 1841; Leighton to Miller, March 2, 1840; Hall Varrell and Joseph M. to Miller, March 13, 1840; Unnamed to Miller, March 16, 1840; E. Spencer to Miller, August 3, 1840; Lyman Lovewell to Miller, August 23, 1840; Joseph H. Sherwin to Miller, November 23, 1840; I. O. Mason to Miller, November 30, 1840; Seth Man to Miller, February 8, 1841; J. Spaulding to Miller, November 29, 1841; J. Spaulding to Miller, January 19, 1842; Sherman Kellogg to Miller, February 15, 1842; John Pearson to Miller, March 18, 1842.

209 Judd, 30; Knight, 23-24.

210 A. Menick to Miller, February 22, 1840.

211 William Hobby to Miller, February 24, 1840; Unnamed to Miller, February 26, 1840.

212 "A Lover of Truth" to Miller, February 22, 1841; John Goodly to Miller, February 17, 1842; David S. Jones to Miller, March, 19, 1842.

213 P.N. Williams to Miller, February 22, 1840; Henry Jones to Miller, May 17, 1842.

214 "Truth" to Miller, May 10, 1842.

215 "A Listener" to Miller, February 26, 1840.

216 Miller, "Lecture XV: The Seven Last Plagues or Seven Vials," 227-228.

217 W.B. to Miller, January 9, 1841; W.B. to Miller, February 21, 1841.

218 Anderson, 78-91; Joseph S. Smead to Miller, April 9, 1841.

219 Since few people who rejected Millerism without much consideration took the time to write to Miller, I rely upon other evidence for this paragraph.

220 Wellcome, 201.

221 Ibid., 209.

222 Ibid., 208.

223 Ibid., 206.

224 Bliss, 102.

225 Ibid., 183.

226 Miller, "An Address to Believers in the Second Advent Near, Scattered Abroad," 55.

227 Miller to Joshua V. Himes, July 16, 1840.

228 Cole to Miller, August 19, 1840.

229 Lewis Hicklin to Miller, November 9, 1840.

230 Jacob Miller Jr. to Miller, January 3, 1841.

231 L.D. Fleming to Miller, March 16, 1841.

232 Chilian Wines to Miller, August 18, 1841.

233 Sarah Marsh to Miller, February 24, 1842.

234 Gladding to Miller, April 15, 1841.

235 D. P. Pike to Miller, February 9, 1842.

236 Charles F. Stevens to Miller, May 6, 1842.

237 Wellcome, 288-289; A. G. Comings to Miller, December 13, 1841.

238 Miller, *Apology and Defence*, 23; Wellcome, 80; M. D. Miller to Miller, January 19, 1840; G. H. Burnham to Miller, December 11, 1840.

239 S. Hayden to Miller, February 14, 1840; C. A. Davison to Miller, January 24, 1842.

240 Wellcome, 81, 84-86, 176, 226, 230-231, 234-235.

241 Ibid., 86-87.

242 Ibid., 87.

243 Ibid.

244 Ibid.

245 L. D. Fleming to Miller, June 27, 1840.

246 Ibid.

247 Gladding to Miller, April 15, 1841.

248 Cole to Miller, August 19, 1840.

249 Ibid.; Josiah Levy to Miller, May 10, 1841; Cole to Miller, May, 10, 1841.

250 Levy to Miller, May 10, 1841.

251 Ibid.; Timothy Cole to Miller, May 10, 1841.

252 Levy to Miller, May 10, 1841.

253 Unnamed to Miller, July 2, 1840. The only evidence outside of Lowell that I was able to uncover on backsliding from Millerism was a letter written to Miller by an unnamed believer, who requested that Miller return to preach because many of the people he originally convinced to believe had quit.

254 Levy to Miller, November 30, 1841.

255 Cole to Miller, July 26, 1841.

256 Levy to Miller, October 18, 1841.

257 Arthur, "Come out of Babylon," 24.

258 Knight, 217-342.

259 Smith, 225-237.

260 Jerald C. Brauer, *Protestantism in America: A Narrative History* (Philadelphia:Westminster Press, 1965), 233-248.