

“Days of vengeance, days of mercy”:  
Experiencing violence and divine providence in British North America, 1744–1757

by

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## **Abstract**

This thesis addresses the ways a group of clergymen and lay people in colonial British North America used “providentialism,” or the effort to explain the divine meaning behind worldly events, as a means of understanding their experience of war during King George’s War (1744–1748) and the early stages of the French and Indian War (1754–1757). Rather than surveying the tremendous number and range of providential interpretations coming from pulpits throughout the Atlantic world, I closely follow the interconnected lives of members of the personal network of Jonathan Edwards, a key theologian and preacher of the Great Awakening, detailing how they perceived and responded to providence during times of violence, and how they interacted with and affected each other through a shared providentialism. Edwards’s network included evangelical ministers in New England and throughout the British Atlantic; family members, including his daughter Esther Edwards Burr and her husband Aaron Burr; government and military officials like Governor William Shirley and Colonel Israel Williams of the Massachusetts colony; and the lay members of his congregations, most notably Seth and Mary Pomeroy of Northampton. In reconstructing this personal network of religious people, lay and ordained, through their letters, diaries, and sermons, I situate personal connections and providential beliefs and practices within the existing religious, political, and social milieu. While social class, educational attainment, and gender all affected the manner in which my subjects constructed or drew on providential themes, their shared religious culture and the collectively-experienced events of war created the space and means for them to find meaning in the violence that surrounded them.

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## **Note on Conventions**

I have worked to retain the original spelling, grammar, and punctuation in quoted primary sources, save for two exceptions. First, I have silently elongated abbreviations (the most common of which include “y<sup>e</sup>” to “the,” “y” to “that,” “G.” to “God,” “AntiXian Kingd.” to “Antichristian Kingdom”). Second, I have added some commas for readability purposes in quotations from Jonathan Edwards’s sermon notes. The use of [*sic.*] has been avoided. Otherwise, any corrections in quoted material appear in brackets.

## Frequent Abbreviations

AB	Rev. Aaron Burr, Sr. (1716–1757)
EEB	Esther Edwards Burr (1732–1758)
JE	Rev. Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758)
<i>Journal</i>	<i>The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754–1757</i> (Karlsen and Crumpacker)
SP	Sarah Prince Gill (1728–1771)
TP	Rev. Thomas Prince, Sr. (1687–1758)
WJE	<i>The Works of Jonathan Edwards</i> and <i>The Works of Jonathan Edwards Online</i>

## Introduction

On the first day of 1755, Esther Edwards Burr sat in her Newark home laden with dread over a dark future. “Indeed my dear friend,” she wrote to her closest confidant, Sarah Prince, “we have reason to expect such times as this land never saw. Tis very probable that *you* and *I* may live to see persecution” at the hands of “our popish enemies.” Burr’s persistent anxiety over the rising tension with France and its Native American allies reached a crescendo as she returned home from a meeting that her entire presbytery had set aside for fasting and prayer in response to France’s threatening machinations against the British. During the past year, France had aggressively expanded its presence in the Ohio Country, and Lieutenant Colonel George Washington of Virginia had clashed violently and disastrously with them in a bid to dislodge the French from Fort Duquesne. Despite the bitter cold that stiffened her fingers, Burr poured out her anguish to Prince—the daughter of Thomas Prince, the minister of the Old South Church in Boston and famed creator of *The Christian History*—with whom she had developed a trusting, supportive, and deeply spiritual bond. With another war with France on the horizon, Esther Edwards Burr found some solace in sharing her worries with Prince, knowing her dear friend in Boston would understand her spiritual angst and earthly fears. She told Prince that she was absolutely certain that these were the “thretnings of heaven,” the work of providence punishing “*Gods own Children*” for falling away from godly living.<sup>1</sup>

Burr recounted the sermons she had heard delivered by her husband, the Reverend Aaron Burr, who shared his wife’s providential assessment. From his pulpit at the Church of Christ in Newark, Burr threatened that, in their current state of unregeneracy, God might very well deliver

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<sup>1</sup> Esther Edwards Burr [EEB] to Sarah Prince [SP], January 1, 1755, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754–1757*, eds. Carol F. Karlsen and Laurie Crumpacker (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 76–77; and EEB to SP, January 2, 1755, in *Journal*, 77.



them into the hands of the French, those “*damnable Heretics*” whose very principle was “to be cruel to *Protestants*.” Indeed, their present situation was the earthly manifestation of “the Displeasure of an angry God,” punishing the “chosen . . . *British Nation*” for their “*INFIDELITY . . . Wickedness . . . and beastly Uncleaness*.”<sup>2</sup> In the eyes of Burr and his audience, the physical and spiritual safety of colonial Protestants were inextricably linked, and thus so too were their efforts to turn the tides of imperial warfare both physical and spiritual. Although the cause of their suffering was clear, the future remained obscured. Considering “the dismal aspect of things” and dangers that war would bring, Esther Edwards Burr was gravely concerned about the fate of her “Dear father,” Jonathan Edwards, “and his afflicted family” at his pastoral post in the precarious frontier town of Stockbridge.<sup>3</sup> Fearing the persecution she, her family, and all of British Protestantism would soon face, Burr confided in Prince that she was prepared “to give up everything for the cause of God . . . even to *burn at the stake*.”<sup>4</sup> Her willingness to die a martyr at the hands of her enemies, just like true believers during the Reformation or pious colonists dragged into Indian captivity, underscores the unity of the temporal and the eternal in the midst of impending war. This conflation of physical and spiritual concerns, understood providentially, occasioned by violence, and expressed to and about the close network of the Edwards family, is the driving focus of this study.

Esther Edwards Burr’s interpretation of the mounting war with Catholic France was not a unique perspective but was, rather, largely representative of that held by the personal evangelical network of her father, Jonathan Edwards, a leading theologian and preacher of the Great Awakening, comprised of clergymen, laypeople, and provincial officials in his sphere of

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<sup>2</sup> Aaron Burr [AB], *A Discourse Delivered at New-Ark in New-Jersey* [. . .] (New York, 1755), 29, 19, 23–24, Eighteenth Century Collections Online.

<sup>3</sup> EEB to SP, November 8, 1754, in *Journal*, 60–61.

<sup>4</sup> EEB to SP, January 1, 1755, in *Journal*, 76.

association. These patterns of military providentialism first appeared among the Edwards network during King George's War (1744–1748), when the War of the Austrian Succession in Europe pushed out into North America, and British and French forces and their native allies vied for geopolitical and economic control of the continent. Here, as will be described in Chapter 1, the core of Edwards's network was populated by the leaders of the Concert of Prayer, a transatlantic evangelical movement, including Scottish divines William McCulloch, John Erskine, and John MacLaurin, as well as Thomas Prince of Boston. When the violence resumed between England and France in North America with the French and Indian War (1754–1766) a decade later, addressed in Chapter 2, Edwards's wartime network became far more familial, and prominently featured Aaron and Esther Edwards Burr and Esther's dear friend Sarah Prince. Beyond these core networks connected by blood, marriage, friendship, and faith, these evangelicals maintained personal and working relationships with the lay congregants in the towns of Northampton, Stockbridge, and Newark, New Jersey, as well as leading government officials, including provincial governors—William Shirley and Jonathan Belcher—and military officers like Colonels Israel Williams and William Johnson. Although the composition and structure of the networks described here are doubtless a product of available sources, I believe the fact that providential wartime discourse shifted from a clerical community to a family accurately reflects real changes in these evangelicals' experiences. First, it demonstrates Jonathan Edwards's turn inward during the interwar years, as his frustrations with lay spirituality and local conflict led to his dismissal from the Northampton pastorate. It also highlights the shifting beliefs, perceptions, hopes, and fears among this broader network during the last two Anglo-French wars in North America. In reconstructing this personal network of early

evangelicals through their letters, diaries, and sermons, I situate personal connections and providential beliefs and practices in the social and cultural milieu in which they existed.

This thesis details the words and deeds of the members of these networks as they lived through and tried to make sense of the two imperial wars during the middle decades of the eighteenth century. Their experiences and interpretive efforts were fundamentally affected by their providentialism—the belief that God controlled everything that had happened and would happen on earth and in heaven. The overruling sovereignty of God was the central theological principal for these evangelicals of New England and the British Atlantic. Recognizing the complexity of the word “evangelical,” especially in light of its many and varied progenies which have proliferated under the tent of evangelicalism since the nineteenth century, I use an early, general sense of the term, describing the “awakened” Congregationalists and Presbyterians of the mid-eighteenth century whose commitment to Puritanism and “Reformed” Calvinism was still visible. A guiding principle of this work has been to describe these people and the world in which they lived in ways that would be recognizable to them. One key feature of this world, grounded in the unwavering conviction in the ultimate sovereignty of God, was their providentialism. This belief was, as Alexandra Walsham has described, “a set of ideological spectacles . . . an invisible prism which helped them to focus the refractory meanings of both petty and perplexing events.”<sup>5</sup> For the Christians studied here, the “petty and perplexing” events of their world were separated into *general* and *special* providences. In this typology, the former explained the ordinary ways God ordered things on earth and in heaven—and was thus reconciled with Newtonian science and other “mechanistic philosophies”—while the latter explained the unexplainable. David D. Hall, Michael P. Winship, Nicholas Guyatt, and Philippa

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<sup>5</sup> Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), 2.

Koch, among many others, have emphasized the importance of the idea of providence in the early modern British Atlantic in sweeping thematic studies that connect providentialism to natural wonders, the Enlightenment, national identity, and sickness, respectively.<sup>6</sup> This project follows the work of these historians and addresses the critical thematic intersection of providence and violence. Furthermore, rather than commenting on providentialism broadly, in the complex and shifting ideological and experiential landscape of the era, I work to underscore the pervasiveness and importance of providentialism during war in the life of the individual by focusing on small networks and communities during brief periods of warfare.

For the leading divines of the British Atlantic, their providentialism fundamentally informed their understanding of history as a continuous providential timeline that connected the events described in the Bible to the present moment and then to the eventual millennium. For Edwards, “the future glorious advancement of Christ’s kingdom on earth” promised in Scripture was a subject of great fascination.<sup>7</sup> In the post-millennialism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the “millennium” referred Christ’s thousand-year reign of peace and prosperity which began with His coming to earth and ultimate destruction of Satan and concluded with the final return and judgement.<sup>8</sup> The final Anglo-French wars proved to be a crucible for the apocalyptic thinking of the reverends Edwards, Prince, and Burr. Under the theological umbrella of

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<sup>6</sup> David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989); Michael P. Winship, *Seers of God: Puritan Providentialism in the Restoration and Early Enlightenment* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Nicholas Guyatt, *Providence and the Invention of the United States, 1607–1876* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007); and Philippa Koch, *The Course of God’s Providence: Religion, Health, and the Body in Early America* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2021). Also see Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England*; and Douglas L. Winiarski, *Darkness Falls on the Land of Light: Experiencing Religious Awakening in Eighteenth-Century New England* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Edwards [JE], “Personal Narrative,” in *Letters and Personal Writings*, ed. George S. Claghorn, vol. 16, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 800.

<sup>8</sup> For more on Edwards’s millennialism, see Gerald R. McDermott, *One Holy and Happy Society: The Public Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 50–77, and for the nuances of his millennial chronology specifically, see McDermott, *Holy and Happy Society*, 50–60.

providence, these men drew on their millennial expectations to understand the meaning of the present wars and to inform their pastoral guidance to congregants. The progressive view of history held by Edwards, Prince, and other New Lights, led them to believe that the millennium would not be established in an instantaneous moment but rather through “an age of gradually increasing glory for the Church,” marked by a period of intermittent revivals. Furthermore, despite their generally optimistic view of Christian history, these clergymen believed that the final age before the millennium would be a time of great upheaval, marked by both revivals and afflictions wherein the forces of the Antichrist grew stronger and fought harder against the prospering Church. Edwards and the others actively searched for the apocalyptic signposts, most notably the rise and fall of the Antichrist, within this “afflictive model of progress,” which was the leading millennial thought at the time.<sup>9</sup> Burr’s more pessimistic perspective differed here in that he believed that only God’s ultimate intervention would end the downward trajectory of human piety and commence the thousand-year reign of peace.

These millennial efforts were not unique to these theologians, but part of a much larger discourse on war and the millennium. One historian, for example, has noted that more eschatological material was published in the 1750s than in any other decade of the colonial period—including the 1770s—most of which was specifically occasioned by the French and Indian War.<sup>10</sup> Erik R. Seeman and others have argued that lay people in colonial America believed the millennium to be “too esoteric in lives filled with more pressing concerns.”<sup>11</sup> This

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<sup>9</sup> McDermott, *Holy and Happy Society*, 56–58. Also see James West Davidson, *The Logic of Millennial Thought: Eighteenth-Century New England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977).

<sup>10</sup> Kerry Arnold Trask, “In Pursuit of Shadows: A Study of Collective Hope and Despair in Provincial Massachusetts During the Era of the Seven Years War, 1748 to 1764” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1971), 199, ProQuest Dissertation Publishing, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/302508077/citation/9FD954937PQ/1>.

<sup>11</sup> Erik R. Seeman, *Pious Persuasions: Laity and Clergy in Eighteenth-Century New England* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), x.

assessment is largely correct in the context of this essay, for many laypeople gave no mind to such portents of the apocalypse. There were several, however, including Esther Edwards Burr, who did comment on the biblical prophecies of the end times during these conflicts, but not with her father's the vigor and sense of importance. I contend, therefore, that interest in the providential nuances of the millennium were not categorically the purview of the clergy, but also influenced by other factors; in this case, one's position in the inner circles of the networks studied.<sup>12</sup>

I further emphasize that lay people were well aware of the wartime providential and millennial discourse and used its rhetoric, idioms, common historical examples, and scriptural references to inform and express their own understandings of the literal and figurative wars of the period. While ministers searched for signs of the end times and worked to instill religious reform and revival in the midst of war, their parishioners prayed for protection and survival, looked for the sinful causes of providence's violent judgments, and thanked God for their physical and spiritual salvation. It is also worth emphasizing that these lay fears were rightly shared by clergymen, who also had to reconcile with the encroaching violence that threatened the health, safety, and survival of themselves, their families, and their nation. The traditional religious paradigm of providentialism, given specificity and energy by the wars of the 1740s and 1750s, provided a common ground on which the esoteric and the prosaic could coexist. This language of providence and the millennium was communicated and imbibed in the spaces and

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<sup>12</sup> For more on the importance of millennialism in early American history, see, importantly, Ruth H. Bloch, *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought: 1756–1800* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1985); Nathan O. Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977); and Susan Juster, *Doomsayers: Anglo-American Prophecy in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

places where clergy and laypeople came together, most notably in meetinghouses and print culture.

Beyond the monumental military success and religious exhortation of the Louisbourg expedition, the significance of King George's War has largely been overlooked by religious historians, often discussed only as a brief prologue to the French and Indian War.<sup>13</sup> While the existence of the war has not been ignored in the history of religion following the Great Awakening, it is most often cast as an opportunity to express millenarianism rather than a geopolitical, social, and spiritual event that influenced evangelical's lives and beliefs.<sup>14</sup> The French and Indian War (known in Europe as the Seven Years' War) of the following decade was a moment of immense providential significance throughout the British Atlantic and historians have recognized how Protestants of every confession, country, and colony interpreted these moments of earthy warfare as signs of an active God's awful displeasure and merciful favor for a chosen British people. Much of this coverage has emphasized the political implications of religious belief and rhetoric during the French and Indian War with special attention paid to its bearing on the Revolutionary period. Nathan O. Hatch, Fred Anderson, and Nicholas Guyatt

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<sup>13</sup> For general treatments of King George's War, see Donald J. Horton, "King George's War (1744–1748)" in *Colonial Wars of North America, 1512–1763: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Alan Gallay (New York, NY: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996), 333–338; Douglas Edward Leach, *Arms for Empire: A Military History of the British Colonies in North America, 1607–1763* (New York, NY: Macmillan Company, 1973), especially 206–261; and Howard H. Peckham, *The Colonial Wars, 1689–1762* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1964), especially 97–120. Other histories of the Louisbourg expedition and King George's War that have been particularly helpful include George A. Rawlyk, *Nova Scotia's Massachusetts: A Study of Massachusetts–Nova Scotia Relations, 1630 to 1784* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1973), ProQuest Ebook Central, especially chapters 9 and 10; and James Russell Trumbull, *History of Northampton, Massachusetts, from its Settlement in 1654*, vol. 2 (Northampton, MA: Press of Gazette Printing Company, 1902), HathiTrust, 102–120, 147–164.

<sup>14</sup> Reflective of the general dismissal of political awareness among laity, Seeman writes: "Before the French and Indian War, [laity] occasionally noticed political events, but only rarely." Seeman, *Pious Persuasions*, 197–198. For more examples of these themes, see Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind: From the Great Awakening to the Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 83–84; and Mark Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 78–82. The most extensive religious coverage of King George's War I have found is in George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 306–319.

have interpreted the optimistic providentialism and millenarian expectations espoused by clergymen during days of fasting and thanksgiving as a critical religious and civil precursor to American nationalism.<sup>15</sup> In the most well-known coverage of these themes, Hatch emphasizes the importance of the French and Indian War as a corrective from the earlier assumption that the Great Awakening established the foundation for the Americanized civil millennialism of the Revolution. In his very brief coverage of King George's War, Mark Noll has similarly argues that the conflict "promoted the first hints of what rapidly became standard religious politics. . . . link[ing] the fate of genuine Christianity to hopes for the future of liberty."<sup>16</sup>

This forward-looking perspective, however, minimizes the violent reality in which these providential expressions were uttered. Recognizing and understanding the impact of violence is not only important to studying religious cosmology and personal faith in its own right, but is absolutely essential in unpacking the connectedness of the lived realities and providential beliefs of British North Americans during the middle decades of the eighteenth century. King George's War presented a complicated providential milieu for New England Protestants, bringing decisive English victories like the early capture of Louisbourg, a French stronghold on Cape Breton Island, while also creating an anxious air of danger in rural Massachusetts and elsewhere, especially during the latter years of the war. Significantly, the years of the French and Indian War studied here, from 1754 to 1757, marked the bleakest and most deadly period of the war for the English. The ways Edwards's network searched for, interpreted, and responded to the final Anglo-French wars demonstrated their utmost concern for their own material and eternal

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<sup>15</sup> Hatch, *Sacred Cause of Liberty*; Nathan O. Hatch, "The Origins of Civil Millennialism in America: New England Clergymen, War with France, and the Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (July 1974): 407–430, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1921630>; Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754–1766* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), especially 373–376; and Guyatt, *Providence*, especially 62–69.

<sup>16</sup> Noll, *America's God*, 78.



preservation, and that of their community of believers. The importance of warfare in the providential cosmology of these Christians cannot be understated, with Edwards himself proclaiming that while God orders all things, “God is wont, especially, to make his hand visible” in the affairs of war, which are “purely providential.”<sup>17</sup>

While the faithful had been looking for and interpreting the acts and designs of God on the battlefield for centuries, the imperial wars against Catholic France held a greater, cosmic significance in the Protestant American colonies. In his study of the political culture of royal America, Brendan McConville convincingly demonstrates that British Americans throughout the long eighteenth century situated themselves and their monarchical rulers in a historical narrative “of the ongoing struggle between pan-European Protestantism and Catholicism, absolutism, and popery.”<sup>18</sup> The violent history of this conflict spanned generations, from the bloody persecution of Protestants in Catholic France to Guy Fawkes’s gunpowder plot in 1605 to the seven decades of war in North America, beginning with King William’s War in 1689, but also transcended time in the minds of Britons, existing in a single common memory. This seamless fusion of political and religious identity and culture had a distinct providential and millennial current. Partisan ministers as early as Cotton Mather interpreted the dichotomy between British Protestantism and French Catholicism as the earthly manifestation of the struggle between God’s kingdom and the forces of the Antichrist. By the time of King George’s War, tropes of eschatological anti-popery

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<sup>17</sup> JE, “God’s People Tried By A Battle Lost,” in *Sermons and Discourses, 1743–1758*, ed. Wilson H. Kimnach, vol. 25, *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*, 689, <http://edwards.yale.edu/archive?path=aHR0cDovL2Vkd2FyZHMueWFsZS5lZHUvY2dpLWJpbi9uZXdwaGlsby9nZXRVYmplY3QucGw/Yy4yNDozNi53amVvLjE5NzA1NDguMTk3MDU1Mw==>. All materials from *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Online* were accessed between January and November 2021. Accession dates have been omitted from citations in the interest of brevity.

<sup>18</sup> Brendan McConville, *The King’s Three Faces: The Rise and Fall of Royal America, 1688–1766* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 7, ProQuest Ebook Central.

which read British political, economic, and military advances and French failures as portents of the kingdom of Christ were well-engrained in the public mind.<sup>19</sup>

As Thomas S. Kidd, Owen Stanwood, and others have established, “New Englanders imagine[d] that they were on the front lines of a global battle for Christianity—a struggle for the world’s souls.”<sup>20</sup> During times of peace and of war, evangelical, Anglican, and Catholic missionaries fought for the souls of native peoples, hoping to bring together every tribe and nation under the reign of their God and hasten the arrival of His kingdom. The spiritual front of this eternal conflict had concrete strategic benefits as well, as religious conversion often cemented diplomatic, military, and economic alliances with Native Americans for Protestant and Catholic powers alike. By 1745 in England and throughout the British empire, anti-popery, which had since fallen out of polite political discourse, reemerged “as an expression of national unity,” a new foil with which to define themselves against their many Catholic enemies: the Spanish in Europe, Prince Charles, the Young Pretender, in Scotland, the French on both sides of the Atlantic, and the native peoples of North America converted by Jesuit missionaries.<sup>21</sup> The experiences during King George’s War and the French and Indian War detailed in the following pages were critically shaped by the providential hopes and “intense fear that permeated

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<sup>19</sup> Similarly, French Catholic clergymen in Europe and North America also understood the Anglo-French Wars as a religious conflict in providential terms and with apocalyptic consequences. British Protestants and French Catholics each saw themselves as the champions of God’s true church in this struggle, and deployed many of the same ideas, rhetoric, and tropes. For more on these comparisons, see Nicole Marie Penn, “Apocalypse Now: War and Religion in Late Colonial and Early Republic America,” (MA thesis, College of William and Mary, 2016), <http://doi.org/10.21220/S2FW2T>.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas S. Kidd, “‘Let Hell and Rome Do Their Worst’: World News, Anti-Catholicism, and International Protestantism in Early-Eighteenth-Century Boston,” *New England Quarterly* 76, no. 2 (June 2003), 290, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1559905?origin=crossref>. Also see Owen Stanwood, “The Protestant Moment: Antipopery, the Revolution of 1688–1689, and the Making of an Anglo-American Empire,” *Journal of British Studies* 46, no. 3 (July 2007): 481–508, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/515441>; and Daniel Robinson, “Giving Peace to Europe: European Geopolitics, Colonial Political Culture, and the Hanoverian Monarchy in British North America, ca. 1740–63,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 73, no. 2 (April 2016): 291–332, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5309/willmaryquar.73.2.0291>.

<sup>21</sup> Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England, 1727–1783* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1989), 202.

provincial society . . . [and] helped hold the empire together.”<sup>22</sup> This study demonstrates how members of the networks in question interpreted and employed anti-Catholic ideas and rhetoric and derived diverse providential interpretations from such beliefs.

While providentialism was a fundamental feature of the eighteenth-century Christian worldview, moments of great suffering—whether individual or communal—often brought this aspect of religious belief to the fore. Walsham explains that providentialism was “an ingrained parochial response to chaos and crisis, a practical source of consolation in a hazardous and inhospitable environment, and an idea which exercised practical, emotional, and imaginative influence upon those who subscribed to it.”<sup>23</sup> For those in Edwards’s circles, intimately aware of the military and political contours of war, living in places like rural Northampton, the precarious frontier post of Stockbridge, and Boston, a center of news and public discourse, and concerned about the degrading state of spiritual affairs, there was no greater moment of chaos and crisis. Similarly, Koch has convincingly argued that the providentialism of eighteenth-century Protestants did not encourage “fatalism or passivity,” but rather the exact opposite: “They sought to comprehend their past and present experiences and actions in terms of God’s will and the proper human response.” When examined in the immediate life of the individual, the frequently-cited clerical view of providence appears as only one piece of a larger experience. This study supports Koch’s claim that “Protestants were active in their response to suffering” and brings this broad idea beyond the medical context of her book and into the violent setting of King George’s War and the French and Indian War.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> McConville, *King’s Three Face’s*, 112.

<sup>23</sup> Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England*, 2–3.

<sup>24</sup> Koch, *Course of God’s Providence*, 4, 5.

One of the newest connections between providentialism and violence has been developed by historian Matthew Rowley, who has explored this intersection in the context of several “decisive victories” led by English Puritans during the mid-seventeenth century.<sup>25</sup> Herein, Rowley has coined two terms which aid in deepening this study of our subjects’ interpretations of and reactions to wartime providences: first, *military providentialism*, as “the attempt to understand God’s will and agency in war”; and second, *godly violence*, which describes the “conclusion that an act of killing was both just and holy.” Further clarifying the second point, Rowley describes the “three senses” of godly violence, all of which are important to military providentialism: that the violence “was performed by ‘the godly’; believed to be godly; and thought to involve God as an active participant.”<sup>26</sup> Rowley persuasively argues that just war and holy war are not a zero-sum game on a single spectrum, but are wholly compatible. I explore the language and ideas of Rowley’s recent scholarship in the context of the final two Anglo-French wars, which were pursued by nation-states and supported, promoted, interpreted, and fought by the godly. In so doing, I underscore the importance of the context of military providentialism—both in the macro, such as the general state of spirituality in the colonies, specific military events, and geopolitical affairs, and in the micro, especially the impact of one’s own social, spiritual, and geographic position. Commenting on the influences of military providentialism in a seventeenth-century Puritan context, Rowley astutely recognizes that “Puritan military providentialism was influenced by whether they thought they were entering the light, passing

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<sup>25</sup> Matthew Rowley, “Godly Violence: Military Providentialism in the Puritan Atlantic World, 1636–1676,” abstract, (PhD diss., University of Leicester, 2018). The five victories Rowley uses as case studies are the Mystic Massacre (1637), Battle of Naseby (1645), Siege of Drogheda (1649), Battle of Dunbar (1650), and the Great Swamp Fight (1675). For a recently published distillation of Rowley’s argument, see Matthew Rowley, “A New Approach to Just and Holy Warfare: The Complicated Case of Puritan Violence,” in *Religion and Conflict in Medieval and Early Modern Worlds: Identity, Communities, and Authorities*, eds. Natasha Hodgson, et al., (New York, NY: Routledge, 2021), 275–293. When possible, citations will be given for this published chapter in service of accessibility.

<sup>26</sup> Rowley, “New Approach,” 275.

into unparalleled brightness or grasping at former glory.”<sup>27</sup> While the spiritual trajectory of a people, often described in terms of light and darkness, was certainly an important factor for Edwards’s networks, the present essay underscores something Rowley’s study of decisive victories is less equipped to demonstrate: the importance of decisive and constant military loss and suffering in the project of military providentialism.

Seeking to reconstruct the full providential experiences of the members of the extended community in which Edwards lived through lay journals, letters, and other personal writings, I follow those historians who have used the study of lived religion to get at “the person in the pew.”<sup>28</sup> While an officer during the Louisbourg expedition in 1745, Major Seth Pomeroy, a friend and congregant of Jonathan Edwards in Northampton, kept a detailed journal of the proceeding military events he witnessed and maintained an active correspondence with his wife, Mary. While Pomeroy’s records are undoubtedly valuable as a first-hand record of the famed conquest, they also provide an account of a devout Christian experiencing and participating in violence and suffering. In similar fashion, Esther Edwards Burr’s journal, intended to be intimately shared with only her closest friend, powerfully underscores the extent to which her life and the lives of those around her were affected by the French and Indian War. Both Pomeroy’s and Burr’s accounts demonstrate how they experienced and interpreted the unique circumstances of violence they each faced through the lens of religious belief.

I am just as concerned, however, with the practiced piety of the man behind the pulpit. As such, most of the source material from Jonathan Edwards, Thomas Prince, Aaron Burr, and other

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<sup>27</sup> Rowley, “Godly Violence,” 26.

<sup>28</sup> The reference to “the person in the pew” comes from David D. Hall, “Introduction,” in *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice*, ed. David D. Hall (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), xi. Studies of lived religion in the eighteenth century that have been especially helpful for this essay include Seeman, *Pious Persuasions*; and Winiarski, *Darkness Falls*.

ministers are drawn not from formal treatises but from personal correspondence, private journals, and sermons, both published and unpublished. These personal sources, as Hatch has pointed out, lay bare their “taken-for-granted assumptions” and “less guarded [political and social] commentaries,” revealing “their most compelling hopes and fears.”<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, these sources offer a window into the theology they were preaching and their lay congregants were hearing. Through the words heard in the meetinghouse—and those read in published sermons—a shared providential cosmology and language flourished across the line of ordination. The experiences of these pastors during wartime was certainly a complex one, as they faced the many earthly dangers and heavenly communications wrought by war and worked to balance their material and spiritual fears and frustrations between the personal and pastoral sides of their identities. Recognizing that Jonathan Edwards, Aaron Burr, and other leading divines were husbands, fathers, friends, and pastors who connected with all sorts of members of colonial society, I highlight the real social and theological connections between clergymen and lay people, and illuminate equally each person’s experiences in and understanding of the events of the mid-eighteenth century.<sup>30</sup>

I argue that King George’s War and the French and Indian War created the primary focus for providentialism among clergymen and lay people during that period, which in turn fostered a dynamic discourse of shared and varied interpretations of and responses to God’s work on earth. Critically, one’s specific ecclesiastical, political, social, geographic, and temporal position fostered the main point of divergence in interpretation and action. Despite these differences, the common foundation of providential beliefs, language, and actions, focused by the collectively-

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<sup>29</sup> Hatch, *Sacred Cause of Liberty*, 9.

<sup>30</sup> My treatment of Jonathan Edwards has been critically influenced by biographer George M. Marsden, who aims to depict Edwards “as a real person in his own time. . . . and in his own terms.” Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 2.

experienced events of an ongoing war, created the space and means for all peoples, regardless of their position in the shifting worlds of the British Atlantic, to find meaning in the violence which surrounded them.

By focusing on this specific network of people during a short but tumultuous period of time, I demonstrate the breadth and depth to which the intersection of violence and providentialism affected these peoples' thoughts, feelings, words, and actions. The communities of evangelicals most closely surrounding Jonathan Edwards at the time illustrate these connections especially strongly because they were at once deeply connected to the contours of war and public life in the British Atlantic and also immensely spiritual. The years of war between England and France studied here were a mortal and eternal crucible for these believers' providentialism. King George's War ebbed and flowed in the wake of waning religious revivals in America and among an emerging community of transatlantic believers. The coalescence of these proceedings created, enlivened, and disappointed hopes of God's work on earth and the hastening of the millennium. Secondly, the period of the French and Indian War covered here, between 1754 and 1757, significantly marked both the nadir of the British war effort and a time of perceived dire spiritual degradation among Protestants on the North American continent. Unfortunately, none of the key individuals studied here lived past the spring of 1758 and were never able to interpret the more benevolent dispensations from heaven that befell the British later in the war. On the other hand, their lives provide a natural boundary which forces a contemporary reading of the tumultuous early events of the French and Indian War, rather than a positive backwards reading from the perspective of the war's victorious conclusion and the Revolutionary period which followed.

From the outset of both of these wars, members of Edwards's networks, and Protestants throughout the Atlantic world, immediately engaged in military providentialism with each other and those close to them. Their early discourse not only established how fundamental their view of providence was to understanding the world, but also how one's place in that world shaped their interpretation of and response to the violence around them. During the mid-1740s, the coincidence of the contested ideas about revivalism, the burgeoning war with Catholic France, and the proliferation of a transatlantic community of prayer occasioned vigorous providential discourse among ministers about imperial and spiritual warfare, hopes to reawaken a backsliding people, and prospects of the coming millennium. That same military providentialism—although detached from the more esoteric concerns of the end of days—was the lens through which lay New Englanders experienced this imperial conflict against a popish enemy. Similarly, specific military events during the first year of the French and Indian War, including General Braddock's defeat on the Monongahela and the Battle of Lake George, elicited surges of providential discourse in the letters, diaries, sermons, and personal interactions of the Edwards family. The increasingly anxious tone of this discourse reflected the quickly-deteriorating military situation which drew ever nearer to these believers.

During both of the periods of warfare studied here, even in the normal moments of daily living these Christians thought seriously and often about God's work on earth. Military providentialism, those efforts to understand God's mercies and judgments, and the material and spiritual actions that were required of the godly community, ran throughout evangelical discourse, even beyond any direct reference to a specific expedition or battle. For example, Esther Edwards Burr's trip from her marital home in New Jersey to visit her family of origin in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, illuminates the fact that their lives were separate from but ultimately



conditioned by the reality of war. Her visit to the frontier also underscores the dynamic situational quality of these Christians' physical and spiritual hopes and fears, all understood within a fundamental view of providence.

Despite the variance of interpretation and response, the military providentialism which flowed through this network during King George's War and the French and Indian War was, in large part, an attempt to stave off suffering, an effort rooted in the fact that belief in God's providence established order and meaning. In a world full of chaos and wonders, questions and anxiety—much of which caused and was caused by suffering—belief in the ultimate ruling of providence offered order, answers, direction, and comfort. While the Christians of the British Atlantic often found different answers and directions in their providential journeys, they joined together in the act of providential interpretation itself, participating in a shared discourse of beliefs, rhetoric, and actions which critically shaped how they experienced the violence of war.

## Chapter One:

### **“Their God Was Turned an Englishman”: King George’s War**

#### **“On Many Accounts Very Melancholy”: Edwards After the Awakening**

In March 1744, Jonathan Edwards wrote to William McCulloch in Scotland of an “open door for ‘the enemy to come in like a flood,’” and the dire circumstances which gave “great advantage to the enemies . . . furnished them with weapons, and gave ‘em new courage.” Although France would declare war against the British within days of Edwards writing this frustrated message, it was not the French nor their Indian allies whom Edwards feared at this moment. Rather, he was describing the Boston minister Charles Chauncy and other “Old Light” opponents of evangelical revivalism who were gratified and refreshed by the excessive and troubling state of colonial revivals. Seriously troubled by the mounting attacks from these conservative reactionaries, Edwards was even more distressed by the radical itinerant revivalists like James Davenport who had “opened the door” in the first place and had themselves flooded the land with prideful, zealous, and heretical “elevations and raptures. . . . until the deluge has overwhelmed the whole land.” By this time, it was clear that the religious revivals that were foundational to Jonathan Edwards’s ministry and identity had come and gone. Thomas Prince’s *Christian History*, edited by his son of the same name, published its last issue in February of 1745, one of many distressing signs that “the Spirit of God [had] began to withdraw.” Not only did Edwards and the revivalism he championed face public opposition and ridicule on the colonial stage in the presses and meetinghouses of New England, but on a local level as well, as some of Northampton’s leading families began moving against their pastor. Disparaged by resistance to his vision of providential truth and with his millennial hopes once energized by the

awakenings of the past decade now left unfulfilled, Edwards lamented the “very melancholy” state of things in New England and throughout the transatlantic British nation.<sup>1</sup>

By 1742, a new generation of preachers, including James Davenport, Samuel Buell, and Benjamin Pomeroy, had become the leading foot soldiers of religious revivals in the colonies. These heirs of George Whitefield, a charismatic itinerant evangelist of international renown whose 1740 tour of New England sparked the Great Awakening, had adopted a radical style of sermonizing, through which revivalism was becoming increasingly defined by visions, trances, and extraordinary exhortations and bodily effects. These excesses and hysteria were concerning to moderate and conservative clergymen, who condemned religious “enthusiasm” as unseemly, disorderly, and too empowering of the laity. Zealous revivalism occasioned lay claims of divine inspiration and spiritual authority, and awakened congregations often questioned their pastors, which led to separatism and schism in Connecticut and Massachusetts congregations, further arming the conservative enemies of the Awakening. In June 1742, the moderate evangelical pastor of Newark, New Jersey, Aaron Burr, articulated the specific concerns moderates held against radicals, which included “their giving heed to visions, trances, & revelations. . . . speaking of divine things with an air of levity & vanity, laughter &c. . . . declaring their judgment about others . . . whether they are converted or not. . . . [and] their separating from their minister under a notion of his being unregenerate.”<sup>2</sup> He, along with Jonathan Edwards, Thomas Prince, and other “New Lights,” maintained their position as champions of revivalism and argued that these troubling excesses were peripheral to the essentially good works of the Awakening. The emergent “Old Light” anti-revivalist faction, with Boston’s Charles Chauncy at

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<sup>1</sup> JE to the Reverend William McCulloch, March 5, 1743/4, in *WJE*, 16:134–135.

<sup>2</sup> AB to Joseph Bellamy, June 28, 1742, quoted in Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 142–143.

the helm, found the zealous new face of the Awakening as further reason to denounce revivalism and return to the old clerical order of New England.<sup>3</sup>

Edwards expressed his early fears of Davenport's zealous itinerancy in a letter to Burr: he "does more toward giving Satan & other opposers advantage against the work of God than any one person."<sup>4</sup> At a time when most evangelicals maintained at least a cautious support of Davenport, Burr shared Edwards's sentiment, writing to Joseph Bellamy that "I dare not justify all his conduct, nor can I see thro' it."<sup>5</sup> This discomfort was magnified during the following months as Davenport's excess became even more excessive. In early March 1743, Davenport arrived in New London, Connecticut, claiming to have had a revelation from God to "root out Heresy and pull down Idolatry." On the Sabbath, as people were leaving the churches of New London, they saw Davenport and his devotees burning Puritan and Congregationalist texts in a rejection of the religious establishment of New England. The next day, he ordered his partisans to burn their jewelry, wigs, and finery as a symbolic and literal purification of their idolatrous love of worldly possessions. As his awakened supporters paraded around the conflagration singing "Hallelujah" and "Glory to God," Davenport, now appearing more wildly enthusiastic than ever before, stripped down and added his only pair of breeches to the flames.<sup>6</sup> Davenport's showing in New London was, as historian C. C. Goen has remarked, "the zenith of his fanaticism and the nadir of his career."<sup>7</sup> The tense and polarized religious climate likely over-inflated such

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<sup>3</sup> This paragraph has largely been informed by Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 268–290.

<sup>4</sup> JE to AB, quoted in Kidd, *Great Awakening*, 140.

<sup>5</sup> AB to Joseph Bellamy, January 13, 1742, quoted in Kidd, *Great Awakening*, 140.

<sup>6</sup> *Boston Weekly Post-Boy*, March 28, 1743, in Richard L. Bushman, *The Great Awakening: Documents of the Revival of Religion, 1740–1745* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), ProQuest Ebook Central, 51–53. Also see C. C. Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism in New England, 1740–1800* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1962), HathiTrust, 25, 68–79; Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 275, 558n17; and Joseph Tracy, *The Great Awakening: A History of the Revival of Religion in the Time of Edwards and Whitefield* (Boston, MA: Charles Tappan, 1845), HathiTrust, 248–249.

<sup>7</sup> Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism*, 25.

accounts of Davenport's radicalism as New Lights hoped to distance themselves from the fringe figure and Old Lights moved to associate the entire evangelical movement with this zealot.

While Edwards was able to bring some degree of order to the specific situation in New London by leading a congress of New Lights which maintained their support for revivalism while rejecting Davenport's actions, the radical and schismatic momentum of the Awakening continued, much to the dismay of New Lights and to the glee of their anti-revivalist rivals.

The increasingly contentious discourse over revivalism also spilled into provincial and ecumenical politics. The Old Light political majority in Connecticut made public moves against revivalism and separatism, including anti-itinerancy laws and, most notably, the repeal of the right to religious dissent in May 1743. At the same time, Old and New Light divisions rent the "General Convention of Congregational Ministers of Massachusetts" in two, which was followed by an even more public and even more egregious contest fought through Boston's presses. Once a driving force during the Great Awakening, the hope that the revival and spread of genuine and vital Christianity would foretell and hasten the coming of Christ's kingdom on earth was a prominent feature of this New Light defense of the revival. A running theme in the many reports published in Prince's *Christian History*, which recorded successful revivals throughout British America, was the steady and encouraging—albeit slow—advancement of the kingdom. In the New Light statement which came from the schismatic convention in the summer of 1743, these ministers defended the revival on the grounds that "it tends to enliven the Prayers, strengthen the Faith, and raise the Hopes, of such as are *waiting for the Kingdom of God*, and the coming on of the Glory of the latter Days."<sup>8</sup> During the war that would soon begin, Jonathan Edwards

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<sup>8</sup> *The Testimony and Advice of an Assembly of Pastors of Churches in New-England* [ . . . ] (Boston, 1743), Eighteenth Century Collections Online, 6.

synthesized this eschatological hope with the millennial signs of the affairs of godly violence to bolster his efforts to defend and reawaken his vision of revivalism.

In September, Chauncy published *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England*, in which he attacked the present state of the Awakening as nothing less than heresy. In his volume, Chauncy set the controversial enthusiasm of revivalism at the very core of the evangelical tradition, rather than as a peripheral feature, as New Lights tried to position it. The decline of the revivalism of Edwards and Whitefield and the surge of radical separatism over the past year established a powerful context for Chauncy's work, which called out Edwards and his optimistic treatise which he completed the previous fall.<sup>9</sup> In a providential interpretation of his own, Chauncy argued that "False Pretensions to *extraordinary* Communications from the SPIRIT; over-heated Imaginations . . . Contempt of the Standing Ministry. . . [and] Schisms and Separations, have often been the Scourges of GOD upon sinful *Churches*." The radicalism of revivalists and the danger they posed was a "justly deserve[d]. . . . *Punishment*" from heaven upon God's true church.<sup>10</sup> Despite this pitched discourse between Old and New Lights, and Chauncy and Edwards more specifically, the Northampton pastor shared many of his opponents' concerns about the excessive transformation of the revival. First in an open letter to Thomas Prince written in December 1743 and published in *The Christian History*, and then later in his *Treatise on Religious Affections*, which he wrote during the next several years, Edwards cast the blame for New England's radical and schismatic new visage at the feet of arrogant, over-zealous New Lights, rather than reactionary Old Lights.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Charles Chauncy, *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England* [ . . . ] (Boston, 1743), Eighteenth Century Collection Online; and JE, *Some Thoughts Concerning the present Revival of Religion in New-England* [ . . . ] (Boston, 1743), in *The Great Awakening*, ed. C. C. Goen, vol. 4 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 287–530.

<sup>10</sup> Chauncy, *Seasonable Thoughts*, 329–330.

<sup>11</sup> JE to the Reverend Thomas Prince [TP], December 12, 1743, in *WJE*, 16:115–127; JE, *Religious Affections*, ed. Paul Ramsey, vol. 2, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*,

Amid the disconcerting revivals and schisms scattered across Massachusetts and Connecticut, Edwards faced a similar situation in his home of Northampton. This frontier town of Hampshire County, once the bulwark of the Great Awakening, had, by the early 1740s, become the stage for religious and political opposition to Edwards and his holy cause. Sources of social, political, and religious tensions which emerged in 1740s Northampton were many. For example, the closure of common fields in 1743, a concrete signpost on the road from communalism to private ownership, was, in Edwards's assessment, "a source of mutual prejudices, jealousies, and debates. . . . above any other particular thing."<sup>12</sup> As the rising population clearly pressed up against the fixed amount of land in Northampton, it also brought the limited number of political offices and the restriction of local power into sharper focus. Like many Massachusetts towns along the Connecticut River, Northampton had been governed, represented, and defended by an exclusive group of interconnected families since the beginning of the century, including the Dwights, Hawleys, Pomeroyes, and Stoddards. The most powerful clan among these and other "River Gods" was the extended Williams family, with whom Edwards shared Stoddard relatives and who began to position themselves politically and religiously against the pastor of Northampton in the 1740s.<sup>13</sup>

Prior to the awakening's more radical turn, the Williamses, who dominated the Hampshire Association of Ministers during this time, worked in concert with their cousin Edwards to enliven the awakenings in western Massachusetts and across the river in Connecticut. The excessive and separatist revivalism personified by James Davenport, the brother-in-law of

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<http://edwards.yale.edu/archive?path=aHR0cDovL2Vkd2FyZHMueWFsZS5lZHUvY2dpLWJpbi9uZXdwaGlsby9zZWxlY3QucGw/d2plby4x>.

<sup>12</sup> JE to TP, December 12, 1743, in *WJE*, 16:127; and Patricia J. Tracy, *Jonathan Edwards, Pastor: Religion and Society in Eighteenth-Century Northampton* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1979), 148.

<sup>13</sup> Kevin M. Sweeney, "River Gods and Related Minor Deities: The Williams Family and the Connecticut River Valley, 1637–1790," (PhD diss., Yale University, 1986), ProQuest Dissertation Publishing, <https://www.proquest.com/pqdtglobal/docview/303507764/B3D1DF955F47464CPQ/1?accountid=11789>.

the Reverend Stephen Williams of Longmeadow, Massachusetts, divided the “River Gods” on the issue. Their vigorous participation in the Awakening was rooted in their commitment to the established ecclesiastical order and desire to bring more lay members into the church, a cause which the populist and anti-clerical thrust of the evolving movement actively undermined. In the winter after Davenport’s New London showing, Jonathan Ashley, the pastor at Deerfield, publicly rejected the present state of revivalism and the position of Jonathan Edwards. Ashley, the brother-in-law of Israel Williams, the wealthy merchant and politician of Hatfield and a leader of the rising generation who opposed Edwards, was the first of the Williams clan to move against the revival. While Ashley’s proclamation created a firestorm among clergy in Boston’s newspapers that winter, the emergent rivalry between the Williams family and Edwards continued for far longer. While Stephen Williams joined Edwards in supporting the revival during the schismatic congregational convention of 1743, he was among only seven Hampshire County clergymen who voiced such support.<sup>14</sup>

Edwards believed that the state of Christian piety was declining not only because of the disunity among local and colonial clergy—more and more of whom were beginning to speak out against his cause—but also because of his own congregational troubles. In the early spring of 1744, for example, Edwards moved against a group of young men in his congregation who had been passing around books on medicine and midwifery as material for lascivious humor, some of which was personally directed at young women. Edwards’s effort to draw out confessions and apologies from these young sinners lasted several months, and reflected broadly the social,

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<sup>14</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 275. This and the following paragraphs on the Williams family have been largely informed by Sweeney, “River Gods,” particularly chapters 3, 4, and 5, and especially pages 230–233, 290–292, 301–306, 333–347, 416–417. See the following notes for citations of quoted material. For Stephen Williams’s show of support, see “From *Seven Rev. Pastors in the County of Hampshire*,” in *Testimony and Advice*, 29–30. This letter is also available, among other places, in *WJE*, 16:111–112.



moral, and spiritual issues Edwards saw as running rampant through his town: sinfulness, vice, drunkenness, co-ed socialization, sexual immorality, and a general disrespect for ecclesiastical order and authority.<sup>15</sup>

This conflict also brought to the surface some latent resentments that the lay public held against their pastor—most notably in regard to Edwards’s salary, which historian Patricia Tracy has described as “that traditional battleground between ministers and laymen in eighteenth-century New England.” Edwards was certainly well-paid, but, as early as 1734 and until his departure from Northampton in 1750, he often had trouble collecting his salary from the town and frequently had to endure the embarrassing ordeal of petitioning for and collecting his annual grant.<sup>16</sup> While Sarah Edwards and her daughters received a brunt of the public criticism during the fiasco in 1744 for their clothing and jewelry purchased in Boston, another signal of the Edwards’s family wealth and gentility was their owning of slaves.<sup>17</sup> Edwards, like Stephen Williams, Samuel Hopkins, and many of his fellow clergymen, relatives, and “River Gods,” appears to have usually owned one slave at any given time during his professional career. Edwards was certainly aware of the lay contention and resentment that slave ownership could bring upon a pastor, especially when discussed alongside salary and material wealth. Several years prior, in 1741, the Reverend Benjamin Doolittle, pastor at Northfield, was denounced by several members of his congregation for owning Black slaves—a condemnation which was deployed alongside criticisms of Doolittle’s excessive salary petition in a larger conflict between the awakened congregation and their Old-Light leaning pastor. Rather surprisingly, Edwards

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<sup>15</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 291–305.

<sup>16</sup> Tracy, *Jonathan Edwards, Pastor*, 157 and, more generally, 155–160.

<sup>17</sup> This and the following paragraph have been greatly informed by Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 255–258; Kenneth P. Minkema, “Jonathan Edwards’s Defense of Slavery,” *Massachusetts Historical Review* 4 (2002): 23–59, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25081170>; and Kenneth P. Minkema, “Jonathan Edwards on Slavery and the Slave Trade,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (October 1997): 823–834, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2953884>. See the following notes for citations of quoted material.

wrote the defense for Doolittle—despite their stark theological differences—when the issue came before the Hampshire Association. He dismissed the Northfield parishioners’ accusations as “sudden and rash . . . reproaches on their pastor, to the great wounding of religion.”<sup>18</sup> Working to maintain the status quo in his defense of Doolittle’s ministerial authority, Edwards condemned these lay critics for hypocritically benefitting, albeit secondarily, from the institution of slavery through their economic participation in the Atlantic world. While he held that the institution of slavery was not wrong or sinful in and of itself, he did condemn the African slave trade as an affront to biblical and moral law.

Predictably for the age, Edwards held a paternalistic, hierarchical view of the world. He viewed African and Native American civilizations and peoples as greatly inferior European Christendom but advocated for their conversion, for during the millennium he “hoped that then many of the Negroes and Indians will be divines . . . [and] more ordinary men, shall then be very knowing in religion.”<sup>19</sup> Recognizing the spiritual equality of all people in the eyes of God, had baptized nine Africans and two Indians into full membership in the Northampton church, most of whom were admitted during the town’s awakening in the 1730s. Nevertheless, slavery existed as a central pillar of Atlantic politics, society, and religion, and Edwards stopped short of applying this egalitarian millennialism to the politics of the present moment or advocating for anything which would lead to social disruption. Until the glory of the later days, Edwards was committed to spreading the gospel to all peoples and to embody what he believed to be a proper Christian master.

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<sup>18</sup> JE, “Draft Letter on Slavery,” in *WJE*, 16:71–76.

<sup>19</sup> JE, *A History of the Work of Redemption*, ed. John F. Wilson, vol. 9, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 480.

By 1745, the tension among the ministers of Hampshire County broke into the public consciousness on the occasion of George Whitefield's colonial tour that year. A majority of the county's ministers, Ashley among them, publicly objected to Whitefield's itinerant circuit, and even more than those who signed—pro-revivalists among them—refused to let the famous evangelical preach in their churches. Amidst this rejection of Whitefield, Israel Williams, by now a staunch Old Light, rode to Northampton to personally inform Edwards that Whitefield would not be preaching from the Hatfield pulpit. This outburst reflected Williams's growing "distaste for Edwards," which, as Kevin Sweeney explains, "had a very personal, visceral dimension," which unfortunately "remains unexplicable."<sup>20</sup> From Edwards's pro-revivalist perspective, which he penned to his Scottish connections shortly after Whitefield left Northampton, as much as the land was stirred by the drums of war against France, Whitefield's return to New England "has been occasion of the whole country's being in a great uproar. . . . Many ministers were more alarmed at his coming, than they would have been by the arrival of a fleet from France."<sup>21</sup>

In the years which followed Whitefield's visit, the once-fiery Williams clan cooled to revivalism, most of whom actively opposed the movement "to preserve the standing order in church polity."<sup>22</sup> Edwards, who never abandoned his commitment to the Awakening nor to uniting all of Christendom under its cause, found himself on the losing end of political and spiritual fractures and realignments. Though the worst of this ecumenical consternation would come to pass during King George's War, Edwards could see those "dark clouds, and threatening appearances" hanging over the American colonies in the final weeks of peacetime. Soon after the Northampton pastor penned his anguish over the open doors through which his Old Light

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<sup>20</sup> Sweeney, "River Gods," 419.

<sup>21</sup> JE to Friends in Scotland, after September 16, 1745, in *WJE*, 16:175.

<sup>22</sup> Sweeney, "River Gods," 307.

enemies poured, another enemy of the faith appeared. Two months later, in May 1744, Boston received news of France's declaration of war; a war which would encourage evangelicals' providential view of the fate British Protestantism, and provide Edwards with a source of millenarian optimism and holy ground to strike back against his own local and colonial opponents. Furthermore, and more importantly, the early years of providentially-dispensed successes provided a common cause and a starkly-divided contest between Britain and France, Protestantism and popery, which transcended and overwhelmed theological differences and local infighting which troubled Edwards on the eve of war.<sup>23</sup>

### **“Nil desperandum Christo duce”: The Protestant Empire Prepares for War**

On 9 January 1744/5, Governor William Shirley of Massachusetts, a leading “war hawk” of his generation, presented to the General Court his ambitious plan of a military expedition to the great French fortress at Louisbourg. Known as the “Gibraltar of the Atlantic” and positioned on the Island of Cape Breton, Louisbourg guarded access to the St. Lawrence River, nourished Jesuit missionary activities among native peoples, and overwhelmed British fisheries and shipping in Nova Scotia and New England.<sup>24</sup> While he was confident in himself and his plan for the destruction of Louisbourg, the governor of Massachusetts also acknowledged the powers beyond his control: “Two Thousand men . . . would, *with the blessing of Divine Providence upon their Enterprize*, be masters of the field at all events. . . . and lay the town in ruins.”<sup>25</sup> Although Shirley almost never employed religious rhetoric in his civic writing, he reiterated this

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<sup>23</sup> JE to McCulloch, March 5, 1743/4, in *WJE*, 16:136.

<sup>24</sup> John R. McNeill, “Louisbourg (Nova Scotia, Canada),” in *Colonial Wars of North America*, 389–391; and Joseph A. Devine, Jr., “Louisbourg Expedition (1745),” in *Colonial Wars of North America*, 395–397.

<sup>25</sup> William Shirley to the General Court of Massachusetts [January 9, 1744/5], in *Correspondence of William Shirley: Governor of Massachusetts and Military Commander in America, 1731-1760*, ed. Charles Henry Lincoln, vol. 1 (New York, NY: AMS Press, 1973), 160. Italics mine.

providential sentiment with even more confidence in his second appeal to the General Court the following week, certain that “the blessing of Divine Providence upon our Arms might . . . be expected” as the land forces held Louisbourg long enough for the navy to arrive and bring the fort’s final destruction.<sup>26</sup> Shirley played directly into New England’s national and transatlantic self-understanding as the stronghold of the “Protestant empire,” a belief which came out of the Glorious Revolution of 1688–1689 and remained a mainstay of colonial political and religious discourse and identity by the time of King George’s War.<sup>27</sup> Soon, these claims that the success of the Louisbourg expedition was dependent on the mercies of heaven became the chorus rising from New England’s churches before, during, and after this military endeavor. The Anglican governor’s military providentialism moved seamlessly from his mouth to the Congregationalist populous of New England, since neither Shirley’s virulent hatred of the “popish” French nor the general language and doctrine of military providentialism varied across provincial or confessional lines. This common milieu of religious and political language and interest was partially the basis for the mutually-supportive relationship Shirley developed with Edwards over the course the next two decades. From Northampton to Boston to Cape Breton, the events of the Louisbourg expedition were, more than any other event in the war, undeniably understood as the remarkable workings of providence—a temporal and eternal series of events that offered confidence, hope, and a cause for repentance, thanksgiving, and prayer.

The proposed Louisbourg expedition was almost unanimously rejected by the General Court that January, but within the month the House of Representatives had changed course and approved the enterprise. This reversal was largely thanks to William Vaughn, a successful

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<sup>26</sup> William Shirley to the General Court of Massachusetts [January 19, 1744/5], in *Correspondence of William Shirley*, 1:168.

<sup>27</sup> Stanwood, “Protestant Moment,” 502.

entrepreneur and tenacious ally for Shirley, who created a viable “coalition of the [virulently anti-Catholic] Essex County fishing interests, the Boston merchants, and some of the northeastern frontier spokesmen” to garner public support and create political pressure in favor of the expedition. The two main pillars of Vaughn’s propaganda campaign emphasized the threats the French fortress posed to New England fishing and shipping interests and to the safety of the northern frontier and eastern coastline.<sup>28</sup> These issues gave specificity to the mysterious and threatening specter of the northern French city which existed in New Englanders’ minds, and also played on and energized extant anti-Catholicism and fear of Native Americans. This justification of the expedition took hold quickly and continued to shape the rhetoric surrounding the affair, even months after the provincial soldiers’ return. After news of the victory reached Boston, for example, Thomas Prince exclaimed that Louisburg’s strength and these specific economic and military threats were created and intensified by God so that the chosen people of New England would feel moved to overtake it in the holy crusade which God had intended.<sup>29</sup>

Shortly after the provincial government’s approval, Shirley approached William Pepperrell, a leading merchant and politician, to serve as commander-in-chief of the expedition. Although Pepperrell curtly declined at first, Shirley’s appeals to his economic interests and “deep sense of responsibility towards his fellows in Massachusetts,” led him to reconsider. Still unsure, however, Pepperrell sought the advice of a close and trusted friend: the Reverend George Whitefield, who happened to be in Boston on his 1745 colonial tour. Whitefield advised Pepperrell that “he would beg of the Lord God of armies to give him a single eye . . . [and] if Providence really called him, he would return more than a conqueror.” Here, Whitefield’s encouragement for Pepperrell to lead this undertaking came from his providential belief that it

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<sup>28</sup> Rawlyk, *Nova Scotia’s Massachusetts*, 157.

<sup>29</sup> TP, *Extraordinary Events the Doings of God* [. . .] (Boston: 1746), 18.

was, indeed, a project of godly violence. The itinerant revivalist encouraged the “worthy” Pepperrell to listen for the divine calling that this was a holy project in which God would participate. The means to the ends, here, were as socially just as they were holy. Pepperrell accepted Shirley’s offer—and providence’s call—shortly after meeting with Whitefield, empowered with civic and holy purpose and courage.<sup>30</sup>

While in Boston, Whitefield continued to offer divine support for the Louisbourg expedition. During a carefully orchestrated recruiting campaign, Whitefield publicly cast the endeavor as a holy crusade. Convinced through serious conversation and prayer that “the expedition was of God,” Whitefield offered up the motto *Nil desperandum Christo duce* (No need to fear with Christ as our leader) and preached at Pepperrell’s request before the soldiers upon their embarkation to Nova Scotia with “no manner of doubt [that] we should receive good news from Cape Breton.”<sup>31</sup> This spiritual infusion into the already-holy Louisbourg expedition further excited New England’s clergy and lay believers to support the military endeavor. Provincial soldiers enlisted for a variety of reasons, many of which were fundamentally interrelated—a public sense of duty and staunch opposition to the French empire; a spiritual calling and fierce anti-Catholic sentiments; and as the promise of commission, plunder, or adventure. Shirley’s politicking, Vaughn’s public advertising, and the ministry’s blessing of the campaign all supported each other as the expedition went underway.<sup>32</sup>

The New Light outpouring of spiritual zeal in encouragement of the expedition during the months before and for years after likely struck a strange chord with Shirley’s political-strategic

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<sup>30</sup> George Whitefield to an Unknown Recipient, July 29, 1745, in Luke Tyerman, *The Life of the Reverend George Whitefield*, vol. 2, (Project Gutenberg: 2013), <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/62023>.

<sup>31</sup> Whitefield to Unknown, in *Whitefield*. Translation from Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 310. Also see Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1991), 192–196

<sup>32</sup> Rawlyk, *Nova Scotia’s Massachusetts*, 160.

mind and his Anglican sensibilities. On the one hand, Whitefield and the godly people of New England provided a great deal of popular support for his politically controversial military endeavor. On the other, this outpouring of evangelical enthusiasm appeared when revivalism and its standard bearer Whitefield were in the center of a controversy that touched New England religion, politics, and society. Although the Anglican governor privately balked at excessive spiritual fervor, his only public stance on the matter was his open support of Chauncy's *Seasonable Thoughts*, upon which he appeared first on its list of over five hundred subscribers. Regardless of the governor's personal religious influence—or lack thereof—the Louisbourg expedition was cast as a holy endeavor blessed by the evangelical God of Whitefield, Pepperrell, and Edwards as New England's crusaders departed for Louisbourg that spring.<sup>33</sup>

As British North America prepared once again for war, the political and military significance emanating from Northampton, and Hampshire County more broadly, was widely recognized. Even before France declared war in March 1744—news of this declaration did not reach Boston until May—the General Court anticipated a violent and “speedy rupture” with the Catholic nation. In their preparations that January, Governor Shirley called upon members of the Williams-Stoddard clan in Hampshire County, who had built their political power on the military establishment, to appoint officers who would oversee the recruitment minute men for wartime frontier defense. Because of Hampshire County's position on the frontier during a century of intermittent wars with France and persistent fears of Indian raiders, control over county militias, provincial garrisons, and expeditionary forces were the primary source of power and wealth for the Williamses. The fact that Shirley afforded Colonel John Stoddard such latitude in this appointment is in keeping with the deference he and his predecessor, Jonathan Belcher, both

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<sup>33</sup> John A. Schutz, *William Shirley: King's Governor of Massachusetts* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1961), 76–79; and Chauncy, *Seasonable Thoughts*, 1.



showed Stoddard in all matters of patronage. Stoddard, who was also Edwards's uncle and primary political patron, selected Seth Pomeroy, Supply Kingsley, and John Clap, all of whom hailed from Northampton. During the war, Stoddard took the command of Hampshire County and, in addition to Captain Ephraim Williams and Major Israel Williams of Hatfield—both of whom were cousins of Edwards—oversaw the defenses of the colony's western frontier.<sup>34</sup>

In December, Northampton made moves toward her own self-defense, designing a series of strategic watchtowers on the town's periphery and in its center. Construction of these mounts, numbering nineteen or twenty in total, one of which was located on Edwards's old homestead on King Street, began in May 1745 with further fortifications made in September. Still, although these early mobilizations reified the threat of another war with France and their native allies, Hampshire County remained free of violence and no Northamptoners were killed in their pursuits of warring Indians in the British colonies. The threat of Indians lurking in the woods of the borderlands was cause enough for troops to be stationed on the frontier and occasionally deploy a detachment to track down a rumored raiding party, but there was no blood shed on either side in the colony of Massachusetts that year. The Louisbourg expedition, therefore, was the first real foray into the violence of King George's War that anyone from Northampton made.

On the morning of April 4, 1745, as the provincial soldiers of Northampton sailed north out of Boston, the Church of Christ in Northampton observed a day of solemn fasting and prayer—a rite traditionally set aside for fearful, hopeful penitence, or joyful thanksgiving and deference to God, and a common colonial response initiated by local congregations or provincial governments in times of geopolitical, social, and spiritual crisis.<sup>35</sup> Standing before his

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<sup>34</sup> This paragraph and the next are based on Trumbull, *History of Northampton*, 2:102–111. Also see Sweeney, "River Gods," 333–334, 350–351.

<sup>35</sup> On the Anglo-American tradition of fast days and their sermons, see Henry P. Ippel, "Blow the Trumpet, Sanctify the Fast," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 44 (1980–81): 43–60, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3817383>.

congregation, remarkably tall but rail thin, dressed plainly aside from his wig, Edwards presented an expression many found severe but his daughter described as “an elevated, almost celestial serenity,” upon his refined, graceful, “almost womanly” face.<sup>36</sup> Edwards endorsed the ongoing war and described the duty of all believers “to look to God for help to maintain their cause.”<sup>37</sup> In keeping with his rigorous sermonic style, he deployed a meticulously evidenced doctrinal examination of the relationship between God and God’s chosen people during times of war. With pious urgency and optimism, Edwards sermonized on the significance of war in providentially-guided history—a theme that would come to define much of Edwards’s pastorate for the next decade.

First, Edwards argued that the natural law of self-preservation justified a nation’s participation in war, confident in God’s “directing, encouraging, commanding, [and] ordering the affairs of war,” and “rewarding” the defenders of His people. Edwards’s endorsement of just war, therefore, was both natural and providential—since all things come from God and are directed by God. For Edwards, King George’s War, like all defensive wars, was just and holy. The ongoing expedition to Nova Scotia, however, was clearly an offensive move. Edwards posited that while just war was defensive, it need not be passive. For “it is their duty to prosecute [that war] in such a manner as tends most effectually to obtain this end, not barely to stand on their defense when their enemies actually assault them.”<sup>38</sup> This positioning of oneself as the victim was, as historian Matthew Rowley articulates, “one key to understanding godly violence.” “Before they were victors, they viewed themselves as victims.” The discourse of victimization

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<sup>36</sup> EEB, in *Esther Burr’s Journal*, ed. Jeremiah Eames Rankin (Washington, D.C.: Woodward and Lothrop, 1903), 63; and Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 18, 302.

<sup>37</sup> JE, *The Duties Of Christians In A Time Of War*, in *WJE*, 25:135, <http://edwards.yale.edu/archive?path=aHR0cDovL2Vkd2FyZHMueWFsZS5lZHUvY2dpLWJpbi9uZXdwaGlsby9nZXRvYmplY3QueGw/Yy4yND04LndqZW8=>.

<sup>38</sup> JE, *Duties of Christians*, in *WJE*, 25:133

that resounded from the Northampton pulpit and beyond preemptively cleansed the moral wrongdoings and violent sins that would occur during war. Their entanglement of justness and holiness and their self-identification as martyrs combined national and religious rhetoric, identity, and history, and was especially fueled by the Catholic French aggressors in the present moment.<sup>39</sup>

Edwards's unwavering belief in the ultimate authority of general and extraordinary providences was foundational to his understanding of warfare: "Health or sickness . . . the wind and weather. . . . One stroke of the sword or one blow of a ball, discharged and directed of providence, may decide the event of a battle, and so of the whole war." God's final and complete control over the events in and about war was crucial to this fast day sermon, and much more of Edwards's wartime preaching. However, the providential lens of eighteenth-century evangelicals did not lead believers to sit idly by. Rather, it was the duty of a people called to war to, "by prayer and supplication . . . look to God for help to maintain their cause," for which God would grant them success, but only if those prayers were offered up "in the manner that [God] has appointed." Edwards reinforced God's devotion to the covenant people—be they the tribes of Israel or the believers in Northampton—in times of war, for it was in these moments that God's people, and therefore the very "church of god in the world" were threatened most by the designs of Satan. By the same token, Edwards comforted his flock: "All promises of temporal blessings imply promises of the preservation of the church."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Rowley, "Godly Violence," 32.

<sup>40</sup> JE, *Duties of Christians*, in *WJE*, 25:134, 135, 137. For more on Edwards's wartime sermons between 1744–1748 and 1754–1758, see Edwards, *WJE*, vol. 25, <http://edwards.yale.edu/archive?path=aHR0cDovL2Vkd2FyZHMueWFsZS5lZHUvY2dpLWJpbi9uZXdwaglsby9zZWxlY3QucGw/d2plby4yNA==>. Also see the editor's note in this volume, *WJE*, 25:1–46, <http://edwards.yale.edu/archive?path=aHR0cDovL2Vkd2FyZHMueWFsZS5lZHUvY2dpLWJpbi9uZXdwaglsby9nZXRvYmplY3QucGw/Yy4yNDozLndqZW8=>.

Though he spoke “not [with] a loud voice nor very masculine,” but a quiet authority, “a supernatural, an angelic tenderness,” Edwards developed a powerfully evocative, far-reaching image of the war from the pulpit.<sup>41</sup> This was a war fought on spiritual, geopolitical, and economic fronts, all contingent on the success or failure of the Louisbourg expedition. It is not clear how long Edwards expected the war to last, but he held his congregation’s focus on Louisbourg. A failure at Cape Breton would doubtless be “attend[ed] with the loss of much blood and [the] expense of many lives,” though he did not address the fact that even the greatest English victory would be won with blood. Again, violent and murderous acts were not factored into “the great decay of vital piety” for which God was punishing the English with the ongoing war. Their pursuit of war was one of godly violence, a just and holy interest, endorsed and accompanied by providence. Violence committed against the English, however, was a threatening and fearful sign of the resentments of heaven and the vile barbarity of their enemies. He filled the hearts and minds of his congregation, many of whom had seen their husbands, fathers, sons, brothers, and friends off to war less than two weeks before, with images of widows, fatherless children, parents without sons, and all of Massachusetts filled “with mourning through the bereavement of friends and neighbors.”<sup>42</sup>

Seeing that Massachusetts had contributed handsomely to the war effort thus far—and, Edwards predicted, would undoubtedly spend “several hundred thousands pounds” before the affair’s end—a failure in Canada would occasion “a great and sore judgement upon us.” Though he did not specify, it appears as though Edwards feared this judgment would come from their fellow countrymen, not their Lord. Indeed, Massachusetts assumed the lion’s share of the cost—both human and monetary—of the mission, contributing 3,250 troops and £50,000. Elsewhere,

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<sup>41</sup> EEB, *Esther Burr’s Journal*, ed. Rankin, 63.

<sup>42</sup> JE, *Duties of Christians*, in *WJE*, 25:137.

Connecticut and New Hampshire raised 820 men between them and the Middle Colonies offered up £13,000 and some supplies to support Shirley's ambitions. Edwards expressed a zeal which matched that of his fellow Massachusetts colonists. Thus, Northamptoners were not only imbibing and participating in the political and economic conversation which had defined much of the public discourse surrounding the prospect of the Louisbourg expedition through conversation and print, but in spiritual meditation, as well. Should New England's armies drive the French from Louisbourg and deliver the English from "the nest and resort of our enemies," Edwards predicted, the rewards of that victory would be felt to the east, as their fisheries and trade routes would be under far less distress, and to the west, for such a victory against the French would hopefully discourage Indian raids on the greatly exposed frontiers. In these things, Edwards was reinforcing the propagandistic efforts of Vaughn and Shirley, who had shaped the talking points of the Louisbourg campaign that January. In this and many of the sermons throughout New England before, during, and after the expedition, ministers emphasized the economic and strategic threats that the French fortress posed as signals of its importance—importance which, through the lens of military providentialism, pointed toward a greater, divine purpose.<sup>43</sup>

Edwards's endorsement of the war, however, was secondary to his pastoral message as New England's troops ventured toward Louisbourg. From such a position of theological doctrine, rooted in his understandings of providence, warfare, and God's chosen people, Edwards took advantage of this day of fasting and prayer to speak to the spiritual and ecclesiastical issues which so greatly affected him. Playing on the well-entrenched causal links between sin, judgment, and war, he took aim at all the vice, immorality, and backsliding which he believed to

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<sup>43</sup> JE, *Duties of Christians*, in *WJE*, 25:137–138. Trumbull, *History of Northampton*, 2:112–13; Horton, "King George's War," 335; and Devine, "Louisbourg Expedition (1745)," 396.

have plagued Northampton since its spiritual awakening and encouraged his congregation to repent for their “provocations [which] have been very great. . . . and particularly to pray to God by the way of the city which God has chosen.” In doing so, he leveraged the many threats of war to guide an increasingly sinful people back to the spiritual glory that had once existed in this divinely chosen hamlet. Perhaps even more important than this, though, was his call for unity. In this moment of fracture and separatism with colonial Protestantism breaking away from Edwards on the theological left and right, his call for action, which was essential to his providential view of warfare, was inherently and powerfully communal: “It greatly concerns this land with one accord, all sorts of persons in it—magistrates, ministers and people; young and old.” Success in the present war, upon which the fate of the British nation and the true church rested, was dependent on a genuine and unified expression of vital piety—that which had and continued to be central to Edwards’s proclaimed mission. He leveraged the war, with all of its entangled geopolitical, economic, and religious facets, to demonstrate “how greatly it is in [the] interest” of all people to “tur[n] from our iniquities and in the way of obedience to the commands of God and mak[e] religion our great business, and the way of peace one with another.” Edwards thus used the violent threats and public excitements of the war and his vision of military providentialism as grounds to combat the sinfulness and disunity which he found so damaging—a pastoral pattern which he would continue throughout King George’s War.<sup>44</sup>

### **“A Very Plain and Loud Providence”: The Louisbourg Expedition, 1745**

On 4 April 1745, Major Seth Pomeroy and about fifty other Northamptoners sailed with a fleet of nearly seventy vessels along the southern coast of Nova Scotia on their way to the French

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<sup>44</sup> JE, *Duties Of Christians*, in *WJE*, 25:138–139.

stronghold of Louisbourg. After several nights of terrible storms which scattered the fleet and an indescribable bout of sickness, Pomeroy gave thanks on that Thursday for strong sailing winds and an improved constitution. While Pomeroy and his companions from Northampton enjoyed smooth sailing, their families and friends sat in Edwards's meetinghouse and observed a day of fasting and prayer in the hopes that God would grant success to the chosen people of New England against their popish enemies in Louisbourg.<sup>45</sup>

While military mobilization in Hampshire County was mostly uneventful, Edwards's spiritual mobilization, on the other hand, took a quick hold in the centrally-located town of Northampton. On May 27, Mary Pomeroy wrote her husband, Major Pomeroy, describing the scene at their home in Northampton: "The whole town is much moved with concern for the expedition, how providence will order the affair, for which religious meetings every week in town are maintained."<sup>46</sup> Major Pomeroy's father, Ebenezer, also of Northampton, wrote to him several weeks later, commenting that "God in his Providence has stirred up a remarkable spirit of prayer in this city. . . . we have good reason to believe that it hath not been in vain; for God hath in a very remarkable manner smiled upon the fleet and army."<sup>47</sup> This acute explosion of piety occasioned by the Louisbourg expedition, rooted in lay concerns for the safety of their loved ones and the success of their nation, and in accordance with their belief in providence, reflected of the prosaic and specific appeals to God's mercy and judgment which was common among Christians at the time.

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<sup>45</sup> Seth Pomeroy, *The Journals and Papers of Seth Pomeroy, Sometime General in the Colonial Service*, ed. Louis Effingham DeForest (New York, NY: The Society of Colonial Wars, 1926), HathiTrust, 15; and Trumbull, *History of Northampton*, 120.

<sup>46</sup> Mary Pomeroy to Seth Pomeroy, May 27, 1745, in *Papers of Seth Pomeroy*, 62

<sup>47</sup> Ebenezer Pomeroy to Seth Pomeroy, June 11, 1745, in *Papers of Seth Pomeroy*, 67–68.

Edwards's pastoral appeals for spiritual reformation also took purchase among some in Northampton. Ebenezer Pomeroy encouraged his son to "Abstain from all appearance of evil, [and] Watch Particularly against those Sins a Soldier's life exposeth men unto." Despite his confidence that the "God of Armys" was greatly inclined to open the gates of Louisbourg to the English, the elder Pomeroy also understood the powerful connections between sin and judgment, on which his pastor had sermonized so emphatically. During this time, the Pomeroy family were ardent supporters of Edwards and members of his congregation, as well as a leading family in Northampton civic life. Ebenezer Pomeroy did not expound on the particular sins which military service exposed soldiers to, but it is doubtful that killing was among them. As a major himself and a fervent supporter of the godly crusade to Louisbourg, he was likely more concerned with the mundane immorality occasioned during military service than he was with its inherent violence. Furthermore, the patriarch did not expound on the theological nuances of vital piety and Protestant rupture that underlay Edwards's worries.<sup>48</sup>

Nevertheless, and understandably, Edwards was heartened that, "the people of God in New England" were now filled with a spirit of prayer far "more than any public affair within . . . remembrance." It appears that the believers of Northampton heeded their pastor's words in lifting up prayers and penitence in hopes of divinely-ordered military success, but did not go so far as to transcend the fractures and conflicts with which Edwards was more seriously concerned. Although this prayerful spirit never grew into the genuine and unifying awakening for which Edwards hoped, it did give the pastor great encouragement.<sup>49</sup>

The letters of Mary and Ebenezer Pomeroy are similarly defined by their focus on the importance of providence in this encounter, likely as a result of their pastor's efforts from the

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<sup>48</sup> Ebenezer Pomeroy to Seth Pomeroy, June 11, 1745, in *Papers of Seth Pomeroy*, 68.

<sup>49</sup> JE to a Correspondent in Scotland, November 1745, in *WJE*, 16:185.



pulpit. Writing to her husband, Mrs. Pomeroy, who understood “the Breath of Life and the Soul of all Living” to be in God’s own hand, prayed not only that providence smile on her husband, but on her as well: “may God be my Support . . . may God Enable me to Trust his Goodness Faithfulness, and Rely on his mercy, till the Evil be past, and Divine Gales Blow an Heavenly Calm.” She took courage that God was indeed on her side and hoped to embolden her husband in the same way, rejoicing in the fact that neither she nor their family nor anyone in Northampton had fallen sick and that no evil had fallen upon this “Christian Land [which was] Daily Experiencing Divine Favours.” Nevertheless, the knowledge that her husband was in “the High Places of the Enemy” was cause enough for Pomeroy to suffer anxious thoughts, her “Soul Distressed and much Pained for” her husband.<sup>50</sup> Major Pomeroy calmed these fears with the same faith in providence from which Mary found strength: “Remember that god in his Providence orders all things he has order’d my being now in an Ennimies Country & he has Prepared me & in a Remarkable manner.”<sup>51</sup> In so doing, Pomeroy articulated the three senses of godly violence: he saw himself as a member of the godly participating in a violent expedition he believed was ordered and ordained by God and in which God was fighting alongside him.<sup>52</sup> His military providentialism, however, was used in this case as spiritual and earthly comfort in the face of war, rather than as a justification of his participation in it. Clearly, not only did the Northampton officer understand the heavenly effort of this expedition into Canada, but also his own holy calling in this attack on the French.

In the anxious months between the departure of the provincial soldiers to Louisbourg and the arrival of the news of their success, war dominated in the Northampton consciousness. As

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<sup>50</sup> Mary Pomeroy to Seth Pomeroy, May 27, 1745, in *Papers of Seth Pomeroy*, 62.

<sup>51</sup> Seth Pomeroy to Mary Pomeroy, June 4, 1745, in *Papers of Seth Pomeroy*, 64.

<sup>52</sup> Again, on the three senses of godly violence, see Rowley, “New Approach,” 275.

Mary and Ebenezer Pomeroy's correspondences indicate, most townspeople were far more concerned with the fate of those at Cape Breton than with their own safety from raiding Indian parties or scheming French commanders. Among the existing prayer requests made by Edwards's parishioners during the spring and summer of 1745, none indicate any fear of violence coming to Northampton. One woman, for example, expressed the hope "that god wou be with [her brother John] & preserve his life and continue his helth and in due Time Return him To his family."<sup>53</sup> While Edwards honored these prayer requests during his sermons and likely led the weekly meetings described by Mrs. Pomeroy, he made no mention of the conflict with France in any of his extant personal notes and correspondence until November 1745, at which time he updated his Scottish correspondents on the current state of war.<sup>54</sup> Despite the watchtowers rising over Northampton and any whispers of Indian raids, the temporal threats of war certainly seemed far off. Further still from the day to day concerns of the lay residents of Northampton was any active concern or interest in the millennium. The prayer requests of Edwards's congregants and the writings of the Pomeroy's during this time were richly colored by their providentialism, yet never voiced any eschatological concerns. Although they and their pastor shared the same understanding of providence, their search for order, meaning, and comfort was structured around those things that affected them most directly—namely, during wartime, the physical health, safety, and survival of themselves and those closest to them.

In his private journal, Major Seth Pomeroy documented the expedition as a series of remarkable instances which he saw as irrefutable evidence "that God has gone out of the way of his common providence in a remarkable and almost miraculous manner." His diary and the

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<sup>53</sup> JE, "774. Sermon on John 15:5 (b)," quoted in Stephen J. Stein, "'For Their Spiritual Good': The Northampton, Massachusetts, Prayer Bids of the 1730s and 1740s," *William and Mary Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (April 1980), 276.

<sup>54</sup> JE to Correspondent, November 1745, in *WJE*, 16:179–197.

letters he wrote to his wife in Northampton are not only one of the few detailed first-hand accounts of the Louisbourg expedition, but are fundamentally shaped by an earnest and consistent providentialism. He was certain in his view, as were many of his fellow believers, that “the Lord of Hosts, the God of armies. . . . has written Salvation for New England.” When news reached Boston, Northampton, and elsewhere of the English success at Cape Breton in early July, then, the confident hopes that God was on their side were confirmed, bringing about an even greater outpouring of providential certainty throughout New England.<sup>55</sup>

In late March, the expeditionary fleet lay at Canso, Nova Scotia, waiting for the ice to melt so they could sail the last sixty miles of their journey and land near Louisbourg. While anchored, the fair sailing weather turned cold and wet, but the several thousand men were “very Remarkabl[y]” preserved from serious illness, just as they had been from the smallpox outbreak in Boston as they gathered there to depart. Landing on time was “Providencially Prevented,” in Pomeroy’s words, by the winter ice on Nova Scotia’s coasts as well as earlier postponements in Boston, due to slow recruitment and a few outspoken fishermen and frontier residents who opposed the expedition. Though the wait was “Thought To be against” them, God’s true plan was revealed with the surprising arrival of England’s Commodore Peter Warren aboard the sixty-gun *Superbe*, the first of what would be twelve warships under Warren’s command during the siege.<sup>56</sup>

The support of the Royal Navy turned out to be vital to the English success—several weeks into the siege Warren’s forces intercepted a French man-of-war loaded with ammunition,

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<sup>55</sup> Seth Pomeroy, June 25, 1745, *Papers of Seth Pomeroy*, 50–51.

<sup>56</sup> Seth Pomeroy to Mary Pomeroy, April 19, 1745, in *Papers of Seth Pomeroy*, 58. This and the following paragraphs are largely informed by Devine, “Louisbourg Expedition (1745),” 395–397; and, Rawlyk, *Nova Scotia’s Massachusetts*, 145–191, as well as Louis Effingham DeForest, ed., *Louisbourg Journals* (New York, NY: The Society of Colonial Wars, 1932), HathiTrust; Leach, *Arms for Empire*, 231–243; and Peckham, *The Colonial Wars*, 97–119.

which then proved to be essential to Pepperrell's land forces, deplete of gunpowder. Warren's arrival at Canso was seen as all the more miraculous because he had initially declined Shirley's request for support in January. In early March, however, Warren received direction from the Board of Admiralty—or, in Edwards's assessment, "it was so ordered in providence"—to depart the West Indies for Boston to lend his support to the American governors.<sup>57</sup> The miraculous ordering of events was further evidenced by Warren's voyage from Antigua to Boston, which was recorded by, among others, Chaplain Stephen Williams and excitedly retold by Jonathan Edwards. En route to Boston, Warren encountered several New Englanders at Cape Sable—a profitable fishing region on the southern shore of Nova Scotia—who informed him that the provincial fleet bound for Louisbourg had passed through the week prior. With this information "so wonderfully thrown his way," Warren set sail directly for Canso and sent a request for more men-of-war to Boston with the all the fishermen but one, a draft-dodger and skilled naval pilot who directed Warren on to Louisbourg.<sup>58</sup>

On April 30, Pepperrell and the New Englanders completed their landing at Gabarus Bay near Louisbourg and began the siege. An early victory came several days later with the capture of the French Royal Battery and the several scores of cannon therein. Pomeroy oversaw the boring out these weapons and moving them across the harbor into position under the cover of fog and darkness. Because the English had not brought enough cannon from Boston, the immediate seizure of these French munitions appeared as a gift from God and gave Pomeroy the confidence

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<sup>57</sup> JE to a Correspondent in Scotland, November, 1745, in *WJE*, 188–189.

<sup>58</sup> JE to Correspondent, November 1745, in *WJE*, 189. For corroborating evidence, see Anonymous, "Third Journal," in *Louisbourg Journals*, 64; and, Chaplain Stephen Williams, "Ninth Journal," in *Louisbourg Journals*, 142. Williams's accounting of Warren's voyage is somewhat remarkable in what is otherwise a curt and gloomy account of his ministrations to the sick and dying at Louisbourg before, during, and for long after the siege.

that “*Providence* will deliver [Louisbourg] into our hands,” despite its “exceedingly strong . . . and well situated” position.<sup>59</sup>

In late May, the offensive effort made a failed attempt to capture the Island Battery at the mouth of the harbor. The noisy and zealous—and perhaps drunk—New Englanders who rowed toward the island were quickly heard by the French, who launched an attack on the approaching rowboats. After this failure, which resulted in the most English deaths, injuries, and captures than any other event during the expedition, Pomeroy simply noted that “Providence Seem’d not To Favour it.” While he certainly mourned this loss, he appeared to quickly move past it.<sup>60</sup> His optimism reflected the posture of the New England soldiers as a whole, which historian George Rawlyk described as a naivety and “confidence, which at times blurred into a chauvinistic arrogance.”<sup>61</sup> The source of this brash self-assurance was primarily grounded in the public optimism which made the expedition possible in the first place—a large part of which was rooted in a providential certainty that theirs was a just and holy mission. As the siege dragged into its second month, this confidence “had been replaced by a feeling of defeat and war-weariness,” exacerbated by the Island Battery fiasco and new and threatening reports of barbarous Frenchman and Micmac scouts who had “inhumanly butchered. . . . Scalped and Chopt and Stab’d and Prodigiously mangled” New England volunteers.<sup>62</sup> Pomeroy diminished these accounts in his personal records and virtually erased them from his letters to Northampton. Following the ultimate victory, the celebratory civic and religious discourse greatly minimized the defeat at the Island Battery and the other casualties which resulted from skirmishes with

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<sup>59</sup> Seth Pomeroy to Mary Pomeroy, May 8, 1745, in *Papers of Seth Pomeroy*, 61.

<sup>60</sup> Seth Pomeroy, May 26, 1745, in *Papers of Seth Pomeroy*, 26.

<sup>61</sup> Rawlyk, *Nova Scotia’s Massachusetts*, 165.

<sup>62</sup> Quoted in Rawlyk, *Nova Scotia’s Massachusetts*, 168. See, for example, Anonymous, “Fifth Journal,” in *Louisbourg Journals*, 76.

Indians, mortars launched from the French line, and the occasional mortal illness, as was the low morale and fear among provincial soldiers. Looking back from the vantage point of victory, soldiers' inflated confidence seemed rightly justified and the expedition's losses were overcome by God's ultimate plan for success.

Despite the failure to acquire another French battery, Pepperrell's land forces, supported by Warren and the Royal Navy, maintained the arduous siege for six weeks, crushing the French fortress with over 9,000 cannonballs and 600 mortar shells. By the middle of June, provincial and royal officers had grown weary and impatient with what was originally thought to be a speedy capture—many soldiers had initially expected to return home in a matter of weeks and be able bring in the fall harvest. Shortly after his capture of the Royal Battery, Major Pomeroy informed his wife of the unanticipated strength of the French fortress: “I expect to be gone from home longer than I did when I left. . . . but I am willing to stay till God's time comes to deliver the City of Louisbourg into our hands, which I do not doubt will, in good time, be done.”<sup>63</sup> Pepperrell and Warren did not share Pomeroy's resolve as the siege dragged on, though, and planned a coordinated attack against the city from land and sea as soon as the wind favored Warren's fleet. Only hours after the wind turned on June 15, however, the French flag of truce was lifted over Louisbourg and within several days the city was under British control. Reflecting on the final days of the siege weeks later, Pomeroy was sure that God “Incline[d] them to give up the City. . . . [which] must be Look'd upon as a Remarkable Providence,” believing that the otherwise intended push against Louisbourg would have “in all human Probibility Prov'd Fatal” for the British offensive.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Seth Pomeroy to Mary Pomeroy, May 12, 1745, in *Papers of Seth Pomeroy*, 61.

<sup>64</sup> Pomeroy, June 25, 1745, in *Papers of Seth Pomeroy*, 50.

In July, on his way back to Northampton, Pomeroy reviewed the expedition as a single narrative driven by the belief that God had cleared the path from Boston to Louisbourg in this blessed undertaking. Among those things which Pomeroy found especially remarkable, he spent a great deal of time documenting the weather's impact on the expedition: strong sailing weather for most of the voyage made for a swift and healthy journey; still winds and frozen waters which prevented their final approach were "ordered in Mercy," for their delayed landing resulted in the destruction and capture of French forces in an early skirmish; the unseasonably clear skies throughout the spring made the weeks-long siege possible; and, the day after the British took control of Louisbourg, the skies opened to release dark rain storms which lasted over a week, ending the nearly-fifty-day drought. Pomeroy's fascination here is in keeping with a rich tradition of searching for God's hand in meteorological events. Lay and ordained New Englanders had long placed special importance on violent storms and earthquakes, destructive winds and lightning strikes, blazing heat and frigid cold, as they searched to understand the erratic natural world and hear the loud voice of a punishing and merciful God. The unseasonable weather at Cape Breton that spring and summer, which proved to be wholly beneficial for the British, was reinforced by the connection between divergences from the normal ordering of things and God's special or extraordinary providences. These signs, quite literally from the heavens, were buttressed by the continued success and survival of the expeditionary forces and instilled in Pomeroy the certainty that God was on their side and that some particularly special design of heaven was unfolding.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Pomeroy, June 25, 2745, in *Papers of Seth Pomeroy*, 48–51. For more on the providential interpretation of natural disasters, see Hall, *Worlds of Wonder*, 71–116; Seeman, *Pious Persuasions*, 149–154; and Winiarski, *Darkness Falls*, 55–59.

The perception that the victory at Louisbourg was an especially remarkable series of events ordered by God was a common sentiment among New Englanders. Several weeks into the siege, on May 20, Pomeroy celebrated his birthday and reflected that while he had “seen and been the Subject of many Remarkable Deliverances” in his thirty-nine years, since departing for Nova Scotia he witnessed “Dayly Some thing Remarkable & Some Days Extraordinary Providances; in Favour of the army or my own Preservation.”<sup>66</sup> Pomeroy’s sense that the recent events of divine intervention were beyond that of the normal workings of providence was proclaimed throughout New England. After receiving word of the capitulation of Louisbourg from Pepperrell, Governor Shirley was quick to interpret this news as “a special favour of . . . Divine Providence” and announced that July 18 would be set aside for “solemn thanksgiving” throughout the entire province—a common civic declaration made during wartime that, in and of itself, suffused public justice and religious holiness. Shirley encouraged the devout officer Pepperrell to likewise guide all of his forces at Cape Breton to “most thankfully and devoutly acknowledge [their victory] to the Lord of Hosts, their protector, who has thus graciously subdued their enemies for ‘em.” Shirley’s private correspondence with Pepperrell acknowledged the Anglican governor’s own military providentialism, which was indiscernible from that of his Congregationalist countrymen.<sup>67</sup> His open encouragement for public thanksgiving for “so Signal a favour of the divine Providence” throughout New England’s towns, armies, and congregations, mirrored the deferential tone of the military providentialism of Edwards, Prince, and other ordained evangelicals.<sup>68</sup> As a combined product of his own religious devotion, awareness of the religio-political traditions of public discourse, and position of power within the public sphere,

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<sup>66</sup> Seth Pomeroy, May 20, 1745, *Papers of Seth Pomeroy*, 26

<sup>67</sup> William Shirley to William Pepperrell, July 7, 1745, in *Correspondence of William Shirley*, 1:237

<sup>68</sup> William Shirley, reply to the address of officers, quoted in *Correspondence of William Shirley*, 1:259–260n2.



Shirley's proclaimed theology here appears somewhere between the traditional representations of clerical and lay providentialism—though he never expressed interest in the apocalyptic implications of the victory, his recognition of the deference and thanks which must be paid to God and his broad encouragement of such thanksgiving signals that his providential concern of events was far broader than only immediate personal safety.

On July 18, people across the city of Boston and throughout New England rushed to meetinghouses, public squares, and fields to celebrate the marvelous victory. As George Whitefield was departing Boston, “numbers flocked [to him] with great joy from all quarters” to deliver the news, upon which the charismatic evangelist “immediately preached to them a thanksgiving sermon” on Psalm 41:11: “By this I know that Thou favourest me, since Thou hast not permitted mine enemies to triumph over me.”<sup>69</sup> Thomas Prince echoed Pomeroy's, Shirley's and Whitefield's assessment that Louisbourg was especially miraculous in a sermon of his own, later published in honor of the Massachusetts governor. On this occasion, Prince articulated a typology of providence, offering rare specificity and structure to the lens through which the believers of the British Atlantic understood their world. For Prince, Edwards, Pomeroy, and lay and ordained Christians throughout British North America and beyond, theirs was a world where “all Nature, both inanimate and animate, both human and angelical, is full of God; full of his perpetual moving, guiding, and over-ruling Influence.” Most of the time, providence was believed to operate in a usual and predictable manner, both in the corporeal world and the spiritual world, as well as those places where the two join—namely, humankind. In this view,

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<sup>69</sup> Whitefield to Unknown, July 29, 1745, in *Whitefield*.

providence allowed and controlled every physical and intellectual function of every man and woman; their ideas, passions, projects, activities, and all manner of things.<sup>70</sup>

In such a world ordered entirely by providence, it was no surprise, then, that the recent victory at Louisbourg was guided by God's own hand; but this was no usual operation of providence. In this fast day sermon, Prince emphasized the corrective message of extraordinary providences—those works of God most visible to humanity which break from the ordinary course of nature. Because of humanity's inherent "Atheism, Blindness, and Prejudice" to dismiss the doings of God as "*Nature only*," or something other than "his ever acting Influence," Prince explained, special providences are sometimes needed to demonstrate God's power and stir the hearts and minds of God's people. Looking to the dramatic increase in demonstrations of individual and public spirituality which surrounded the expedition from the very beginning, it appeared as though God's correcting purpose for this series of events was being properly fulfilled by the covenant people. These providences were thus further confirmed to be special and extraordinary by the stirring effect it had on the people of New England. Prince's ongoing effort to bring a new revival out of the war was starting to be realized, which he saw as a sign of the people's holiness and as a gift from God. Prince was convinced and encouraged by the spiritual infusion of the undertaking and its reception, and celebrated the fact that "many *pious* and *prayerful* Persons were embark'd in the Cause, which we accounted the Cause of God and his People" and to witness "such a *Spirit of Supplication*" by both the fasts and meetings of local congregations and the prayers of individual believers, and also the "solemn Days of *publick* and *general Prayer* appointed by *these three Governments*." From his post in Boston, Prince was

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<sup>70</sup> TP, *Extraordinary Events*, 12. Prince's exploration of what made these events a special or remarkable providence is in keeping with a common providential typology of the time. See, for example, Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England*, 12.

invigorated by the explosion of unity and godliness displayed in all corners of colonial society upon the successful capture of Louisbourg. Furthermore, as a leading New Light, a champion of the Edwardsian schema of revivalism, and a close personal friend to Edwards himself, Prince had a strong reason to see the extreme events of the war as a way of reviving revivalism as did his ally in Northampton.<sup>71</sup>

Concluding his increasingly dramatic oration, Thomas Prince set forth a vivid tableau of God's providence witnessed at Louisbourg. His message, tone, tempo, and power were all redolent of the many fast day sermons delivered that summer, and is therefore worth quoting at length. With a flourish reminiscent of a biblical prophet, he cast the capitulation of the city as a single event of ultimate spiritual and political importance.

“But let us rejoice, not only in *our own Salvation*, the Salvation of *all our Colonies*, and some of the most important Branches of the *British Trade*; – But let our Joy rise higher, that hereby a *great Support of Antichristian Power* is taken away, and the *visible Kingdom* of Christ is enlarged. Methinks, when the southern *Gates of Louisbourg* were opened, and our Army with their Banners were marching in; *the Gates were lifted up—the Gates were lifted up—and the King of Glory* went in with them. Even the Son of God, the Lord of Hosts, the Lord strong and mighty in Battle—having gain'd the Conquest, he rode in Triumph and took Possession. He set up his Standard, proclaim'd his Gospel of Peace, the Glad Tidings of Salvation, open'd the Prisons, redeem'd his Captives, and began to receive his grateful Incense of pure Adorations! . . . He may reign and shine to all the Islands about, as long as the Sun and Moon endure. . . . O that under the Influence of *British Liberties*, in a *happy Consitution of Civil Government*, and the Divine Care and

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<sup>71</sup> TP, *Extraordinary Events*, 12–14, 23.

Blessing, even *Louisbourg* itself, with *Cape-Breton*, and all of *Nova Scotia*, may revive and flourish. May they have religious, wise and generous *Governors*, that may be as *nursing Fathers* to them; encourage them in Piety, Virtue, and good Order, promote their Trade, and protect them in their Properties and Liberties.”<sup>72</sup>

Elsewhere in Boston on that same July fast day, Charles Chauncy delivered a sermon recounting the very same “train of providences” as the New Lights whom he so vociferously opposed did. Chauncy’s view of the capture of Louisbourg extended from the same providential suppositions as Edwards and Prince: in the affairs of war, men were ultimately dependent on God, who “raises up and qualifies those who are employed in a Day of Battle, he spirits them to the Service, arms them with Resolution, directs their Conduct, and crowns their Valour with Success.” The signal victory against the French was evidence for Chauncy, as it was for Prince, that God had heard and answered the prayers “continually going up to God from all Parts of the Country,” of which he had never seen such fervor. Bringing together the just and holy conceptions of the destruction of the French advantage in the paradigm of godly violence, Chauncy declared that “the *Providence of God*. . . . open[ed] our View . . . not only [to] the *Justice*, but *Necessity* of reducing this Place, from whence we were exposed to suffer so much.” His celebration of the siege was refracted through the lens of victory, erasing the spirit of terror that many provincial soldiers felt that summer and lifting up the officers and soldiers who “endured Hardships, cheerfully went thro’ Fatigues and Hazards, fearing nothing!” Chauncy’s ecstatic tone reinforced his call for genuine thanksgiving—the pastoral prescription for the recent mercies extended to New England. Although Edwards never suggested that his animosity toward Chauncy and his conservative cause waned in any way, perhaps he did take some hope in the fact

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<sup>72</sup> TP, 31–32.

that the public celebration of the providences dispensed at Louisbourg transcended age, station, and ecclesiastical posture as he had hoped it would.<sup>73</sup>

The believers in Northampton were also unsurprisingly boisterous in their pious celebration of the blessings of providence which unfolded that summer, the likes of which was greater “than in any public affair within” memory. In his sermon devoted to the celebration of the return of Northampton’s soldiers that August, Edwards took heart in the fact that “God has remarkeably appeared to fight for” the covenant people and gave thanks that He had “return[ed] ‘em to the People & House of God in Prosperity.”<sup>74</sup> Whether guided by their pastor’s persistent and hopeful instructions or their own piety in the moment, the Northampton congregation praised God for “Preserving [returning soldiers] from the many Instruments of Death, that [they had] been Expos’d to.”<sup>75</sup> In several instances, veterans themselves handed their prayers and thanks to Edwards so that he could lift them up to God before those assembled in his church. Elisha Strong, for example, was not only concerned with the state of his physical health, but his spiritual well-being as well. After rejoicing with his congregation upon his return, Strong requested they also pray “that god wood Parfect mercy to Him & enable Him to walke in Some Good measure according to the mercyes He Has Received.”<sup>76</sup> When prayers were left unanswered, on the other hand, one’s spiritual health was all that mattered. When news came that Timothy Baker died at Louisburg, his parents implored Edwards and the congregation to ask God to consecrate their son’s death and “Sanktify this awful Stroke of his prvedence to them . . .

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<sup>73</sup> Charles Chauncy, *Marvellous Things done by the right Hand and holy Arm of God in getting him the Victory* [ . . . ] (Boston, 1745), Eighteenth Century Collections Online, 12, 6, 14–15, 8.

<sup>74</sup> JE to Correspondent, November, 1745, in *WJE*, 16:185.

<sup>75</sup> JE, “787. Sermon on II Chron. 20:27–29,” in *Sermons, Series II, 1745*, vol. 63, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*, ed. Jonathan Edwards Center, <http://edwards.yale.edu/archive?path=aHR0cDovL2Vkd2FyZHMueWFsZS5lZHUvY2dpLWJpbi9uZXdwaGlsby9nZXRvYmplY3QucGw/Yy42MToyLndqZW8=>.

<sup>76</sup> JE, “854. Sermon on Heb. 6:7”; and JE, “858. Sermon on Heb. 6:8,” both quoted in Stein, “For Their Spiritual Good,” 281.

for their Spiritual and everlasting good.”<sup>77</sup> In moments of fear, joy, and mourning, Northamptoners never let go of their view that providence guided all things.

Still, even amid the celebration of proof that God was still aligned with the Christians of the British nation, Edwards cautioned his congregation, albeit very briefly, with the same warning as before the capture of Louisbourg: “if we are not thankful to him on such an occasion as this we shall shew our selves very ungrateful & stupid indeed.” Ministers and civil servants, Edwards thought, ought to voice the first and loudest praise to their God—ministers because they had been appointed by God to watch over and guide the godly community, and earthly rulers because, as “the leading Instruments” of war so, too should they be the leading instruments of thanks where thanks is due. Prayer, humility, and thanksgiving must be given to God, who guided all things, not only in times of violent suffering, but also in violent victory. Though the pastor was witnessing the very spiritual outpouring for which he had hoped the expedition would bring, it did not abate his persistent concern for the maintenance and increase of true Christian virtue among all his followers and fellow believers.<sup>78</sup>

Though Edwards recognized the laity’s thanksgiving for the military conquest and for their own safety and preservation, his utmost concern following the capture of Louisbourg was more refined. In a scriptural *tour de force*, Edwards equated the arrival of Northampton’s soldiers from Louisbourg with Jehoshaphat’s army’s victorious return to Jerusalem upon defeating the Moabites and Ammonites. He identified providence in every turn of the expedition from the “Great Preparations” to the serendipitous timing of fleet movements throughout the Atlantic to the “wonderfully ordered” capture of enemy batteries, further reinforcing his congregation’s understanding of the Louisbourg campaign as a holy crusade against the enemies

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<sup>77</sup> JE, “857. Sermon on Zech. 8:20–23,” quoted in Stein, ““For Their Spiritual Good,”” 281.

<sup>78</sup> JE, “787. Sermon on II Chron. 20:27–29,” in *WJE*, vol. 63.

of the Lord. Observing events temporal and eternal, Edwards witnessed the preserved and improved human, strategic, and economic condition of the British war effort, which not only had implications for the war itself, but for the increase of God’s kingdom and the weakening of the Antichrist. Citing conversations with Major Pomeroy, Sir William Pepperrell (“The most active, brave & successful of any”), an article from the *Boston Gazette*, and scores of verses of scripture, Edwards confidently proclaimed that “The whole [expedition] is wonderful, from beginning to the End [and has] no parallel in History. [There is] Great Reason to think that God is now about to fulfill Prophecies” and promises. Although the war in the end of days “shall be Chiefly spiritual . . . there will be also a great temporal destruction of the open Enemies,” which Edwards was almost certain was the one they were witnessing. This fascination with the end of days would only increase after 1745, pushed forward, in large part, by his interpretation of the affairs of war.<sup>79</sup>

Edwards’s eschatology, though not of significant interest to many of his congregants, was not wholly incompatible with the lay experiences and discourse of 1745. Indeed, his millennialism was a rarified and focused application of the broader providentialism to which he and his congregants equally subscribed. His knowledge of the events of the Louisbourg expedition came primarily from his parishioners, including Major Pomeroy and Joseph Hawley—the latter being a cousin of Edwards who served as an army chaplain at Cape Breton. Although Edwards’s blessing for the expedition, laden with military providentialism, occurred after the departure of New England’s forces from Boston, the language of Pomeroy and others was remarkably similar, signaling a common theology and language of idioms with which these believers understood the violence in which they were participating. Edwards spoke directly with

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<sup>79</sup> JE, “787. Sermon on II Chron. 20:27–29,” in *WJE*, vol. 63.

his parishioners who served in Louisbourg and joyfully received their first-hand accounts of the extraordinary providences which occurred in Nova Scotia that summer. In his insatiable thirst for colonial and world news, Edwards surely read secular reports of these events in Boston's newspapers and stayed attuned to the public discourse of the victory. To hear about the expedition as a providential narrative from those who witnessed it, however, shaped his view of the specific events of the expedition and certainly reinforced his already deep-seated wartime providentialism.<sup>80</sup>

The impact of Northampton's soldiers is made clear in Edwards's meticulously evidenced and fundamentally providential narrative which he sent to the Scottish evangelical minister John MacLaurin. In the late fall of 1745, Edwards collected his thoughts about "the late wonderful works. . . wherein the Most High has made his hand manifest, in a most apparent and marvelous manner," and relayed them to his supporters in Scotland. Before recounting the events of the year, he proudly mentioned that he "had much opportunity to be well-informed" by his twenty parishioners who served, giving special mention to the "worthy [and] pious" Pomeroy and Hawley. His lengthy missive detailed the events from even before Shirley's proposal—"Providence made provision for the expedition" through the gift of a bountiful harvest the summer prior—through to the outburst of pious thanksgiving in New England following the victory. Many of the details, events, and judgments that Edwards chose to include are noticeably similar to those in Pomeroy's private journal, suggesting the marked impact laymen had on their pastor's providential view of events. For example, he noted that "God held them at Canso" with exceedingly cold winter storms and iced-over bays, "till the Connecticut forces and Commodore Warren were come up." Edwards also gave prominence to several of Pomeroy's individual

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<sup>80</sup> JE to Correspondent, November, 1745, in *WJE*, 16:185.



experiences, both of which exemplified strong providential interpretations, including the details of boring out spiked French cannons in the Royal Battery and an account of an enemy bomb which landed “in the most suitable spot,” displacing an enormous rock that blocked the continuation of the British trench. Pomeroy’s personal strategic opinions, supported by spiritual optimism, were also reflected in Edwards’s analysis, specifically in the view that God had “wonderfully and happily prevented” the coordinated assault against the fort by the French surrender, for such a “desperate attempt” would have surely led to the destruction of Pepperrell’s and Warren’s forces.<sup>81</sup>

A final persistent theme shared between Pomeroy’s journals and Edwards’s missive was the fascination with the wonderfully beneficial impact of the weather. Repeating a popular anecdote that Pomeroy had recorded several times in his papers, Edwards rejoiced in the fact that “the French inhabitants agreed, that there never had been any instance of such weather at that time of the year. . . . And it was apparent to the French, by this and other things . . . and some of them said, ‘that their God was turned an Englishman.’” Many of the events recorded in Edwards’s letter included a note of the weather at the time, likely informed by Pomeroy’s own observations. This interest in climatic events as special providences was not only a tradition of popular religion in New England, but one which took purchase across the line of ordination. As Douglas L. Winiarski remarks, looking for God’s will in storms, earthquakes, and other remarkable weather patterns “invoked a rich storehouse of folk wisdom, biblical stories, natural philosophy, and Reformed theology. . . . Culled from learned and popular books, fueled by biblical exemplars and local superstitions, and shared by educated ministers and parishioners” alike.<sup>82</sup> In the context of the Louisbourg expedition, the rich lore of wonders and providence

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<sup>81</sup> JE to Correspondent, November, 1745, in *WJE*, 16:185–197.

<sup>82</sup> Winiarski, *Darkness Falls*, 56.

seamlessly supported Pomeroy's more worldly providential assurances and Edwards's rarified millennial expectations. Such things even factored into Edwards's confident conclusion of the events of the spring and summer: "Thus the clouds and winds, and sun, moon and stars in their courses, from the beginning, fought for us." For Edwards and Pomeroy, as well as Prince, Chauncy, and a whole host of soldiers and civilians, ministers and magistrates, the hand of God made visible in the skies and on the seas was a sign of support that their violent conquest was a blessed endeavor.<sup>83</sup>

Where Edwards's account differed from that of Pomeroy was in his final, albeit brief, analysis: "It is a day of great commotion and tumult among the nations . . . but it now becomes us, and the church of God everywhere, to cry to him, that he would overrule all for the advancement of the kingdom of Christ, and the bringing on the expected peace and prosperity of Zion." Whereas Pomeroy—as well as much of lay New England—saw the remarkable workings of heaven as a blessed military victory which "Delivered this Strong City into our hands," and gave thanks for the his own protection and the "Salvation For New England," Edwards took a more high-minded and prophetic approach.<sup>84</sup> He would continue to develop his eschatological reading of Louisbourg, and the wartime events which would follow, though more so to the ministers of Scotland and in his private notebook on the apocalypse, rather than to the wider populace. By contrast, throughout all of Major Seth Pomeroy's diaries and letters during the war, while filled with providential rhetoric and several references to their popish and barbarous enemies, he made no acknowledgement of the biblical kingdom of the Antichrist or Christ's return. Edwards's millennial hope was also impacted by his identity as a frustrated pastor, casting the victory as a notable exception to a time when there was little "in the present aspects

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<sup>83</sup> JE to Correspondent, November 1745, in *WJE*, 16:185–197.

<sup>84</sup> Pomeroy, June 25, 1745, in *Papers of Seth Pomeroy*, 51.

of divine providence to encourage. . . . God's people's uniting cries to God for spiritual blessings" which were so greatly needed. Reflective of the typical disjuncture between clergy and laity, Edwards searched for signs of unfolding prophecies of the eternal church while his congregants paid attention to the prosaic and physical concerns of the present moment.<sup>85</sup>

Edwards's millennial fascination was not deterred by lay soldiers' apparent disinterest in such matters, however. Rather, the information he received from them, communicated through the shared language of providentialism, provided supporting evidence to his refined millennialism. Although the ultimate interests of the laity of Northampton and that of their pastor differed, they both drew meaningful conclusions through their shared work of military providential interpretation in 1745. Edwards continued to pursue a millennial interpretation of the unfolding violence at hand but, recognizing his congregation's more temporal concerns, he did so mostly among fellow clergymen, where such ideas were happily received. While the specific theological predictions of the apocalypse were largely the purview of the clergy, the language through which these ideas was communicated and the sweeping belief that "God fights for the English" was shared by all British Protestants, regardless of one's theology, politics, or place in the church. Edwards and his congregants, therefore, found their own purpose and hope through the synthesis of their belief in providence and the anti-Catholic political culture. While the laity did not find much purchase in the high-minded notions of apocalyptic predictions like their pastor, they nevertheless all found meaning in a shared religious language.

The Louisbourg expedition, an early flashpoint in King George's War, witnessed as an undeniable dispensation of providential mercy, demonstrated to Edwards, as well to his New

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<sup>85</sup> JE to Correspondent, November 1745, in *WJE*, 16:197, 183.

Light allies like Prince, that the ongoing affairs of war may be a sufficient cause through which to develop the social and spiritual unity they so desperately hoped to reestablish.

### **“Unitedly Cry to God for His Mercy”: Providential Victories and the Call for Unity**

While no single event after the victory at Louisbourg captured New Englander’s attention in such an explosive manner, the importance of the war with France nevertheless loomed large. The events of King George’s War proved to be a generative context for Edwards’s efforts to reunify British Protestantism under his vision of the revival, a pastoral mission which he pursued on two fronts. On the one hand, he did so in terms of his interest in providence and millennial portents. This rarified providential cosmology was explored primarily in a community of evangelical clergymen bound together around through Scottish Concert of Prayer. Finding meaning and support in global events and a transatlantic community, Edwards was able to momentarily transcend local, and even colonial, conflicts. On the other hand, unable to ignore his own congregation, Edwards continued to use the undeniably providential events of the war as grounds to begin another proper revival and forge unity among colonial believers. While these efforts were, in Edwards’s mind, clearly eschatological, his congregants rarely looked to the millennium through their shared providential lens.

Shortly after the arrival of news from Cape Breton, word came that Prince Charles Edwards Stuart—the Catholic “Young Pretender”—had invaded Scotland from France in hopes of restoring his grandfather, King Charles I, on the throne. The Jacobite Rising, as it would become known, created dread not only in Scotland but throughout the British Atlantic, striking a chord with the persistent fear of Catholicization held by Protestant Britons everywhere. The Young Pretender and his Highlander army were ultimately rebuffed and the Catholic threat

driven out of Scotland. The base fear continued, however, embodied by the converted Catholic Native Americans fighting alongside the French in North America.<sup>86</sup>

In the summer of 1746, the people of New England witnessed their salvation from the Duke d'Anville's expeditionary fleet "without any interposition of any arm of flesh."<sup>87</sup> Whereas the Louisbourg expedition had been won by Protestant crusaders strengthened by God as they fought on His behalf, the English had virtually nothing to do with the destruction of the French armada, thus making the hand of God all the more visible. The loss of Louisbourg created a slew of problems for the French empire, reducing its military capabilities and strategic options, closing off trade and fisheries, and hindering plans for the Canadian colony. Thus, while New England was in an uproarious celebration, Versailles immediately began planning the recapture the lost fortress. In May 1746, a French armada of seventy-six sail set out under the command of Jean-Baptiste de la Rochefoucauld, duc d'Anville, on a three-month voyage across the Atlantic to secure Louisbourg and then to pillage and plunder along the New England coastline. On their crossing, however, they encountered unfavorable winds, terrible lightning storms, and thick fog, which extended the voyage by a matter of weeks, scattered French ships across the Atlantic, and damaged and destroyed much of the fleet. It was not until the remnants of d'Anville's armada limped toward the island of Santa Maria that they were even sure they were close to Nova Scotia, and not the interior of Mediterranean or the isle of Martinique. With meager supplies, scurvy swept through the fleet, enjoining smallpox and a multitude of infectious and venereal diseases which had plagued them from the beginning. With the dead and dying outnumbering the healthy

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<sup>86</sup> The Jacobite Rising ended at the Battle of Culloden in April 1746 when Charles and his Highlander armies were defeated by the Duke of Cumberland. After avoiding capture, the Young Pretender fled back to France that fall. For more on the Jacobite Rising, see, especially, Geoffrey Plank, *Rebellion and Savagery: The Jacobite Rising of 1745 and the British Empire* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); and W. A. Speck, *The Butcher: The Duke of Cumberland and the Suppression of the '45* (Caernarfon: Welsh Academic Press, 1995).

<sup>87</sup> JE to the Reverend William McCulloch, January 21, 1746/7, in *WJE*, 16:219.

that September, the French clawed toward their goal through days on end of sunless skies and cyclonic winds. Shortly after the arrival of what was left of the armada into Chebucto Bay—which gave rise to Governor Shirley seeking military reinforcements for British Nova Scotia—d’Anville suffered a stroke and died two days later. Demoralized and wracked with fear and indecision, his successor, Commandeur Constantin-Louis d’Estourmel, attempted suicide with his own sword. The fleet discarded their plans to take Louisbourg and rerouted to attack Annapolis Royal in late October, but, after immediately encountering dense fog and fierce storm, abandoned the expedition entirely and returned to France. All told, between the destructive weather, persistent sickness, and several encounters with English vessels, the expedition claimed as many as 8,000 of the original 11,000 soldiers and sailors. Even under the most conservative estimate of the death toll, this bungled French expedition occasioned more deaths than that of King George’s War in total. Joining Edwards and the chorus of preserved New Englanders, Thomas Prince described the failed French campaign as an act of providence alone: “God was pleased to visit them with such a mortal sickness. . . . [and] to raise against them such a violent Storm of Wind” as to “put a total End to their mischievous Enterprize.”<sup>88</sup> Special providences such as this certainly reinforced the clergy’s belief that God was on their side in the war, but did not give them cause to lay idle and let the hand of God fight this war alone. These signs, like the entire schema of military providentialism, were interpreted as a call from God to continue in the war against popish powers and to further awaken their spirits with prayer and thanksgiving.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> TP, *The Salvations of God in 1746* [ . . . ] (Boston, 1747), 28, 29, 32, Eighteenth Century Collections Online. For Prince’s a detailed account of d’Anville’s failed campaign in this sermon, see pages 21–33.

<sup>89</sup> For a complete history of the politics and strategy of this French failure, see James Pritchard, *Anatomy of a Naval Disaster: The 1746 French Expedition to North America* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995) ProQuest Ebook Central. Also see Horton, “King George’s War,” 336; and Ian K. Steele, *Warpaths: Invasions of North America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994), 170–174.

Amid these victories of British Protestantism against the Catholic enemies throughout the Atlantic arose the Concert of Prayer, a transatlantic effort to establish and maintain revivals by uniting individuals, praying societies, and congregations in prayer. Edwards's participation in this cause was intrinsically linked to the events of the ongoing war and provided further justification to his vision of evangelicalism and the Awakening. After two years of success in Scotland, John MacLaurin and other advocates of the project sent hundreds of letters to ministers throughout the British Atlantic, including Edwards and Prince, proposing an international Concert of Prayer.<sup>90</sup> While Edwards not did publish his formal treatise advocating for colonial participation in the Concert until late 1747, much of this network of clergymen was galvanized during the "great and awful calamities" of the decade across the British Empire—the War of the Austrian Succession and, within it, King George's War, against Spanish, French, and Native American enemies, and the Jacobite Rising in Scotland. Beginning in late 1745, Edwards cultivated a vigorous network of communication and close, caring friendships with William McCulloch, John Erskine, and John MacLaurin, the leading revivalist ministers of Cambuslang, Kirkintilloch, and Glasgow, respectively. Ultimately concerned with the expansion of true revivalism and the hastening of the millennium, their conversations largely centered on the victories and losses afforded by providence amid the violence of the British Atlantic and their relevance to the prophecies of scripture. In fact, it was this discourse of military providentialism that fostered these relationships in Edwards's heart. He wrote to McCulloch that he found the early events of the Jacobite Rebellion "much more affecting to me . . . [because] of the correspondence I have been favored with, and the friendship I have by this means been engaged in, with some of the ministers of Scotland; that land has seemed nearer to me, and more as a land

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<sup>90</sup> "A Memorial from several ministers in Scotland," in JE, *An Humble Attempt*, in *Apocalyptic Writings*, ed. Stephen J. Stein, vol. 5, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), 326.

that I was interested in on this account.”<sup>91</sup> In the living room of the Edwards home hung a gift from the Reverend Erskine, a portrait of John the Evangelist, offering Edwards a reminder of his holy mission and a close friend.<sup>92</sup>

Thomas Prince was also a familiar and active figure in this prayerful community, writing personal correspondences with leading Scotsmen and forwarding on Edwards’s letters, as well as sending books and sermons printed in his home city of Boston. His efficacy in this epistolary community was questionable, however, failing on numerous occasions to send books and letters as Edwards requested, and deliver Scottish communications back to Northampton.<sup>93</sup> Despite the forgetfulness of the sexagenarian pastor, his published sermons were a source of conversation and influence in Edwards’s wide circles. Rather than pen his own interpretation of the providential dispensations since Louisbourg to MacLaurin and McCulloch, for example, Edwards pointed them toward Prince’s *The Salvation of God in 1746* for an accurate and agreeable account of things. Edwards’s decision not to attach a copy of the published sermon, based on the belief that evangelicals in Scotland would “doubtless see” it, signals the presence and impact of Prince’s work across the Atlantic.<sup>94</sup> The professional admiration and trust Edwards and Prince shared for each other extended into their personal lives and the lives of their families. Edwards’s letters to his dear friend in Boston often blended the work of the Gospel, news of the world—and God’s hand in it—and familial updates and greetings. Upon receiving news of the

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<sup>91</sup> JE to the Reverend William McCulloch, May 12, 1746, in *WJE*, 16:207–208.

<sup>92</sup> For the Edwards family’s personal relationship with the Scottish ministers, see, for example, EEB, *Esther Burr’s Journal*, ed. Rankin, 62–63.

<sup>93</sup> JE to the Reverend William McCulloch, September 23, 1747, in *WJE*, 16:236–240; JE to the Reverend John Erskine, August 31, 1748, in *WJE*, 16:247–250; JE to the Reverend William McCulloch, October 7, 1748, in *WJE*, 16:256–257; and JE to William Hogg, November 25, 1752, in *WJE*, 16:549.

<sup>94</sup> JE to McCulloch, January 21, 1746/7, in *WJE*, 16:219.



death of Prince's daughter, Deborah, Edwards quickly sent out his deepest condolences and the sympathy of his family.<sup>95</sup>

The shared spiritual and national identity—which, for these clergymen, was nearly inseparable—affected their reading of the ongoing violence in the Atlantic world. Edwards's analysis of New England and Scotland, two British lands both facing suffering at the hands of their popish enemies, was one and the same. In November 1745, Edwards observed the continuing war with France in North America and the recently-received news of the militant arrival of the Young Pretender in Scotland as two manifestations of God's judgment extended upon the Protestant empire. Rather than finding contradiction in God's mercies and punishments dispensed to Americans and Scots, Edwards found comfort in the recent revivals in Scotland during a time of darkness and backsliding in New England while aiming to give his Scottish brothers hope in the recent events of Louisbourg, while they themselves faced off against the Catholic invaders of their own. In the view of all these ministers, throughout the world there was but one true church of God, "the distant members . . . closely united in one glorious head." The shared providential rhetoric and cosmology, united with a collective Protestant British identity, was fertile soil for continuing the Concert of Prayer in this time of spiritual tumult, suffering and violence, and millennial hope.<sup>96</sup>

At home in Northampton, as well, Edwards preached under the canopy of British Protestantism as a unifying, comforting, and motivating motif. On a fast day in the summer of 1746, for example, Edwards stirred the spirits of his church by meditating on the fall of the Antichrist as prophesied in the Book of Revelation. By his reading of Scripture and history—the

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<sup>95</sup> JE to TP, July 27, 1744, in *WJE*, 16:146–147. Unfortunately, no direct communications between Prince and Scottish evangelicals exist, but Prince's participation in this community is clear through Edwards's letters.

<sup>96</sup> JE to Correspondent, in *WJE*, 16:180.

two being largely the same—Edwards found it “Exceedingly manifest” that “The Pope of Rome with his Clergy, Church, & Kingdom” were the very “Characters [of the] Antichrist & the Antichristian society” as described in the Bible.<sup>97</sup> Here, Edwards was playing on traditional tropes of anti-popery that had long cast British Protestants and French Catholics as political and spiritual enemies. In addition to the atmosphere of violence, fear, and suffering wrought by war, the specifics of King George’s War prompted and influenced the content and tone of clerical and lay military providentialism. From the Restoration onward, public rites, religious observations, and a burgeoning print culture—all of which reinforced each other—conditioned British Americans to “abhor the Pope, Devil, and Pretender,” through “the effigies of November 5, blamed for every historical disaster that had overtaken Protestants, [and] denounced in oaths, in print, and in toast.”<sup>98</sup> In England, as well, the ongoing wars with the Catholic powers of France and Spain and the threats posed by the Young Pretender brought the fierce anti-popery back into mainstream political culture.<sup>99</sup>

This villainization of Catholic France was also supported with specific descriptions of French-allied Native Americans as another force of evil threatening God’s covenant people through the use of well-worn savage, bestial, and demonic idioms of the period. Edwards cast their unconverted and Catholic Indian enemies as an opposing force with which he found evidence that God was with the British and was perhaps working toward a more glorious end. In the case of the North American continent, Edwards took heart in the fact that God had “wonderfully preserved” their forefathers “from being swallowed up by natives” and had

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<sup>97</sup> JE, “832. Sermon on Rev. 17:11 [Fast on Occasion of the Expedition to Canada, July 10, 1746],” in *Sermons, Series II, 1748*, vol. 64, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*, ed. Jonathan Edwards Center, <http://edwards.yale.edu/archive?path=aHR0cDovL2Vkd2FyZHMueWFsZS5lZHUvY2dpLWJpbi9uZXdwaGlsby9nZXRvYmplY3QucGw/Yy42Mjo2LndqZW8=>.

<sup>98</sup> McConville, *King’s Three Faces*, 119.

<sup>99</sup> Langford, *Polite and Commercial People*, 202.

“Strangely removed the Antient inhabitants to make Room for us.” In more recent history, Edwards explained to his congregation, the mercies of providence have “Preserved us from swalled up by the Invasions of our Enemies” during the previous wars with French and Indian forces in “our Land.”<sup>100</sup> Throughout King George’s War, Prince articulated similar sentiments in Boston, decrying their “*Indian Enemies*” that savagely destroyed English livestock and crops, houses, villages, and even entire towns, and murdered “our Men, Women, and Children; carrying many into a barbarous Captivity.”<sup>101</sup> On another occasion, he described God’s many uses for the native tribes of North America: “He was pleas’d to suffer the barbarous *Indians* . . . to surprise and murder some of our People; yet . . . [at other times] He was pleased to give us the Victory.”<sup>102</sup> Many of Edwards’s sermon notes simply discuss “the Enemy,” rather than specific peoples. These oblique references are nevertheless conditioned with tropes used elsewhere to describe French and native combatants, as beings marked only by their “Cruelty” and their “injurious & Bloody” machinations, brief notes which he undoubtedly expanded upon from the pulpit.<sup>103</sup>

In such sermons, Edwards was particularly animated by the prospect of the coming kingdom of Christ. His congregants were largely not, however. Nevertheless, the language of anti-popery served to satisfy Edwards’s millennialist impulses on the one hand and the laity’s desire for spiritual and physical comfort and a justification for their participation in the war on the other with little contradiction. The pattern demonstrated here, where a pastor and his congregation shared the same providential paradigm but used it to address and advance different

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<sup>100</sup> JE, “800. Sermon on Jer. 51:5,” in *WJE*, vol. 63.

<sup>101</sup> TP, *Salvations of God*, 23.

<sup>102</sup> TP, *Extraordinary Events*, 27.

<sup>103</sup> JE, “800. Sermon on Jer. 51:5,” in *WJE*, vol. 63; and JE, “824. Sermon on Neh. 4:14,” in *WJE*, vol. 64. For more on Edwards’s preaching style, especially in the last two decades of his life, see the editor’s notes in *WJE*, 25:1–47.

concerns, was not unique to the Northampton congregation or to King George's War. As Owen Stanwood has shown, "the vast majority of Protestants in the colonies" were united in their anti-Catholic outlook during King William's War in 1689, but only radicals like Cotton Mather were ultimately concerned with the war's bearing on the apocalypse. "It was not that the colonists lacked political beliefs or religious convictions," Stanwood argues, "they merely put personal safety ahead of principle."<sup>104</sup> Indeed, the threats of death and captivity, rather than the prospect of uniting heaven and earth, were the main drivers of the lay response to King George's War. Nevertheless, the threats posed by war were widely interpreted as heaven's judgment and fears for personal safety occasioned prayers to their merciful and overruling God.

During this period, Edwards also never lost sight of the missionaries' spiritual front of the ongoing war. While he spoke about their unconverted and Catholic Indian enemies as violent and depraved savages, he still endeavored for their conversion to the true Christian faith, both for their own sake and for the sake of God's kingdom. On a particular fast day Edwards sanctified the 1746 "Expedition against Canada . . . the most considerable part of the Antichristian Kingdom" on the continent. Although this northern expedition never materialized, Edwards used the occasion of preparation to animate his people to bring "the Gospel into that dark Land" through "the Instruction of the Indians," thereby establishing the church of God more fully and "pulling down the Kingdom of Satan" and "weaken[ing] the Kingdom of France."<sup>105</sup> The mutually beneficial relationship between the military and missionaries was widely recognized throughout British North America—military control cleared the path for missionaries to reach native peoples and spread the Protestant faith, which in turn cemented interconnected diplomatic, military, and economic alliances between British interests and converted Indians. The lines

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<sup>104</sup> Stanwood, "Protestant Moment," 507.

<sup>105</sup> JE, "832. Sermon on Rev. 17:11," in *WJE*, vol. 64.

between national and religious efforts were further blurred by New Englanders' grand notion of the Protestant empire.

Through the common images and rhetoric of anti-popery and providentialism, Edwards hardened the lines between Britain and France, Protestant and popery, while erasing the divisions between New Lights and Old Lights, Edwardses and Williamses. He called on his congregation to wield a “spiritual sword,” proclaiming the word of God and “promoting the Interest of Religion on the Protestant Church,” and a worldly sword, seeking to “overthrow of [the] Antichrist by using temporal means [as] Called in providence: a temporal . . . war with Antichristian Powers.”<sup>106</sup> In sermons such as these, Edwards emphasized common causes and shared language—here, proteolyzing to “heathen” and “popish” Indians and combating France’s military designs—rather than criticizing the particular theological and moral issues that lay at the root of Northampton’s conflicts. The nature of the Concert of Prayer offered further justification to Edwards’s attempts to transcend local and colonial troubles: “Union and agreement of many in different places and distant parts of the world in such prayer is becoming and acceptable to God. . . . [and while] a civil union is amiable, but above all others a religious union [is sweet].” Turning ever outward, Edwards leveraged this transatlantic cause for unity among British Protestants, which worked in tandem with continuing military success against France—a martial effort which was already understood in fundamentally providential terms—to rise above local and colonial opposition.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> JE.

<sup>107</sup> JE, *The Suitableness of Union in Extraordinary Prayer for the Advancement of God’s Church*, in *WJE*, vol. 25:203.

## **“All Matter of Calamity and Misery”: Crisis and Conflict in Northampton**

While d’Anville’s naval expedition was an abject failure, the French found far greater success on land. In 1746 they launched a bloody and destructive guerrilla campaign against the New England frontier with an initial Canadian militia of nearly seven hundred, supported by countless French Indians. These raids against Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New York, which the French had employed successfully in previous conflicts, persisted until the conclusion of the war in 1748, at one time involving so many Canadians that New France did not have the manpower to bring in the harvests at home. Understandably, Northampton was rife with anxiety from the increasing violent threats of war. In the first nine months of the year, over forty detachments consisting of over two thousand men, mostly native peoples, were thrown against New England’s frontier. Even by the spring of 1746, Northamptoners received “almost daily news of mischief done by” Indians on the Canadian border, “distressing the new settlements [there] . . . killing and taking captive [individuals and families], burning houses, and killing cattle.” By the end of the summer, thirty-seven New Englanders had been killed, wounded, or taken into captivity. The actual destructive violence which did come from the forests fueled the fires of anxiety and dread about when and where the next raid would strike—a fear which brought a great deal of suffering in and of itself. In these latter years of the conflict, Edwards continued to search for God’s purpose in the events of war from his pulpit and to leverage that purpose to instill his vision of revivalism that was under attack at home and across the colonies. However, as violence moved from Nova Scotia to western Massachusetts and major victories which elicited surges of Protestant piety and national pride were replaced with frontier attacks

which only brought fear and a prolonged, watchful anxiety, the foundation of Edwards's campaign was shaken and his call for unity found less purchase among his parishioners.<sup>108</sup>

In this milieu of constant anxiety and vigilance, several events struck fearfully close to the town of Northampton, beginning with the fall of Fort Massachusetts in mid-August. One of the few sources of protection for the western line of the colony and located only thirty miles northwest of Northampton, Fort Massachusetts was especially prone that summer as its normal garrison of fifty men under the command of Ephraim Williams were away preparing for another northern expedition. A force of between 700 and 1,200 French regulars, Canadian militiamen, and Abenaki Indians took advantage of this weakened position. Their offensive was led by Pierre de Rigaud de Vaudreuil de Cavagnial, Marquis de Vaudreuil, the governor general of New France and an adept administrator, diplomat, and strategist.<sup>109</sup> Sergeant John Hawks of Deerfield and the ten fighting men under his control killed sixteen enemies and lost only a few of their own during the twenty-eight hour siege which ended with Hawks's surrender after running out of ammunition. Victorious, de Vaudreuil captured thirty-three Englishmen and women and burned Fort Massachusetts to ash. As they made their way back to Canada, several detachments of Indians under de Vaudreuil's command continued raiding in and around Hampshire County—likely dissatisfied with their French leader's failure to uphold his promise to give the survivors of Fort Massachusetts to the Abenaki, deciding instead to take the English captives to Canada to exchange for French prisoners. In the days following the destruction of the fort, a raiding party struck a cluster homesteads on the outskirts of Deerfield, taking five scalps and one prisoner with

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<sup>108</sup> JE to the Reverend John MacLaurin, May 12, 1746, in *WJE*, 16:207.

<sup>109</sup> D. Peter MacLeod, "Rigaud de Vaudreuil de Cavagnial, Pierre de, Marquis de Vaudreuil (1698–1778)," in *Colonial Wars of North America*, 631–634.

them, and leaving in their wake three men and a boy dead, and several seriously wounded, including one woman tomahawked in the head.<sup>110</sup>

Rural Massachusetts remained in a perilous physical and psychological state until the end of the war, the likes of which has been colorfully described by Northampton historian James Russell Trumbull: “Flying detachments of French and Indians, gathering a scalp here, a prisoner there, and plunder everywhere, buzzed about the settlements, quickly disappearing when a hand was stretched to smite them.”<sup>111</sup> The fear of raiding Indian parties that was in-built in the rural New England consciousness latched onto several scalplings and killings which occurred near Northampton before the end of the war. During an attack on Southampton in the spring of 1748, many residents fled the eight miles northeast to Northampton, bringing the panic and suffering of war ever closer to the collective consciousness of Edwards’s family and congregation.<sup>112</sup>

De Vaudreuil’s raid on Deerfield forcefully renewed memories of the 1704 “massacre” on the Connecticut frontier town—although the displaced Indians who launched the attack saw it as a justified act of war.<sup>113</sup> This strike, carried out by Indians and French officers, left 39 Englishmen dead and another 112 carried off to Canada as captives. Although Jonathan Edwards was only an infant when this raid occurred, it remained a central feature in the collective memory of New Englanders, and especially for the interconnected Edwards-Stoddard-Williams clan. The Reverend John Williams, pastor at Deerfield, and his wife, Eunice, witnessed two of their children killed in the early moments of the 1704 attack. In the aftermath, these Williamses (the

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<sup>110</sup> Trumbull, *History of Northampton*, 147–149; and William Pencak, “Fort Massachusetts (Massachusetts),” in *Colonial Wars of North America*, 431. For a firsthand account of the attack on Fort Massachusetts and the subsequent captivity of Englishmen, see John Norton, *The Redeemed Captive, Being a Narrative of the taking and carrying into Captivity the Reverend Mr. John Norton* [. . .] (Boston 1748), HathiTrust.

<sup>111</sup> Trumbull, *History of Northampton*, 157.

<sup>112</sup> Trumbull, 147–164.

<sup>113</sup> Evan Haefeli and Kevin M. Sweeney, *Captors and Captives: The 1704 French and Indian Raid on Deerfield* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003).



brother-in-law and sister to John Stoddard, and the newborn Jonathan Edwards's uncle and aunt) were taken into captivity, along with their surviving children, including Eunice and Stephen. The elder Eunice was killed with the stroke of a hatchet after suffering an injury on the second day of the journey to Canada, but the Deerfield pastor and his children survived for several years in captivity. Upon his return to New England, Williams published *The Redeemed Captive*, an account of the violent horrors of his capture, emphasizing the Antichristian depravity of his Catholic captors.<sup>114</sup> The persistent fear of joining the enemy and turning Catholic while in captivity was further reinforced by the life of the younger Eunice, Williams's daughter and Edwards's cousin. Adopted into a Mohawk family shortly after her capture, Eunice had "forgot [how] to speak English" by 1707, was baptized into the Catholic Church several years thereafter, and, in 1713, married a Mohawk man, François Xavier Arosen. Living as the "unredeemed captive" far north of her birth family, Eunice was never repatriated into English society and was held in sorrowful disregard by the Williamses, who simultaneously rejected her existence among the Mohawks and hoped she would return to the "civility" and "true religion" of New England.<sup>115</sup> With such a "seduced" and fallen soul in his own family, Edwards had deep personal cause to fear captivity and to energize the work of Protestant missionaries among native peoples. For decades to come, John Williams's *The Redeemed Captive* held a great deal of religious and cultural significance, perpetuated through numerous republications and annotations, including one by Thomas Prince. The account of the captivity of the Englishmen captured at the fall of Fort Massachusetts in 1746, for example, was published under the same title.<sup>116</sup> Williams's work and

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<sup>114</sup> John Williams, *The Redeemed Captive, Returning to Zion* [ . . . ] (Boston, 1707), HathiTrust; and John Demos, *The Unredeemed Captive: A Family Story from Early America* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1994).

<sup>115</sup> Demos, *Unredeemed Captive*, 146, 197. Eunice Williams's life and legacy is thoroughly documented in Demos, especially pages 140–236.

<sup>116</sup> Norton, *Redeemed Captive*. In a study of seventeenth-century literature in England and New England, James D. Hartman has argued that the literary predecessor of the captivity narrative was the earlier "providence tale," stories that factor the work of God on earth "into a tale of the bizarre, a case study in natural history or philosophy, or a

the life of his daughter served as critical touchstones in informing white Protestant colonists' fears of death, captivity, torture, and being turned heathen or Catholic.

As the glorious and far off victories like Louisbourg gave way to violent threats on the western frontier of Massachusetts, providential concerns among the ministry and the laity shifted. In Edwards's view, the bleak military situation was compounded by the fact that the unified re-awakening for which he had hoped had still yet to materialize. Speaking directly to this situation from the pulpit in March 1748, Edwards brought his congregation to "Consider that when God departs from such [a people] as have been favoured with the special Tokens of his Presence, their Glory is gone and they are brought into Contemptible & disgraceful Circumstances." Although Edwards was certain that God had not yet forsaken the people of Northampton, he feared that the present situation may be the final correcting judgment before God departed from His people entirely. Significantly, he had abandoned his unifying transatlantic perspective and now spoke with pointed specificity: "If God dont Return in infinite mercy to us . . . there are many ways that this Church & Congregation may come to Ruin . . . [being] in danger of all manner of Calamity & misery . . . God may Cause this Church to be utterly broken in Pieces." Departing from this message to the congregation, then, Edwards showed the terrible consequence of God's departure from a particular individual: In death, "Christ will bid you depart from Him to all Eternity" and cast you "in Hell where there are no tokens of his Favourable Presence" but only the presence "of devils [and] of all Evil . . . without Restraint." Edwards chastised his backsliding brothers and sisters and called them come back from their fallen ways and earnestly seek the presence of God, taking the utmost care not to further provoke Him. In the latter years of the war, the Northampton pastor continued to use the

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popular legend," as well as "accounts of miracles, of answered prayers, and of judgments." James D. Hartman, *Providence Tales and the Birth of American Literature* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 1.

war as a platform to reform and revive his congregation, but in the context of this gloom and suffering he had largely lost the optimism that had once defined his wartime message.<sup>117</sup>

The war's sharp downturn on the frontier impacted Edwards on a deeply personal level, as well. Writing to his daughters Sarah and Esther in November 1746, he tried to quell their worry for him and their mother in Northampton. Edwards's brief and fairly casual note to his daughters illuminates not only the state of affairs in Northampton, but also his influence on his children's own providential viewing of things. Sarah and Esther, aged eighteen and fourteen, were in East Hampton, Long Island, for several months on an extended visit, a customary practice among family and close friends. Edwards was pleased to share that no violence had come to Hampshire County since the destruction of Fort Massachusetts that August and that the Edwards home was "now fortified in" with a nightly watch kept over them. It is unclear whether or not the idea of their parents sleeping behind armed battlements ameliorated Sarah and Esther's anxiety. Even in a letter to his two young daughters, the Northampton divine delivered a clear assessment of the spiritual state of things consistent with his sermonizing at the time, giving thanks for the wonderful appearance of God "for so sinful and unworthy a people" as themselves. In a final effort to still his frightened children living far from home, Edwards hoped to comfort their spirit by reminding them God remained close to them and aimed to settle their minds with the belief that they were far safer East Hampton and could sleep "and have none to make [them] afraid." In Northampton, he described by contrast, "we have been in much fear of an army suddenly rushing in upon the town in the night to destroy it."<sup>118</sup> This dark tone with

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<sup>117</sup> JE, "892. Sermon on Num. 12:9 [Fast, March 12, 1748]," in *Sermons, Series II, 1748*, vol. 66, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*, ed. Jonathan Edwards Center, <http://edwards.yale.edu/archive?path=aHR0cDovL2Vkd2FyZHMueWFsZS5lZHUvY2dpLWJpbi9uZXJwaGlzby9nZXRvYmplY3QuGw/Yy42NDo2LndqZW8=>.

<sup>118</sup> JE to EEB, November 3, 1746, in *WJE*, 16:213–215.

which Edwards addressed his children was not out of the ordinary, however, especially during times of war. During the French and Indian War, he penned a similar message of religious commitment and the delicacy of life to his son, Jonathan, Jr., on his tenth birthday. Alerting the young Jonathan that one of his childhood friends had unexpectedly died, Edwards explained the boy's death as "a loud call of God to you to prepare for death. . . . always remember that life is uncertain: you know not how soon you must die, and therefore had need to be always ready." It is doubtful, however, that such a sentiment found much comforting purchase among Edwards's young children.<sup>119</sup>

During the second half of the war, optimistic and pious thanksgiving was replaced with a deep wanting for God's mercies among the lay people of Northampton, too. Fears of sudden destruction, mourning the casualties of their loved ones, stress from living among mounts and fortifications in and around the town, and frustrations from the overcrowding brought on by refugees became the mainstays of the Northampton consciousness, leaving the joyful capture of Louisbourg as a distant memory. In February 1747, the congregation of Northampton joined Ebenezer Sheldon and his family in thanking God "for his Wonderfully preserving of them . . . from falling into the hands of their innimies when beset by them."<sup>120</sup> This sort of prayerful response, in this case referring to an attack on Dea Sheldon's Fort in nearby Falltown by about fifty French and Indians, was typical of the religious activity during the dire years of the war. Much to their pastor's frustration, however, the downturn in western Massachusetts did not lead the laity to any sort of meaningful reformation or earnest revival of the spirit.<sup>121</sup> In the latter half

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<sup>119</sup> JE to Jonathan Edwards, Jr., May 27, 1755, in *WJE*, 16:667. For another example of Edwards's classically Puritan approach to death expressed in his parental duties, see JE to Mary Edwards, July 26, 1749, in *WJE*, 16:288–290.

<sup>120</sup> JE, "857. Sermon on Zech. 8:20-23," quoted in Stein, "For Their Spiritual Good," 281.

<sup>121</sup> See, for example, JE to McCulloch, September 23, 1747, in *WJE*, 16:238.

of the war, Major Pomeroy was stationed along the western frontier of Massachusetts, frustrated with the largely unsuccessful efforts to fend off guerrilla attacks and dealing with “the Bloody Flux” sweeping through his company. Under this constant stress, Pomeroy’s spiritual concerns also turned to his own well-being and hopes of arriving in Northampton safely. Upon his dismissal from service near the end of the war, he wrote to Mary that he hoped to return home within the week, “Divine Providence permitting.”<sup>122</sup>

In addition to the suffering wrought by war, the residents of Northampton were gravely concerned with a sickness that had been hanging over the town for several years. Between 1745 and 1748, the town recorded 141 deaths—over one-tenth of the population of Northampton—43 of which came in 1748 alone. This epidemic gave further cause for religious ideas of communal unity to give way to individual prayers. In fact, over half of the prayer bids submitted in the final two years of the war concerned this sickness. Prayers came before the congregation for people such as Joel Clark, who was “Exersised with Exeding pain and tis feard nigh his end,” and the three young children of the congregation whose “aperence [was] neer death.” The overruling designs of providence were not forgotten in these requests, many of which expressed sentiments that “god would ese him of the pain that he labours under and Spaer his Lif and restore his health *if it be his will*,” or that “this awful providence may turn to [the] Spiritual good” of the afflicted, whether in life or in death. Certainly, providentialism remained a relevant part of people’s religious outlook, but the cause of reform and unity among all of British Protestantism was lost as the tumult of war and death moved ever closer toward Northampton and lay concerns once again turned inward.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Seth Pomeroy to His Wife, August 1, 1747, and August 3, 1747, in *Papers of Seth Pomeroy*, 92–94; and Seth Pomeroy to Mary Pomeroy, October 22, 1747, in *History of Northampton*, 152.

<sup>123</sup> JE, “861. Sermon on Matt. 12:41;” JE, “876. Sermon on Prov. 11:7:” and JE, “897. Sermon on I Cor. 13:8–13,” all quoted in Stein, “For Their Spiritual Good,” 282–283.

Throughout these final years of King George’s War, Edwards maintained an active line of communication with his Scottish counterparts. Although his message to his congregation in Northampton had become pointedly local, the ministers in the Concert of Prayer remained an outlet for Edwards to vent his local frustrations, explore his nuanced eschatology, and find some sense of providential optimism. Nearly a year after d’Anville’s failed Atlantic crossing, Edwards remained thoroughly upset that British Americans had not been “led to repentance by” such mercies. Writing in September 1747, although he marveled at the visible hand of God striking down the French invaders at sea, the far more important matter in Edwards’s view was that God’s deliverance of “a people, whose provocation have been so great” had no serious impact, and the backsliding people only continued in their “apostasy and provocation.” Still, from his wide view of the arc of providential history, it was most probable that the salvation of New England the summer prior was a marker of the coming millennium. In their correspondence, Edwards and the Scots debated the unfolding of events as prophesied in the books of Revelation, Daniel, and Jeremiah, counting the “1,260 days of the witnesses prophesying in sackcloth,” and trying to discern the actual fulfillment of the seven-headed beast or the seventy years of captivity—matters which the lay people of Northampton had no interest in. Believing the current geopolitical events of the British Atlantic signaled “the beginning of that glorious work of God’s Spirit,” but still deeply disheartened with the state of things at home, Edwards entertained the idea that God had merciful plans for the rising generation and had planted a “holy seed” of “a great many of the elect among our children, born and unborn.” Thus, the grand view of things maintained among those ministers in concert lifted the greatly encouraging “present aspects of divine providence” out above the sin, vice, and dissent churning at the local level.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> JE to William McCulloch, September 23, 1747, in *WJE*, 16:236–241.

Privately as well Edwards carefully documented the geopolitical landscape as evidence of the hastening millennium. In the final years of King George's War and over the course of the final decade of his life he combed through the news coming out of Boston presses for "Events Probably Fulfilling the Six Vial on the River Euphrates," which he carefully recorded in his personal notebook entitled "Apocalypse."<sup>125</sup> The early pages of this eschatological ledger were filled with the events of the ongoing war, celebrating the victories of the English and the losses of not only France, but all the Catholic powers of Europe, especially Spain. Though Edwards himself never editorialized in his meticulous transcriptions, he doubtlessly rejoiced at recording the workings of providence throughout the Atlantic world. Although Edwards spent most of his time in his study, his thirst for the news of the world seemed to be insatiable.<sup>126</sup> Economic and social losses among the popish powers were also included, such as a report from France which "complain[ed] much of the fall of the prices of wine and brandy," of which the loss of a market would be devastating for "many thousand families in that kingdom."<sup>127</sup> So, too, in natural disasters, did Edwards find evidence of the hastening apocalypse, including the destruction of a Viennese church, library, and other property belonging to the Jesuit order by lightning and fire and the unprecedented rise in earthquakes in Italy, "during which a great number of towns suffered much . . . [some] almost wholly laid in ruins."<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> JE, "An Account of Events Probably Fulfilling the Six Vial on the River Euphrates, the News of Which was Received Since October 16, 1747," in *WJE*, 5:253–284.

<sup>126</sup> Edwards's first biographer, Samuel Hopkins, described him as having "commonly spent thirteen hours every day in his study" and keeping "himself quite free from worldly cares." Samuel Hopkins, *The Life and Character of the Late Reverend, Learned, and Pious Mr. Jonathan Edwards, President of the College of New Jersey* (Edinburgh: 1799), 46, 57. In an example of his search for current news, especially during the war, Edwards curtly wrote in an extent fragment of a letter: "I received the last week's paper; but those of the two preceding weeks I missed: I desire you to send 'em." JE to an Unknown Recipient, June 4, 1745 in *WJE*, 16:172.

<sup>127</sup> *Boston Gazette*, March 12, 1748, 2, quoted in in JE, "An Account of Events," in *WJE*, 5:263.

<sup>128</sup> *Boston Gazette*, October 6, 1747, 2, quoted in JE, "An Account of Events," in *WJE*, 5:253; and *Scots Magazine* 14, February 1752, 64, quoted in JE, "An Account of Events," in *WJE*, 5:278.

In the bleak midst of 1747, the spiritual efforts in the ongoing war also suffered a major blow with the death of David Brainerd. A budding young protégé of Edwards's and close to many within the Northampton pastor's sphere of influence including Aaron Burr and Joseph Bellamy, Brainerd possessed an unrivaled missionary zeal. In the fall of 1745, Brainerd famously fostered an awakening among Delaware Indians in New Jersey, although this effort was cut short the following year by an illness which followed him until his death. Brainerd's concern with the souls of native peoples was grounded in the same millennial hope which Edwards held so tightly, "insist[ing] much on the prosperity of Zion, the advancement of Christ's kingdom in the world, and the flourishing and propagation of religion among the Indians."<sup>129</sup> Brainerd spent the last months of his life with the Edwards family, most notably the pastor's seventeen-year-old daughter, Jerusha, who served as Brainerd's nurse. Shortly after Brainerd's death on October 9, 1747, Edwards set to work on editing the missionary's diary into a spiritual biography which promoted Indian missions and the Awakening as leading forces in service of the establishment of the heavenly kingdom on earth. Four months later, Jerusha Edwards passed away after a short course of tuberculosis, deepening the grief that the Reverend Edwards and his family was already holding for the departed missionary. During their time together, Brainerd and Jerusha developed a profoundly spiritual love for each other. The passing of these two pious Christians, ultimately committed to the mission of God's kingdom and whom Edwards loved deeply, appeared as another mournful and troubling aspect from the Northampton parish.<sup>130</sup>

Amid the dark times of fear and sorrow at home, Edwards was also hard at work on his next major publication, *An Humble Attempt to Promote an Explicit Agreement and Visible Union*

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<sup>129</sup> JE, *The Life of David Brainerd*, ed. Norman Pettit, vol. 7, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 446.

<sup>130</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 320–333; and JE, *Life of David Brainerd*.



*of God's People in Extraordinary Prayer*, which he completed in the fall of 1747 and was published later that year. Functionally, *An Humble Attempt* was Edwards's tripart argument for the adoption of the 1746 Scottish proposal for an international Concert of Prayer based on his hopes for the millennium. Following the intention of MacLaurin and his Scottish colleagues, Edwards understood the Concert of Prayer as a fulfilment of "a duty that is perpetually binding, prayer that our Lord's kingdom may come." In a sweeping examination of Scripture and Christian history, Edwards led his readers to imagine and desire the dynamic and glorious coming together of heaven and earth—a future desired by humankind and the Lord, one "surely . . . worth praying for."<sup>131</sup>

Fundamentally grounded in the time of its composition, *An Humble Attempt* was, in some ways, Edwards's final providential analysis of the war. He turned to the present moment of his "nation and land," where he found "much in providence to shew us our need of" a greater sense of prayerfulness and of the hastening of the fulfillment of God's kingdom. He divided these providential signs into two categories, two faces of the same God: "days of vengeance" and "days of mercy." Among the former was, of course, "the bloody war that embroils and wastes the nations of Christendom," and "our nation" especially. In this awful violence Edwards saw the Lord calling His people to more greatly desire a time of peace: the war with France "may well make all that believe God's Word, and love mankind, earnestly long and pray for that day, when 'the wolf shall dwell with the lamb,' and 'the nations shall beat their swords into plowshares.'" The desperate state of the frontier notwithstanding, however, the course of King George's War was, on the whole, moving in favor of British Protestantism. Edwards spilled far more ink over

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<sup>131</sup> JE, *An Humble Attempt* [ . . . ], in WJE, 5:340; and "A Memorial from several ministers in Scotland," in JE, *An Humble Attempt*, in WJE, 5:326.

the “spiritual calamities and miseries of the present time,” delivering one of his sharpest rebukes of the state of Christian piety in New England:

“How much is that kind of religion, that was professed and much experienced and practiced, in the first, and apparently the best times of New England, grown and growing out of credit? What fierce and violent contentions have been of late among ministers and people, about things of a religious nature? How much is the gospel ministry grown into contempt, and the work of the ministry, in many respects, laid under common difficulties, and even in danger of sinking amongst us? How many of our congregations and churches rending in pieces? Church discipline weakened, and ordinances less and less regarded? What wild and extravagant notions, gross delusions of the devil, and strange practices have prevailed . . . How strong and deeply rooted and general are the prejudices that prevail against vital religion and the power of godliness, and almost everything that appertains to it or tends to it? How apparently are the hearts of people, everywhere, uncommonly shut up against all means and endeavors to awaken sinners and revive religion? Vice and immorality, of all kinds, withal increasing and unusually prevailing?”

Now, more than ever, did the people of God need to earnestly and fervently pray for a pouring out of the Holy Spirit.<sup>132</sup>

The “days of mercy”—those encouragements that God was moving history quickly toward the millennium—on the other hand, were visible in the providential blessings extended in war amidst those “fresh attempts made by the antichristian powers against . . . Great Britain, the chief bulwark of the Protestant cause.” Edwards recited the events of the war under which all of Britain gathered to glorify the Lord. They certainly had much to be thankful for, including God’s

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<sup>132</sup> JE, *An Humble Attempt*, in *WJE*, 5:361, 357–358. Edwards quotes Isa. 2:4 and 11:6.

“preserving and delivering . . . our nation and this land” from the Jacobite Rising in Scotland, the destruction of d’Anville’s fleet before the French expedition could retake ground in Canada and lay waste to New England, the miraculous capture of Louisbourg during the first year of campaigning, protecting and “delivering up the strength” to the fleets and armies of England since the first blows of the war, the return and restoration of many English captives in Canada, and “many strange instances of protection of particular forts and settlements, shewing a manifest interposition of the hand of heaven.” These flashpoints of visible success, witnessed as undeniable gifts of providence, could only be reconciled with the perpetually low state of piety by interpreting the events of the war as a patient Lord’s “free grace and sovereign mercy” bestowed upon an underserving and greatly provoking people. Edwards was the first to admit his own proclaimed disappointment about the cooling off and backsliding which followed the “great awakenings of late” in New England, among the Indians in Brainerd’s missions the Middle Colonies, and in Scotland. The most he could say was that the present state of spiritual affairs was greatly encouraging “that God was about to do something more glorious” and “bring things to a greater ripeness.”<sup>133</sup>

This balance between the “spiritual” and the “outward” calamities and Edwards’s interpretation of these providential carrots and sticks is largely reflective of his opinion—and that of his colleagues, family, and congregants—of King George’s War. For the Edwards network, the general providential interpretation of the war held that affairs and successes of the war were signs of God’s mercy which offered hope to believers despite the low state of piety in their nation and land. This would be turned pessimistically on its head during the French and

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<sup>133</sup> JE, *An Humble Attempt*, in *WJE*, 5:358, 361, 364.

Indian War, as the disastrous English war effort would be understood as providential judgment *because of* the spiritual calamities which still plagued British Christendom.

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In the period immediately following King George's War, Edwards witnessed a growing spiritual darkness like nothing else, which he sadly reported to William McCulloch in 1750: "desperately hardened" and "sadly backslidden" sinners; chief doctrines of the true religion and godliness "far more than ever discarded" for Arminianism, enthusiasm, and zealous excess; and "great contentions, separations, and confusions in our religious state prevail in many parts of the land."<sup>134</sup> This negative accounting of things was vividly colored by the several tumultuous years he had endured Northampton after the war. King George's War had ended anticlimactically with the signing of the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, in which England, though victorious in war, returned Louisbourg back to the French, much to the defeated dismay of British Americans. Shortly after the death of Colonel John Stoddard in May 1748, Edwards voiced his desire to reform the moderate position of his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, on the question of the community of Christ's church. He moved to restrict church membership to align with his scriptural understanding of the "visibility of saintship," demonstrated through a genuine and heartfelt profession of faith which "signified the reality of grace."<sup>135</sup> This move was, in part, a manifestation of Edwards's frustration with the vice and sin that flowed through his congregation—a depravity that extended far beyond the bounds of Northampton and made the victorious events of King George's War so truly undeserved, in Edwards's mind. His attempt to

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<sup>134</sup> JE to the Reverend William McCulloch, July 6, 1750, in *WJE*, 16:357.

<sup>135</sup> David D. Hall, "An Humble Inquiry," in JE, *Ecclesiastical Writings*, ed. David D. Hall, vol. 12, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Online* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 62, <http://edwards.yale.edu/archive?path=aHR0cDovL2Vkd2FyZHMueWFsZS5lZHUvY2dpLWJpbi9uZXdwaGlsby9nZXRVYmplY3QucGw/Yy4xMTozOjE6Ni53amVv>.

revoke the half-way covenant, the long-standing ecumenical policy of baptism and membership, brought on a series of constant and virulent attempts from town and church to remove Edwards from the pastorate, which dragged through most of 1749 and 1750. Leading the majority opposition against Edwards were Joseph Hawley and Seth Pomeroy—the “worthy pious men” of Northampton who served at Louisbourg and whose providential views of the war structured Edwards’s own—as well as Major Pomeroy’s father, Ebenezer.<sup>136</sup> Throughout Massachusetts and Connecticut, the Williams family lent their full-throated support for the opposition, interpreting their cousin’s reformation as an assault on the Williams-Stoddard legacy. In addition, Edwards’s proposals undermined the established religious and political order of New England, which was a primary source of power for the family, especially after their access to a robust military establishment was reduced at the end of the war. In June 1750, the church council voted for Edwards’s immediate dismissal, which was supported by 203 of the 230 male members.<sup>137</sup>

Defeated and grieving, Edwards delivered his farewell sermon on July 1, 1750, and demonstrated once again his ultimate frustration with the people of Northampton: “‘Tis to be feared that all my labors as to many of you have served no other purpose but to harden you; and that the word which I have preached, instead of being a savor of life unto life, has been a savor of death unto death.”<sup>138</sup> The sharp turn against Edwards deeply affected his entire family. As she left her “dear, sweet Northampton,” the teenaged Esther Edwards compared her family to David, driven out of Jerusalem by his son Absalom, and was filled with frustration and grief toward

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<sup>136</sup> JE to Correspondent, November, 1745, in *WJE*, 16:185.

<sup>137</sup> For informative accounts of Edwards’s dismissal from Northampton, see Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 341–374; Sweeney, “River Gods,” 413–457; and Tracy, *Jonathan Edwards, Pastor*, 171–183.

<sup>138</sup> JE, “A Farewell Sermon [. . .],” in *WJE*, 25:480,

<http://edwards.yale.edu/archive?path=aHR0cDovL2Vkd2FyZHMueWFsZS5lZHUvY2dpLWJpbi9uZXdwaglsby9nZXRxvYmplY3QucGw/Yy4yNDoyMS53amVv#note3>.

those who made designs against her family with such “bitterness and persecution.”<sup>139</sup> While Jonathan Edwards counseled his daughter to purge such negative ideas from her thoughts, he suffered privately, deeply humiliated and upset by his dismissal “from the people, between whom and me there was once the greatest union.”<sup>140</sup> Nevertheless, holding in her mind the image of entering exile after a mutinous defeat, Esther and her family moved further west to her father’s new parish in the frontier mission town of Stockbridge.

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<sup>139</sup> EEB, in *Esther Burr’s Journal*, ed. Rankin, 45.

<sup>140</sup> JE to McCulloch, July 6, 1750, in *WJE*, 16:358.

## Chapter Two:

### “The Angry Resentments of Heaven”: The French and Indian War

#### “The Late Encroachments of the French”: Missions and Politics on the Eve of War

By the late spring of 1754, the dark clouds of conflict were once again gathering over Britain’s American colonies. The French had recently finished construction of three strategic frontier forts in the Ohio Country, an ominous physical reminder of the danger of native peoples living near the Forks of the Allegheny, Monongahela, and Ohio Rivers—such as the Delawares and Shawnees—being enticed into the French orbit. That summer, representatives of the British colonies met with leaders of the Iroquois Confederacy, hoping to improve relations and frontier defense in light of the burgeoning French threat. The ultimately unsuccessful Albany Congress not only broadened the gap between the British and the Six Nations, but also fostered disunion among the colonies. At the same time, news came from the frontier of English, French, and Indian bloodshed, most notably the failings of Lieutenant Colonel George Washington at Jumonville’s Glen and Fort Necessity.<sup>1</sup>

Rumors of another war with France were especially threatening for British colonists on the frontier, including Jonathan Edwards who was now presiding over the Indian mission town of Stockbridge in western Massachusetts. Soon after the end of King George’s War, Edwards hoped to restrict church membership in Northampton to better reflect his view of the visible sainthood, which created a storm of controversy resulting in his removal from the Northampton pastorate. Upon moving forty miles west to Stockbridge, Edwards observed that “God in his

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<sup>1</sup> Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 22–32, 50–85.

providence seems now to be opening the door for the introducing the light of the gospel among these nations, more than ever [he] has done before.”<sup>2</sup> Edwards, like many missionaries in North America, excitedly saw this frontier project as a fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah, “a glimmer anticipating the dawn of the millennium, when every tribe and nation would see the light of God’s righteousness and dwell together in harmony.”<sup>3</sup> This fervent hope that the conversion of Native Americans would hasten the arrival of Christ’s kingdom on earth had only grown in Edwards’s heart since King George’s War—since 1748 he had been excitedly recording news of Indian conversions in his notebooks on the apocalypse and in 1749 he published *The Life of David Brainerd* which galvanized the bonds between missionary zeal and millennial expectation.<sup>4</sup> The importance of Indian missions in the ongoing battle between Protestantism and Catholicism were readily manifest in Stockbridge, visible to Edwards by the rapid construction of French forts and the vigorous work of French missionaries throughout North America. Constant fears among British colonists of being dragged away by Catholic Indians into captivity and the renewed threat of another all-out war with France infused the religious benefits of mission work with strategic practicality—two efforts inextricably linked in the cause of British Protestantism. From Edwards’s view in 1751, providence had provided the English with “the prospect of great things being done” for the cause of God’s kingdom, but, in the face of rising popish threats, “this present season is our *now or never*.”<sup>5</sup>

By 1755, however, the Mohawks and Mahicans of Stockbridge were becoming increasingly disaffected with English missionaries and politicians, so much so that by September of that year the Mohawks had announced their definitive departure from the Christian outpost. In

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<sup>2</sup> JE to Speaker Thomas Hubbard, August 31, 1751, in *WJE*, 16:399.

<sup>3</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 375.

<sup>4</sup> JE, “Events of an Hopeful Aspects on the State of Religion,” in *WJE*, 5:285–297; JE, *Life of David Brainerd*.

<sup>5</sup> JE to Hubbard, August 31, 1755, in *WJE*, 16:399.



addition to signaling Britain's increasingly precarious position amid shifting alliances, this departure also dampened Edwards's earlier optimism that "some things remarkable in divine providence" were unfolding at Stockbridge and his "hope that God has mercy in store for" the native peoples there.<sup>6</sup> For those in the Middle Colonies, like Aaron and Esther Edwards Burr in Newark, New Jersey, the actual threat of violence was still just a specter, but the fear of impending terror was all too real and itself became a cause of suffering. The early wartime experiences of the Edwards family powerfully underscore how deeply engrained their providentialism was, especially in a time of emerging violence, as well as how those experiences were conditioned by their place in the Atlantic world.

On New Years' Day in 1755, Aaron Burr stood before his Newark congregation with a commanding presence, despite his small, delicate stature, and painted a dark future: sailing from the east, French fleets and armies would "lay waste, and destroy our Coasts; while the *Savage Natives*, whose tender Mercies, are Cruelty, join them in falling on our *Frontiers*."<sup>7</sup> The biblical images of "*Men* slaughtered . . . *Wives* and *Daughters* delivered to the Lusts and Fury of a lawless *Soldiery*," and "helpless *Babes* dashed against the *Stones*," were all too easy to imagine for the Christians of the Middle Colonies.<sup>8</sup> In depicting the violent fate that seemed to await them and the Indian enemies who would bring it, Burr drew on the tropes of war well-worn over a century of religious and political discourse. This rhetorical move in the context of Burr's jeremiad was highly evocative for his audience. According to his wife, Esther Edwards Burr, the present assembly had not been "so affected [in] many years."<sup>9</sup> Burr's religious belief—like that

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<sup>6</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 345–74, 406–413; JE to William Hogg, July 13, 1751, in *WJE*, 16:392.

<sup>7</sup> For remarks on Burr's physical appearance and presence at the pulpit, see Charles Burr Todd, *A General History of the Burr Family with a Genealogical Record from 1193–1902* (New York, 1902), 49–50, HathiTrust; and William Livingston, *A Funeral Elogium, on the Reverend Mr. Aaron Burr, Late President of the College of New Jersey* (New York, 1757), America's Historical Imprints.

<sup>8</sup> AB, *Discourse Delivered at New-Ark*, 40.

<sup>9</sup> EEB to SP, January 1, 1755, in *Journal*, 76–77.

of his wife and father-in-law, Jonathan Edwards—led him to understand himself in a single, providential history. He actively engaged in retrospection and interpretation to understand God’s will, observing in the ancient past the providential destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah with “*the Vengeance of eternal Fire*” and God’s annihilation of Babylon for its “sensual and luxurious Indulgences.” Just as God used the Romans to exact “the Judgements of Heaven” on the ancient Jews when they fell into sin, so too were the French and Indians the worldly instruments of “the *angry Resentments of Heaven*.” With such a view of history, Burr found the reason behind the impending destruction of God’s chosen people to be clear enough: the British nation had become “greatly degenerated . . . and descend[ed] to the lowest Pitch of *Sensuality*.”<sup>10</sup> Viewing these events as being ultimately ordered by God, Burr was not bound by fatalism, but in fact vehemently opposed it. The entire purpose of this jeremiad was to convince his congregation of the serious danger the war posed to their bodies and souls and to awaken them to fulfil their earthly and spiritual duty.

At the same time, however, Burr balanced these well-deserved judgments of divine providence with British Protestants’ status as innocent victims at the hands of “*lawless*” and “*wicked*” Frenchmen, whose “every *Scheme* . . . will be attempted to weaken and destroy us.”<sup>11</sup> This rhetorical move of victimization was common in much of the military providential discourse deployed in King George’s War and long before. Through balancing the guilt and innocence of the British nation, Burr and other divines endorsed the war as godly violence—both just and holy—while maintaining the overruling will of providence. The encouragement for Christians to participate in these violent confrontations was therefore both a fulfilment of Christian duty—both in terms of regaining God’s favor and moving against God’s popish

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<sup>10</sup> AB, *Discourse Delivered at New-Ark*, 27, 23–24.

<sup>11</sup> AB, 15.

enemies—and a service to King and country, which was unduly subject to the designs of an evil and scheming empire.

The interconnectedness of this argument was further fortified by the association of the British nation as the bulwark of God’s true church, however disparaged it may have been, and the French and their Indian allies as the forces of the Antichrist. On this day of fasting and prayer, Burr’s congregation considered the rising imperial strife between European empires, strained political alliances among the American colonies and with their native allies, and, likely most importantly, the threats of frontier violence. The colonists in British America, including those sitting before Burr in Newark, were thoroughly aware of the political and military affairs of the European powers on both sides of the Atlantic. This awareness was part of their unified civic consciousness as subjects of the British Empire and religious identity as part of a transatlantic Protestant community. Most Britons would not have drawn such a dividing line between nation and religion, however, as they understood Englishness and Protestantism to be largely synonymous. The self-proclaimed identity of Burr, Edwards, and their congregations reflected the royal political culture that was, as Brendan McConville describes, “decidedly monarchical and imperial, Protestant and virulently anti-Catholic.”<sup>12</sup>

This character was significantly fostered by an emergent print culture that perpetuated many of the religio-political attacks against Catholic France on which Burr and other clergymen sermonized. In the same way that the efforts of the British empire forwarded the interests of Protestantism, the expanding influence of France in North America was largely built on their bonds with native peoples, strengthened through Catholicism, trade, and military alliances.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> McConville, *King’s Three Faces*, 7. Also see Kidd, ““Let Hell and Rome Do Their Worst””; and Stanwood, “Protestant Moment.”

<sup>13</sup> For more on the relationships between French and Indian peoples, especially forged through bonds of Catholicism, see Allan Greer, *Mohawk Saint: Catherine Tekakwitha and the Jesuits* (New York, NY: Oxford

Thus, the lay people of Newark recognized that the present moment and ominous future were both political and spiritual. Drawing on a biblical trope used frequently during previous wars, Burr warned that Catholic France was marching against them, the “*Watchmen on the Walls of God’s Jerusalem.*” With the familiar imagery and rhetoric of the Babylonian captivity, here from the prophet Ezekiel, Burr contrasted the special role of British Protestants in the kingdom of God with their current depravity in the context of a single providential timeline.<sup>14</sup>

Hoping for mercy, the congregation at Newark joined Christians across the entire presbytery in fasting and prayer. This was not the time for empty hope, however. Rejecting passivity, Burr called his congregation to heed “the Voice of divine Providence” and humble themselves, repent for their sins, and acknowledge the insufficiency of man in the face of their ultimate dependence on God. During King George’s War, Burr remembered, the British nation “cast off their Dependence upon. . . . *overruling Providence,*” and looked only to themselves for strength and safety—“Nothing is more provoking to God.”<sup>15</sup> Burr’s sole exception was the providential recognition which followed the capture of Louisbourg, which he mentioned only in a footnote of his printed sermon alongside a reference to Thomas Prince’s July 1745 sermon. The confident military providentialism which erupted after New England’s victory at Louisbourg—an affair in which Burr’s second cousin, Colonel Andrew Burr, participated—could not be ignored.<sup>16</sup> Other events interpreted as extraordinary providences at the time, however, such as

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University Press, 2006); Bronwen McShea, *Apostles of Empire: The Jesuits and New France* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2019); Brett Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance: Indigenous and Atlantic Slavery in New France* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); and Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>14</sup> AB, *Discourse Delivered at New-Ark*, 23; and Ez. 3, 33 (King James Version).

<sup>15</sup> AB, 35.

<sup>16</sup> For more on Col. Burr and his participation in the Siege of Louisbourg, see Todd, *Burr Family*, 34–43.

God's destruction of d'Anville's fleet and salvation of New England, did not factor into this historical jeremiad.

Though he never stated it explicitly, Burr's implication was unmistakable: their rejection of merciful providence during King George's War—both through their spiritual backsliding and the return of Louisbourg back to the French at the end of the war—was a cause of the vengeful darkness in the present moment. In a significant religious and historical reorientation, Burr did not relish in the special providences of the recent past as so many did during King George's War, but emphasized only the ungrateful and irreligious responses which followed these extraordinary dispensations. A more daunting gloom was falling on British America in 1755 than was seen during the prelude to the previous war with France—a fact which, in conjunction with a continuing decline in piety perceived by clergymen, as well as Burr's own millennial pessimism, occasioned a much darker reading of the providential past.

In a dramatic call to action, Burr commanded all the Christians of the British nation to zealously pursue the present war “in our own *Defence*, by all those *Means* that the Providence of God has put into our power” with humility and repentance in their hearts and their eyes cast toward heaven for strength and guidance.<sup>17</sup> The emphasis on an enthusiastic, yet *defensive*, position in the affairs of war underscores the emphasis of victimhood that runs through the discourse of godly violence. Burr's endorsement for taking up arms squared the ultimate power of providence with the necessity for human agency, fused spiritual and political interests, and asserted that the present war was both just and holy.

Furthermore, his religious vision for a united community of believers paralleled his desire for a politically unified British nation. Although the Plan of Union adopted by the Albany

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<sup>17</sup> AB, *Discourse Delivered at New-Ark*, 37.

Congress on the eve of war gave a glimmer of hope that the colonies could find some common cause, either for their own preservation or the expansion of empire, these expectations were dashed when most of the colonial legislatures swiftly rejected or ignored the plan from Albany. By the fall of 1754, it was clear the colonies were unwilling and incapable of making a collective and cooperative war effort on their own. As Fred Anderson pithily notes, “colonies, business interests, political factions, and individuals sought to realize some advantage in trade or land or influence or power” at Albany.<sup>18</sup> Aware of this lack of concern for collective safety, Burr called from the pulpit for colonial governors and assemblies to refocus their efforts: “All private and *selfish* Designs . . . should be swallowed up in a *disinterested* View to, and Concern for, the public Good” and “zealous . . . Service of their *King* and *Country*.”<sup>19</sup> Clearly, Burr’s distaste for the irreligion that was pervasive among his fellow believers went hand in hand with his disgust of the political disunity of his countrymen and the apathy that was especially pronounced in the Middle Colonies.

In his frustration, Burr articulated his dire, yet optimistic vision of providential history in hopes of forging British Protestant unity through political and spiritual energy and action. His closing remarks on that fast day were hotly political, deeply religious, and vehemently anti-Catholic and anti-French: “What! Sacrifice our precious Liberty, our Property, and what is more, our Religion” and “become the Dupes and Slaves of a *French* Tyrant?” Certainly not, he bellowed, for it is time to take up “all those *Means* that the Providence of God has put into our Power” and “call up all the *Briton* in us, every Spark of *English* Valour; cheerfully to offer our Purses, our Arms, and our Lives, to the Defense of our Country, our holy Religion, our excellent Constitution, and invaluable Liberties.” For life without these liberties and “the Enjoyment of the

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<sup>18</sup> Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 83, 80–87.

<sup>19</sup> AB, *Discourse Delivered at New-Ark*, 39; and Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 77–85.

glorious *Gospel* of Christ” is certainly not worth living. By these words and their own sense of providentialism, Newark Christians saw that earthly safety, the eternal salvation of every individual and the survival of the Protestant religion and British empire were hanging in a single balance guided by providence. Only when unified under God and country in a violent undertaking that was equally just and holy could Britons hope to defeat their political and spiritual adversaries and achieve inner and outer peace.<sup>20</sup>

Unlike her husband, Esther Edwards Burr believed spiritual reformation alone was the path to salvation—both from their worldly enemies and their own sinfulness. With the same hope that war would bring about a spiritual revitalization that her father held a decade prior, Burr hoped the quickening in Newark would take hold among all people and that their “sleepy souls” would “awaken” to the spiritual aspect of the present darkness and would become just as concerned about their “never dieing souls, as they are about their bodies and estates, when they imagine them in a little danger of being injured.” Three years before, in 1752, twenty-year-old Esther Edwards married Aaron Burr, sixteen years her senior. Despite the age difference, the two enjoyed a deeply loving and supportive union founded on their shared commitment to God.<sup>21</sup> In early January of 1755, however, Burr did not share her husband’s sense of public duty or the desire to pursue earthly warmongering. As the violence persisted, however, she would become far more concerned with the British war effort. Channeling Abraham’s plea to God for the salvation of Sodom, Burr prayed that heaven’s grace be dispensed in British America, crying “O Lord look in infinite mercy on us, and save this wicked land for the *Ten Righteous sake!*” The

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<sup>20</sup> AB, *Discourse Delivered at New-Ark*, 41.

<sup>21</sup> For Esther Edwards Burr’s account of her engagement and marriage, see EEB, *Esther Burr’s Journal*, ed., Rankin, 58–71; and Karlson and Crumpacker, “Introduction,” in *Journal*, 12–16.

words of her husband's powerful jeremiad remained with Esther Edwards Burr for several days as she continued to pray for the souls of her colonial brothers and sisters.<sup>22</sup>

Likely, one of the most frequent recipients of Esther Edwards Burr's prayers that January was her father, Jonathan Edwards, serving in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. Originally proposed by Massachusetts governor Jonathan Belcher in 1730 and established by 1739, the missionary village of Stockbridge centered around several hundred Mahican Indians (also commonly referred to as Housatonic or Stockbridge Indians). John Sargeant served as the first missionary pastor, aided by Timothy Woodbridge, the schoolmaster for the Hollis School, a school for Indian boys named after the wealthy English patron the Reverend Isaac Hollis. Several years before the incorporation of Stockbridge, Ephraim Williams, brother of the family patriarch William Williams, moved to the frontier town and quickly became a primary political force. Williams's connection to the mission town was galvanized by the marriage of his seventeen-year-old daughter, Abigail, to Sargeant in 1739. This genteel familial bond was offset, however, by a bitter rivalry between Williams and Woodbridge, the origins of which remain unknown.

After Sargeant's death in 1749, however, the Williams-Woodbridge conflict opened wide when the schoolmaster nominated Jonathan Edwards as the town's next missionary pastor. Williams, certainly aware of the animosity between his family and their Northampton cousin and personally opposed to his anti-Stoddarian leanings, sought the aid of his influential kin, including Colonel Israel Williams, in opposing Edwards's move to Stockbridge. Williams was eventually overpowered by the other white families of the mission town, however.<sup>23</sup> This animosity was readily visible to the Edwards family upon their arrival. Esther Edwards, still single at the age of

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<sup>22</sup> EEB to SP, January 1, 1755, in *Journal*, 76–77. See Gen. 18:16–33 for the account of Abraham pleading for Sodom, which God agreed to save if ten righteous people could be found there.

<sup>23</sup> Sweeney, "River Gods," 457–481.



eighteen, remarked that “even Stockbridge has my honored father’s enemies. Not Indians, that lurk in the wilderness and waylay the unsuspecting victim. . . . but the scattered remnants of that bitter company, who moved my father from Northampton.”<sup>24</sup> For the time being, the threats posed by Jonathan Edwards’s colonial enemies remained greater than those of any Indians.

Despite the political machinations which conditioned Edwards’s arrival to Stockbridge, the union of the temporal and the eternal was powerfully visible to him there. Due to its geographical position on the frontier and the Indian mission and boarding school established there, Stockbridge held geopolitical and spiritual significance for the empire of British Protestantism. Edwards served a critical role in Indian affairs while there and quickly developed a keen sense for political, diplomatic, and military matters. Though originally established to administer to the Mahicans (Housatonics), Stockbridge’s expanding influence drew the interest of the Mohawks, one of the member tribes of the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy and a much-needed ally for the English interest. Several months after Edwards’s arrival, the Mohawks agreed to settle in New England and send their young boys to the Hollis School. Even then, in the fall of 1751, another war with France appeared on the horizon and the English were in desperate need of establishing stronger alliances with native peoples. Later that fall Edwards reported to Thomas Hubbard, Speaker of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, with credible information from the Mohawks that the French were fast succeeding in their “endeavors to establish their interest among all the Indian nations in North America, and to alienate them from the British interest.” Edwards argued that the Stockbridge project provided the best hope “that divine providence hath left us” in restoring and strengthening relations with native peoples.<sup>25</sup> He clearly believed, however, that any political dealings were inextricable from his

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<sup>24</sup> EEB, January 27, 1752, in *Esther Burr’s Journal*, ed. Rankin, 51.

<sup>25</sup> JE to Hubbard, August 31, 1751, in *WJE*, 16:400, 401.

work as a servant of God: “If we regard only our temporal interest and safety, without any respect to the enlargement of Christ’s kingdom, it certainly greatly concerns us to do our utmost to propagate the Protestant religion among the Indians.”<sup>26</sup>

For the next several years, Edwards served in a variety of capacities: minister to English and Indian congregations, overseer of the Hollis School, leading theologian in the Atlantic evangelical community, ad hoc civil servant, and husband, father, and friend. His bonds with Prince and his old protégé and new son-in-law Aaron Burr continued, the three sometimes gathering all together. While Burr and Edwards were visiting Boston, Esther Edwards Burr sat in Newark and imagined what Sarah Prince must have been witnessing: “You all set in the Middleroom, *Father* has the *talk*, and Mr Burr has the *Laugh*, Mr Prince gets room to stick in a word once and a while.”<sup>27</sup> This rare glimpse into the personalities of these spiritual leaders in such a relaxed and informal state cuts against Edwards’s tactless and socially-unaware reputation and Burr’s stern and pessimistic presence at the pulpit. These relationships of camaraderie and brotherly love created spaces for these men to engage with and escape from the temporal and spiritual suffering wrought by the providentially-ordered war which consumed their consciousness. In a world of political machinations, church factionalism, and increasing sinfulness, these bonds of trust and like-minded spirituality were certainly welcomed. Furthermore, Esther’s clear view of such a scene highlights her intimate familiarity with the casual and playful nuances of her family and closest friends. The social, emotional, and spiritual importance of these relationships, bound in blood and faith, provided an immense amount of comfort in the most trying of times. Moreover, such closeness freed them of reservations, able to share their truest hopes and fears for the present world and the world to come.

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<sup>26</sup> JE to Joseph Paice, February 24, 1751/2, in *WJE*, 16:375.

<sup>27</sup> EEB to SP, October 13, 1754, in *Journal*, 54.

During the Williams family’s campaign to block Edwards from taking Sargeant’s mantle at Stockbridge, Ephraim Williams, Jr., wrote to Jonathan Ashely outlining his opposition to Edwards’s arrival. In addition to Edwards being “not sociable” and holding “a doctrine deeply tinged with that of the Romish church,” Williams balked “that a head so full of divinity should be so empty of politics.”<sup>28</sup> Quickly, however, Edwards proved to be an astute political mind. From Stockbridge, he maintained robust lines of communication with provincial officials, military personnel, and a network of Atlantic evangelicals through which he provided updates on political, military, educational, and spiritual matters—often all at once and marked by shrewd analysis, opinion, and suggestion. Unfortunately for Edwards, these skills and relationships were sharpened by years of conflict. The Edwards-Williams crisis continued in Stockbridge, fueled by the Dwight family’s move from Edwards’s camp into that of his opponents. Brigadier General Joseph Dwight solidified this realignment with his marriage to Abigail Williams Sargeant, the widow of John Sargeant, a powerful and rising matriarch of the Williams clan, and a previous paramour of Aaron Burr. At the same time, the Stockbridge Mohawks were increasingly disillusioned with English policies, and within several years the Indian mission and boarding school had fallen into abject failure. In February 1754, the Mohawks announced their intention to leave Stockbridge for good—a move which Dwight quickly blamed on their dissatisfaction with Edwards. Recounting the downward spiral at Stockbridge to his friend Prince, who served as his political and ecclesiastical envoy in Boston, Edwards implored Prince to pray that he may be granted “divine assistance” with his present tribulations.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ephraim Williams Jr. to Jonathan Ashley, May 2, 1751, in *Colonel Ephraim Williams: A Documentary Life*, ed. Wyllis E. Wright (Pittsfield, MA: Berkshire County Historical Society, 1970), 61–62.

<sup>29</sup> JE to TP, May 10, 1754, in *WJE*, 16:643. Edwards’s early years at Stockbridge are closely detailed in Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 375–413. For Abigail Williams’s relationship with Aaron Burr, see Sweeney, “River Gods,” 472.

Since King George's War, Edwards had become increasingly entangled in the politics and military affairs of the colony and the empire. As a critical player in civic life and Indian affairs while at Stockbridge, he became familiar with some of the most prominent figures in the British war effort on the continent. One of the most famous patrons of the Stockbridge mission was Sir William Pepperrell, the hero of Louisbourg and a devout evangelical, with whom Edwards shared a supportive friendship and correspondence in the years following King George's War.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps one of the minister's strangest bedfellows, however, was Colonel William Johnson, a great Indian trader in the Mohawk Valley and, after 1755, the Superintendent of Northern Indian affairs. Arguably the most powerful Englishman in North American Indian diplomacy, Johnson had supported and promoted the Stockbridge school on political and diplomatic grounds since Edwards's arrival on the frontier. Edwards found Johnson to be a reliable source of information regarding Indian affairs, especially in light of his marriage to a Mohawk woman and immersion in that culture.<sup>31</sup> Edwards had little ill to say of Johnson, but found it curious that providence was working through him to further the mission of the Hollis School since, in Edwards's assessment, the colonel was "a man of not much religion."<sup>32</sup> Johnson also maintained a working relationship with Gideon Hawley, one of Edwards's protégés and an Indian missionary in Stockbridge and the Six Nations Iroquois town of Onaquaga (in upstate New York), as well as a mentor of Edwards's son, Jonathan, Jr.. On occasion, Hawley served as a key interpreter and informant for Johnson. Moreover, in the precarious winter of 1756, the colonel opened his home at Fort Johnson to Hawley and the young Edwards as a place of safety.

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<sup>30</sup> See, for example, JE to Sir William Pepperrell, November 28, 1751, in *WJE*, 16:406–414; and JE to Lady Mary Pepperrell, November 28, 1751, in *WJE*, 16:414–419.

<sup>31</sup> For general biographies of Johnson, see Milton W. Hamilton, *Sir William Johnson, Colonial American, 1715–1763* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1976); James Thomas Flexner, *Mohawk Baronet: A Biography of Sir William Johnson* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1989); and Fintan O'Toole, *White Savage: William Johnson and the Invention of America* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015).

<sup>32</sup> JE to Hubbard, August 31, 1751, in *WJE*, 16:401.

Despite any perceived spiritual inadequacies, Edwards certainly had reason to trust Johnson as an ally.<sup>33</sup>

During this time, Edwards also developed a rapport with the Governor of Massachusetts, William Shirley, who later became Major General Edward Braddock's successor as commander-in-chief of the British forces in North America. Despite the bitter rivalry between Shirley and Johnson, Edwards approached his relationship with the governor pragmatically, rather than on the basis of the hostile feud. In early September 1755, only days before Johnson's Pyrrhic victory at Battle of Lake George in upstate New York, Edwards received news that the Connecticut troops defending Stockbridge were to be withdrawn. This was likely the doing of Colonel Israel Williams, Edwards's cousin and fierce rival, who belittled the importance of Stockbridge and ridiculed Edwards's requests for military protection of the frontier town. As power brokers in the military establishment during King George's War, Williams and his uncle/brother-in-law, Colonel John Stoddard, had consolidated the power of the Williams family in Stockbridge via Ephraim Williams, and in other frontier towns in western Massachusetts. Despite his broad religious, political, and social influence, Edwards was still limited by the hegemony of the "River Gods," as historians have called them, as he was a decade prior in Northampton.<sup>34</sup> The departure of Connecticut troops magnified the vulnerability of Stockbridge. Shortly before that time, Shirley had solicited thirty Stockbridge Indians to bolster his own ranks, which Johnson later depleted for his purposes during the northern campaigns of 1755.<sup>35</sup> Much to the relief of Stockbridge, however, Shirley promised "that a sufficient number of English soldiers" should remain to defend the town. Aware of these complex troop movements, issues of

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<sup>33</sup> JE to the Reverend William McCulloch, April 10, 1756, in *WJE*, 16:684-687; and Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 421-423.

<sup>34</sup> Sweeney, "River Gods," 334-335.

<sup>35</sup> William Shirley to Sir Thomas Robinson, December 2, 1755, in *William Shirley Correspondence*, 2:355.

manpower, the fraught relationship between Johnson and Shirley, and Shirley's political and military clout, Edwards leveraged the governor-general's commitment to defend Stockbridge in his favor. Williams, however, refused to command Stockbridge's defensive troops, claiming he was not properly consulted. Stockbridge did not receive adequate protection until the following March when Shirley sharply directed Williams to raise and send "a Sufficient Number of Soldiers . . . for the Protection and Defense of the Inhabitants of" Stockbridge—paid for by Connecticut, not Edwards and the frontier colonists. Seeming to rebuke the obstinate Williams and emphasize the importance of Stockbridge, Shirley commanded that he "fully . . . represent the Necessity of this Measure as it will afford equal Protection to the Frontiers of that Colony as to those of this Province."<sup>36</sup> Generally, then, Edwards's relationships with Johnson, Shirley, and other political and military leaders were shaped more by pragmatism than loyalty.<sup>37</sup>

His ultimate concern during the interwar years and the first moments of war, however, was for the furtherance of God's kingdom. During the his clash with Williams over the town's defense, for instance, Edwards wrote to Thomas Prince with an update on the Indian mission school. He sadly carried "no great expectation of" acquiring any more Mohawk students, "so long as the war continues." Although the school's patron Isaac Hollis wanted Edwards to travel to New York and New Jersey to provide updates on the school and receive funding, the tenuous safety of Stockbridge, compounded with an illness contacted by two of the Edwards children, made any intercolonial travel for the sake the mission unlikely. Furthermore, soon after his dismissal from Northampton, his correspondence with Scotland slowed considerably. This was, in Edwards's assessment, due to "the failing of such agreeable matter for correspondence as we

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<sup>36</sup> William Shirley to Israel Williams, March 17, 1756, in *William Shirley Correspondence*, 2:422–423.

<sup>37</sup> For more on this episode, see JE to the Reverend Thomas Foxcroft, June 3, 1755, in *WJE*, 16:667–669; JE to Col. Israel Williams, September 4, 1755, in *WJE*, 16:669–671; and JE to Col. Israel Williams, September 5, 1755, in *WJE*, 16:671–672. Also see Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 110.

had some years ago, when religion was flourishing in Scotland and America, and we had joyful information to give each other of things pertaining to the city of God.” Indeed, the Concert of Prayer in the colonies had all but vanished, as had the providential fodder of King George’s War. The advent of the French and Indian War, however, would revitalize these transatlantic bonds. Although he was in low spirits, he still expressed his deep love and affection to his brothers in Scotland and to Prince, and Prince’s daughter, Sarah, signaling the comfort he found in his spiritual kin.<sup>38</sup>

In July 1754, several violent clashes on the frontier between British, French, and Indians stressed an already-tenuous geopolitical balance even further and reified fears of another full-scale war in North America. After George Washington’s disastrous attempt to weaken the French foothold in the Forks of Ohio Country, which resulted in the gruesome death of the French emissary Ensign Joseph Coulon de Villiers Jumonville at the hands of Tanaghrisson, the Half-King, and the destruction of the British Fort Necessity, all sides had the others’ blood on their hands.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, Edwards developed “the longest and most tedious sickness” he had ever experienced, lasting nearly seven months. As he lay wasting away to that of “a skeleton,” unable to minister to the Englishmen and Indians of Stockbridge or keep up regular correspondence with family and friends, news of the war flew through the frontier village.<sup>40</sup> Believing an Indian attack could come at any moment, soldiers were sent to defend Stockbridge and to construct a makeshift garrison around Edwards’s home. By February, the frontier community only had enough supplies to support four soldiers, most of whom Edwards boarded in his own home.<sup>41</sup> With one of the most well-worn religious idioms of wartime, Edwards

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<sup>38</sup> JE to TP, September 15, 1755, in *WJE*, 16:672; and JE to McCulloch, July 6, 1750, in *WJE*, 16:357.

<sup>39</sup> Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 50–73.

<sup>40</sup> JE to the Reverend John Erskine, April 15, 1755, in *WJE*, 16:662.

<sup>41</sup> JE to Brig. Joseph Dwight, February 26, 1755, in *WJE*, 16:657–658.

surmised that the “dark cloud [that] seems to hang over us” was a providential message, an ordering of events through which God was punishing, guiding, and speaking to His followers. Likewise, what was to come lay with the Lord alone. Writing to the evangelical community in Scotland, Edwards requested “the prayers of all our friends, and all friends to the Protestant interest. . . . What will become of us in the struggles that are coming on, God only knows.”<sup>42</sup>

In Newark, the Burrs continued to dwell on “the danger of being swallowed up by [their] popish enemies” throughout January 1755. On a trip to New York to deal with affairs of the presbytery, Aaron Burr counseled several prominent evangelicals about their wartime concerns. During one visit, Burr heard Eunice Polk Cumming pressure her husband, Alexander, to move the family to Boston where she thought they would be far safer. Her husband, however, did not share these fears. According to Esther Edwards Burr, who detailed her husband’s visits to Sarah Prince, Alexander Cumming did not “care *two pence* for all the french” and told his wife there was no danger at all and New York was as safe as anywhere. Burr’s and Prince’s interest with the wartime concerns of the Cummings stemmed not only from their intense fascination with current political, religious, and social events, but also from the cordial but strained relationship they both shared with the couple. Alexander Cumming had previously been one of Sarah Prince’s suitors, a fact his jealous wife Eunice had difficulty forgetting. While he was with the Cummings, it is likely that Aaron Burr inquired about Mr. Cumming’s recent departure from his post as associate pastor at the First Presbyterian Church of New York, where he and Ebenezer Pemberton had both resigned over theological differences with the congregation. Burr was involved in this crisis to the extent that he counseled his student and friend Joseph Bellamy to fill the empty post in New York, a move which Esther opposed. From his clerical vantage point,

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<sup>42</sup> JE to Erskine, April 15, 1755, in *WJE*, 16:665.



Cumming would have at least considered the work of providence in the political and military goings on, though he was not convinced of any earthly danger. It is easy to imagine Aaron Burr's distaste for Mr. Cumming's casual view of their place in the war. Perhaps, in an effort to persuade Cumming to take action or to console his wife, Burr touted his providential view of the war, arguing the Middle Colonies were actually in danger and they had a spiritual duty to renew their piety and a civic responsibility to fight for their liberty and their religion.<sup>43</sup>

While in New York, Burr also visited Elizabeth Anderson Breeze, the daughter of James Anderson, who had served as the first minister of New York's First Presbyterian Church. Breeze was particularly concerned with the spiritual implications of the war, inquiring of Burr if the witnesses had already been slain. Her reference to this eschatological marker in Revelation 11—a time when the Antichrist would establish his reign and God's church would suffer terrible persecutions and suffering—led to a discussion of these things through Breeze's and Burr's shared providential worldview and with a degree of theological refinement. In relaying this to Prince, Mrs. Burr scoffed at Breeze's alarms: "If [the witnesses] are not [yet slain] I suppose she thinks she shall *go to it*."<sup>44</sup> Aaron Burr, however, did not dismiss the troubled woman's worries. Rather, he calmed her anxieties about the looming state of the war and provided spiritual comfort about the return of Christ. Remarkably, Burr put aside his own pessimistic eschatology in a pastoral attempt to assuage her fears. Rather than explain that he truly believed the church's darkest suffering was yet to come, he shared with her Jonathan Edwards's view that these events had already come to pass centuries earlier. Burr's decision here critically signals the importance

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<sup>43</sup> EEB to SP, January 22, 1755, in *Journal*, 83. For more on the Cummings and their relationships with the Burrs and Sarah Prince, see EEB, *Journal*, 46n5, 64n30.

<sup>44</sup> EEB to SP, January 22, 1755, in *Journal*, 83. For personal details of Abigail Anderson Breeze, see EEB, *Journal*, 75n16. For the differences between Burr's and Edwards's eschatological timeline, and specifically regarding the slaying of witnesses, see Hatch, *Sacred Cause of Liberty*, 34; and Hatch, "Origins of Civil Millennialism," 415–416.

of one's present circumstances in shaping the ways in which they discussed God's work in the world. While Burr's published sermons reflect a military providentialism and eschatology designed to reform and activate, in this instance of pastoral care he decided to use the prospects of God's providential plan to console Breeze and ameliorate her suffering. His time in New York demonstrates that influential situations were not only limited to one's proximity to violence or the state of military affairs, but also to something as limited as a certain personal interaction.

Upon hearing of her husband's conversations of the encroaching war, Esther Edwards Burr promptly shared them with Sally, as Sarah Prince was affectionately known by family and close friends—excluding Jonathan Edwards, who, as Esther wrote at the age of twelve, “does not like to hear her nick-named.”<sup>45</sup> Burr and Prince discussed these New Yorkers' beliefs and concerns in their epistolary amalgamation of social gossip, public discourse, and spiritual meditation. Not only were these women of the same social circle, but also of a similar political mind and spiritual heart; this closeness facilitated thoughtful, if playful, discussion of the temporal and eternal concerns of the Cumming and Breeze families. The fact that Burr recounted only these stories of her husband's trip to New York also speaks to the impact of the war and its implications on the minds of many throughout British North America.

Aaron Burr's role as influential theologian and President of the College of New Jersey, and Esther Edwards Burr's association with her husband and father, as well as her own charm and erudition, established the couple as active and prominent actors in social and political circles in the Middle Colonies and New England. Within this milieu, they forged close friendships with people of substantial civic and religious authority in the British Atlantic, such as the Ogdens, a large family of considerable influence in Newark and nearby Elizabethtown. This proximity to

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<sup>45</sup> EEB, May 14, 1744, in *Esther Burr's Journal*, ed. Rankin, 30.

politics gave a distinct shape to the social circle's view of the war. On the evening of January 27, the Burrs hosted some of the Ogden women, including the wives of Colonel Josiah Ogden and one of the Justices Ogden, for "a very pleasant time." They may have discussed Mr. Burr's recent trip to New York, news of the presbytery's search for a new pastor to replace him once his duties with the college become too demanding, and their thoughts on the sermon heard in Newark the day before on the sorry state of the community's young people, for which Esther Edwards Burr saw "the *vengeance of Heaven* in a very remarkable and distinguishing manner."<sup>46</sup>

The Burrs also shared a strong personal friendship with Jonathan Belcher, the governor of New Jersey, and his wife, Mary Louisa Teal Belcher. Governor Belcher, who had previously served as the provincial governor of Massachusetts from 1730 to 1741, was a devout evangelical, a great supporter of George Whitefield, a member of Thomas Prince's Old South Church in Boston, an early and fervent supporter of the College of New Jersey, and a close friend and political ally of the Stoddard-Edwards clan. By the late 1740s, as George M. Marsden observes, although the prospects of a lasting evangelical political influence in New England had faded with the revivals of the 1730s, "Belcher's [gubernatorial] appointment consolidated the growing power of New Englanders," including Burr, in the Middle Colonies.<sup>47</sup> This consolidation of political and religious power was marked by an inter-confessional unity, with Edwards, Prince, and Belcher representing Puritan Congregationalism (the hegemonic theology in New England) and Burr serving as a leader among Presbyterians (the most articulate and published theologians in the Middle Colonies and elsewhere). The starkest differences between Congregationalism and

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<sup>46</sup> EEB to SP, January 27, 1755, in *Journal*, 85. Mary Banks Ogden was the wife of Colonel Ogden. Burr's reference to "Justis Ogdens Wife," is either to Hannah Sayer Ogden, wife of the notable Newark lawyer and judge John Ogden, or to Elizabeth Charlotte Thébaud Ogden, wife of Judge Uzal Ogden. EEB to SP, January 29, 1755, in *Journal*, 85.

<sup>47</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 339. Also see pages 145–149 and 205.

Presbyterianism was in their ecclesiastical structure, rather than theology, with the latter emphasizing the hierarchical church government which the former firmly rejected.

Theologically, colonial Presbyterians were committed to the traditional Calvinism expressed in the Westminster Confession of the seventeenth century; a position which differentiated them from their Scottish and Irish brethren and kept them closer to the Puritan Congregationalists of New England. Moreover, Burr was among the New Side faction of his confession—the pro-revival proponents of Reformed theology which emerged from the Presbyterian schism in 1741 and were aligned with New England’s New Lights. The College of New Jersey, which was founded in response to the Old Light/Side control of Harvard and Yale, further galvanized this bond between the “New” factions of each Reformed tradition.<sup>48</sup>

Both Presbyterianism and Congregationalism, like all of formal colonial religion, maintained the sovereignty and providence of God at their theological center. Edwards, sharing the spiritual and political good news of Belcher’s appointment with his Scottish correspondents, was greatly encouraged that within Belcher’s first few months there was already a waning of “vice and open profaneness . . . among the great men, and virtue and religion [were becoming] more credible.”<sup>49</sup> Privately, Belcher prayed with Edwards shortly after his rising to the new governorship “for a measure of divine grace and wisdom; that so [he] may be honored in being an instrument of advancing the kingdom of the blessed Jesus in this world.”<sup>50</sup> Belcher’s providentialism not only guided him to believe God alone was the source of his wisdom and strength, but so too that the Lord “will take vengeance on his adversaries, and reserveth wrath for his enemies!”<sup>51</sup> On this common providentialism and a shared commitment to glory of Zion

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<sup>48</sup> Noll, *America’s God*, 19–30.

<sup>49</sup> JE to the Reverend John Erskine, October 14, 1748, in *WJE*, 16:261.

<sup>50</sup> Jonathan Belcher to JE, February 5, 1748, in JE to Erskine, October 14, 1748, in *WJE*, 16:262.

<sup>51</sup> Jonathan Belcher to JE, May 31, 1748, in JE to Erskine, October 14, 1748, in *WJE*, 16:263.

through means religious and political, Jonathan Belcher became a close friend and strong ally with Edwards, Burr, Prince, and the Scottish evangelicals.

As the Burrs discussed the broader contours of the emergent war within their elite political and religious circles, their conversation was shaped by the countless rumors and few pieces of reliable news that swirled through the wartime British Atlantic. On January 29, 1755, two days after the Ogdens' visit in Newark, Esther Edwards Burr updated Prince about certain political developments and expressed particular interest in the New England government's "secret" plans for a military campaign—likely Governor Shirley's expedition to capture Fort Niagara that he would lead that summer: "Be it where it will, my desire and fervent prayer is the Lord go with them and prosper them. It does me good to hear any are engaged for their Country and the Religion we profess." Like the other members of her family, Burr's religion was the foundation on which her every experience was built, and thus her physical and spiritual concerns for the war—and understanding of an earthly and eternal providence—were inextricably connected. In her intimate writings to Prince, Burr revealed the breadth and depth of her understanding of the workings of providence in the world. As the threatening murmurings of war reified into news of serious military affairs in the early months of 1755, Esther's concerns came to encompass geopolitical matters as well. Only several weeks prior, she hoped for spiritual awakening and reform as a means of protection from providential judgments. Now she spoke to Prince with joy about New Englanders moving against the threatening forces of Catholic France and condemned the state of things in the Middle Colonies: "As for US here we act as if their was never such a thing to be as *War*. Newyork have but two guns that can be fired. . . . Did you ever hear the like!" Like her husband, Esther was now aggravated with the apathy of the Middle Colonies' provincial governments in the face of a threatening war. Her friendship with Prince, a

politically and spiritually compatible Bostonian, was all the more meaningful for Burr amidst the dearth of like-minded neighbors with which to vent her partisan frustrations.<sup>52</sup>

Burr's and Prince's fascination with the politics of the British Atlantic and its spiritual implication reflected their standing in colonial society. Their lives were filled with rigorous spiritual, political, and intellectual discourse, all of which certainly shaped their perspective of and fascination with the war at hand. This discourse, however, had its limits. Burr wanted herself and all women to be recognized as the "spiritual and intellectual equals of men," and occasionally pushed the bounds of her social status to assert as much. Once, she scoffed at the male assumption that women have no need concerning themselves with public affairs, though her husband was "not one of the sort": "if I was convinced that our great men did act as they really thought was for the Glory of God and the good of the Country it would go a great ways to make me easy." When in private among Prince, her father, her husband, and other close friends, Esther felt free to explore such ideas.<sup>53</sup>

On the first Sabbath of February 1755, Esther Edwards Burr was remarkably moved by two sermons on Deuteronomy 21:18-21, which commanded the holy community to stone the "stubborn and rebellious son" to death and purge themselves of the evil among them.<sup>54</sup> "Tis true," Burr lamented, "Never did our young people get to such a high of wickedness as now . . . Drunkenness and uncleanness prevail abundantly. O my dear I am sick of this World!"<sup>55</sup> From her pious perspective, the reason for the ongoing punishment from heaven was abundantly clear. Burr's frustration strikingly reflects that of her father and Thomas Prince during King George's War, as well as of her husband, more recently. They, too, positioned the British nation as

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<sup>52</sup> EEB to SP, January 27, 1755, in *Journal*, 86.

<sup>53</sup> EEB to SP, December 20, 1755, in *Journal*, 178; and Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 420.

<sup>54</sup> Deut. 21:18 (King James Version).

<sup>55</sup> EEB to SP, February 2, 1755, in *Journal*, 87.

deserving subjects of God's punishing arm and as innocent victims against dangerous worldly enemies. Burr fashioned herself a martyr from the beginning, expressing her steadfastness to the omnipotent will of God but subject to the violence carried out by her enemies. Her willingness to "burn at the stake" held a powerfully historical meaning, calling back to the French persecution of Protestant Britons in Europe—a primary touchstone in the British identity constructed around anti-poper. Perhaps even more importantly for Burr was this image's connection to the violent tortures to which Indians put their captives; stories of which had coursed through personal tales of captivity told among the Edwardses about the 1704 Deerfield attack.<sup>56</sup> Burr's present repulsion with the irreligious—who seemed especially numerous in her own community of Newark—also made her friendship with Prince all the more valuable. Living in the midst of people who did not seem to share her sense of the impending war or her abhorrence of rampant spiritual bankruptcy, Burr found in Prince a truly kindred spirit with whom she could speak most freely.

While her epistolary journal to Prince was filled with spiritual concerns during the first weeks of 1755, Burr's mind was certainly drawn to more real and personal matters as well, most notably her family living northward on the frontier. In Stockbridge, her father lay weakened by persistent fever. While it is unclear if he was aware of the day of fasting in the Middle Colonies, Edwards was certainly cognizant of the imminent danger of which Aaron Burr, a close friend, mentee, and son-in-law, sermonized: "A dark cloud seems to hang over us; we need the prayers of all our friends . . . Stockbridge is a place much exposed, and what will become of us in the struggles that are coming on, God only knows."<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> EEB to SP, January 1, 1755, in *Journal*, 76.

<sup>57</sup> JE to Erskine, April 15, 1755, in *WJE*, 16:665.

## **“Vengeance That the Lord Has Sent”: Providentialism and Decisive Losses**

In the early spring of 1755, the British command was planning its most intensive campaign on the continent to date. This effort was led by Major General Edward Braddock, the British commander-in-chief in North America and the figure upon whom Britons on both sides of the Atlantic had placed a great deal of hope. Braddock and his forces, en route to Fort St. Frédéric at Crown Point during the northern expeditions of that year, were met with death and devastation as they approached Fort Duquesne along the banks of the Monongahela River. This ruinous loss on July 9 and Braddock’s death from a musket ball wound several days later left the frontier of the Middle Colonies virtually defenseless and threw most of British America into a panic. The French leveraged this victory, ultimately made possible by their Indian allies, to shift native alliances evermore in their favor. The terror of war would only continue that summer. In early September, news of another devastating loss arrived in the desperate and prone town of Stockbridge from about one hundred miles away at Lac St. Sacrement—renamed Lake George after Johnson’s victory over French defenders, though such a declaration was probably premature. Here, French and Canadian Indian forces ambushed the British provincials and their Mohawk allies, thwarting the ambitious push toward Crown Point. Braddock’s defeat and the Battle of Lake George each occasioned Jonathan Edwards, Esther Edwards Burr, and Aaron Burr to engage in serious providential interpretation and reaction. As the military situation darkened, so shifted their understanding of God’s view of British Protestantism. Significantly, the reverends Edwards and Burr also took these military losses as opportunities to unpack their theological view of violence, warfare, and providence.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 86–114; Steele, *Betrayals*, 28–56; and Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 414–420.



After being granted approval by the ministers of Whitehall the previous December, Braddock prepared a sweeping campaign led by himself, his second-in-command William Shirley, and William Johnson. The ambitious design was to lead provincial and native troops on three fronts, destroying French outposts on the way to an ultimate convergence on Fort St. Frédéric, a strategic stronghold centrally positioned along the Lake Champlain–Hudson corridor.<sup>59</sup> As Braddock prepared for war, evangelical lines of communication hummed with a tempered optimism.<sup>60</sup> “We are all in a commotion from one end of the British America to the other,” Edwards reported to the Scottish evangelical leader John Erskine, with whom he kept up regular contact despite the falling off of the Concert of Prayer. Edwards did not show any great excitement to Erskine, but rather accepted the reality of war with solemn anticipation. His hope for British military success was tempered by recent “embarrassments” in public affairs, specifically “the disunited state of several governments” displayed at Albany. He did not revel in the fact that war was upon them, but he clearly understood that British military success was directly related to the success and safety of the Stockbridge community and its mission work.<sup>61</sup> In early July, the Burrs received news from New York about Colonel Robert Monckton’s successful capture of French forts Beauséjour and Gaspereau in Nova Scotia, and Esther found reason to rejoice: “O how good is God to an unthankfull, wicked, and ungreatfull people!” Despite these victories, the Burrs still looked in despair upon the spiritual state of the land.<sup>62</sup>

As they would soon learn, however, the Nova Scotia expeditions of the early summer, designed and promoted by Shirley, would be the only bright spot of 1755. Ambitious but

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<sup>59</sup> Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 88.

<sup>60</sup> For examples of Esther Edwards Burr’s perspective on the war at this time, see EEB to SP, March 3, 1755, in *Journal*, 96; and EEB to SP, March 12, 1755, in *Journal*, 98–99.

<sup>61</sup> JE to Erskine, April 15, 1755, in *WJE*, 16:665.

<sup>62</sup> EEB to SP, July 9, 1755, in *Journal*, 132.

ignorant, Braddock and London's administrators failed to account for many of the fault lines in the aggressive expedition to Fort St. Frédéric, situated at Crown Point on the southwestern bank of Lake Champlain. Competition for men and supplies between the several provincial armies raised costs and slowed preparations; extremely treacherous and varied geography which required infrastructure, experience, and a great deal of time to travel went completely unaccounted for; and the relatively inexperienced Shirley and Johnson were greatly affected by the fierce political and personal competition between them, aggravated by their efforts to recruit English and Indian patrons, allies, and soldiers. By the end of the summer campaign season, Braddock lay dead; Johnson, halted after the Battle of Lake George that September, was wounded and in no position to move against Fort St. Frédéric; and Shirley, who was never able to leave New York, succeeded Braddock as commander-in-chief and was facing a bleak winter.<sup>63</sup>

As the expedition to take Fort St. Frédéric got underway in July, however, Edwards took to the pulpit to sanctify the affair. Like he had a decade earlier in Northampton, Edwards encouraged his English congregants in Stockbridge to go to war in the name of God, for only then could they hope to find victory. To Edwards, fighting in the name of God implied that God "allows us to go to war & calls us to it in Providence." Again, his military providentialism and conclusion of godly violence went hand in hand. He found further encouragement of this holy sanction by looking to their enemies, the Catholic French, the very people whom "God hates." Edwards gave his Stockbridge parishoners a similar commandment to that which Burr delivered in January: repent for your sins and place your ultimate trust in God, not in men. Whereas Burr's graphic and condemnatory fast day jeremiad forwarded an overtly political tone, Edwards maintained his focus on faith and providence, indicating the importance of their different

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<sup>63</sup> Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 86–123.

situations. Serving in the Middle Colonies, which were generally apathetic toward a concerted colonial war effort due to their religiously and ethnically diverse population and the disinterested, isolationist provincial governments, Burr strained to energize his congregation to recognize a new danger and to elevate themselves past spiritual sinfulness and political disunity. Edwards, on the other hand, who probably would not hear of Braddock's defeat until several days after this sermon, sought to provide comfort and hope to a frontier community in the throes of war. "Put away all sin," Edwards charged, and "be much in Prayer to G[od] that He would help us."<sup>64</sup>

This lack of piety was confirmed and all hope vanished days later with the news of a devastating loss for the British at the hands of the French and their Indian allies at the battle along the Monongahela River which resulted in Braddock's death. On the evening of July 19, ten days after this defeat, the Burrs received a report about Braddock's death and Esther immediately looked to heaven: "O our *sins*, our *sins*—they are grown up to the very heavens, and call aloud for Vengeance, the Vengeance that the Lord has sent." This loss left the frontier of the Middle Colonies vulnerable and threw much of the white population into a frenzied panic. Certainly aware of these earthly consequences, Burr only wrote about the designs of heaven to Sarah Prince, though her tone was fearful and frenetic. Although this was "dreadfull, Awfull News," Burr did not question "the ordering of God" for a moment, believing this defeat to be a "just" and "right" punishment. Burr shared the sense of specialness that undercut many Protestant jeremiads of the era, including those of her husband and father. "Our Danger from our *Enemies*, and especially from our *Sins*, is great," Aaron Burr preached the previous winter, but "so is our

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<sup>64</sup> JE, "1144. Sermon on I Sam. 17:45–47 [July 1755]" in *Sermons, Series II, 1754-175*, vol. 72, *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*, ed. Jonathan Edwards Center, <http://edwards.yale.edu/archive?path=aHR0cDovL2Vkd2FyZHMueWFsZS5lZHUvY2dpLWJpbi9uZXdwaglsby9nZXRVYmplY3QuGw/Yy42OTozLndqZW8=>.

Encouragement from the *Sovereign boundless Mercy* of our God . . . [who] in his Sovereign Goodness [has] chosen the *British Nation* to be the *Bulwark* of the *Reformation*.”<sup>65</sup> The very fact that God was punishing them indicated that God was trying to guide them back into righteousness. Anything short of a final and unequivocal abandonment and destruction, therefore, was a sign that Britain remained God’s chosen nation. Though not on this occasion, this high-mindedness extended into Esther Edwards Burr’s personal sense of piety as well, as she often lamented that she was in the midst of a region of such spiritual depravity, making her New England connections with like-minded believers all the more meaningful.

At the same time, however, Burr was willing to entertain the notion that Britons were actually more sinful than the enemy: “I know I have been guilty enough to procure this judgement of heaven—I really believe that our sins are much greater, and more aggravated than the sins of our enemies.”<sup>66</sup> This striking admission appears in stark contrast to the entrenched belief that Catholic French and Indians armies were quite literally the earthly forces of the Antichrist. While the sinfulness and depravity of the British nation was a constant thread which ran through Burr’s wartime letters to Prince—a belief shared by their male relatives who frequently sermonized on this theme—her proposition that their sinfulness actually outweighed that of their religious and political enemies was anomalous in the discourse of her network. Recognizing the gendered tendency for women to see themselves as highly susceptible to sin and therefore accept a significant amount of the blame in themselves and, by extension, of their people, Burr’s lamentation was likely a product of her womanhood.<sup>67</sup> It is also a particularly

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<sup>65</sup> AB, *Discourse Delivered at New-Ark*, 29.

<sup>66</sup> EEB to SP, July 19, 1755, in *Journal*, 136.

<sup>67</sup> For more on the gendered aspects of the soul and sinfulness in colonial New England, see Elizabeth Reis, “The Devil, the Body, and the Feminine Soul in Puritan New England,” *Journal of American History* 82, no. 1 (June 1995): 15–36, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2081913>.

extreme example of the firmly-entrenched pattern of finding “wrath-occasioning sin in the camp” as the cause for suffering and defeat during war while continuing to ignore the sins inherent in the British war effort.<sup>68</sup> Like her father, Thomas Prince, Seth Pomeroy, and other evangelicals who were active during the final two Anglo-French wars, Burr believed that to abstain from war-making was sinful ignorance to the will of God; participation in this bloody affair was to heed the signs of providence and carry out righteous, godly violence.

Aaron Burr reacted to Braddock’s defeat in much the same way, preaching the following day on Isaiah 63:10: “But they rebelled and vexed his holy spirit: therefore he turned to be their Enemy, and he fought against them.” Addressing a congregation marked by an “uncommon solemnity,” Burr divined that the British defeat on the Monongahela was the most recent sign that God had turned against them for their rebellion against Him. Repeating his providential view of the war from earlier that year—one he would continue to sermonize on throughout the fall—Burr warned that God would continue to fight against them until they returned from the state of spiritual squalor. At the evening meeting in Newark, the reverend John Brainerd, brother of the famed Indian missionary David Brainerd, prayed that their people “receive good at the hand of God and shall . . . not receive evil.” Esther Edwards Burr was delighted to see that Brainerd’s sermon on humanity’s dependence on God had uncommonly affected the congregation: “O what cause of thankfulness if this awfull dispensation of God might be the means of reforming a backsliding people!” Her immediate and extreme damnation of the British people was apparently tempered by time and prayer. Despite the terrible fears wrought by the war, Burr’s firm faith in the justice of God’s providence and her sense of spiritual superiority over that of her neighbors guided her towards a reason to give thanks in the current situation.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Rowley, “Godly Violence,” 199.

<sup>69</sup> EEB to SP, July 20, 1755, in *Journal*, 137.

Like her husband, Esther Edwards Burr saw this military loss as a just punishment for individual and communal sinfulness, and as a manner of heavenly communication that had been witnessed for millennia: “It would be infinitely just in the ever blessed God to deliver us into there hands and utterly reject us and cast us off forever as he has done many a time in his professing people heretofore.” Burr was certain in God’s displeasure given the army’s condition as they approached Monongahela: “We hear that the Army was very sick before the ingagement, which looks more like the immediate hand of God than if they had fell only by the sword of the enimies—O if the Lord be against us who can be for us!”<sup>70</sup> While dysentery—a relatively common issue in army camps—was among the many aspects which slowed and weakened Braddock’s men on their approach to Fort Duquesne, it was by no means the deciding factor.<sup>71</sup> Burr likely latched on to news of the army’s poor health due the prevalence of sickness in providential discourse—especially during times of war. As an act of extraordinary providence far from the normal operations of God on earth, this weakening illness clearly had a terrible purpose. This reading of sickness, moreover, brought little solace to Burr and her Boston correspondent—in fact, it only confirmed their increasingly pessimistic view of God’s judgments on the community of believers. On a deeper level, perhaps, the causal connection Burr established here to understand suffering, be it the sickness of the troops, Braddock’s defeat, or the state of the war more generally, brought some level of comfort. Providentialism, be it military or otherwise, was a lens through which these Christians viewed—and, more importantly, understood—a seemingly chaotic and mysterious world. While the specific subject and conclusion may have brought little comfort, the very act of meaning-making very well may have.

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<sup>70</sup> EEB to SP, July 19, 1755, in *Journal*, 136.

<sup>71</sup> Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 96–97. By another historian’s account, the impact of illness was negligible: “Despite some problems with dysentery, the army that departed Wills Creek was in generally good condition.” Paul E. Kopperman, “Ohio Expedition of 1755,” in *Colonial Wars of North America*, 525.

Since Braddock's defeat, rumors swirled throughout the Middle Colonies. "Some new stor[y] comes every day, but all very bad," Esther wrote. "We can depend [on] nothing we hear as yet."<sup>72</sup> Hoping to get to the truth from a dependable source, the Burrs and Mr. Brainerd traveled to visit with Governor Belcher in Elizabethtown. Ironically, however, the Governor incorrectly told them that Braddock was not dead, but had only been defeated and robbed of his artillery; this news softened the "great frown of heaven" for the Burrs.<sup>73</sup> It was not until a week later when Aaron Burr was in Princeton that he learned with certainty that Braddock had been killed in battle earlier that July.<sup>74</sup>

In a tender expression to Prince, Burr identified her motherhood as a source of much of her present fear. Thinking again to Psalm 137, Burr expressed her grave fear that her children would "be *dashed against the stone by our barbarous enemies*—or which is worse, to be enslaved by them, and obliged to turn *Papist*."<sup>75</sup> Her grave concern over her children falling into enemy hands was grounded in her knowledge of Indian captivity, a terrifying feature of New England life and culture. Burr would have grown up listening to her father tell about his Williams cousins' trials as "redeemed" and "unredeemed" captives following the 1704 Deerfield raid, which had become a graphic feature of Edwards family lore. Stephen and Eunice Williams were only nine and seven at the time of their capture and their infant siblings were killed during the raid, a fact which brought into sharp relief for Burr the explicit dangers that captivity posed for children.<sup>76</sup> More generally, Burr and Prince had surely read many of the famed captivity narratives from colonial New Englanders, including the celebrated account of Mary

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<sup>72</sup> EEB to SP, July 26, 1755, in *Journal*, 139.

<sup>73</sup> EEB to SP, July 21, 1755, in *Journal*, 137.

<sup>74</sup> EEB to SP, July 29, 1755, in *Journal*, 140.

<sup>75</sup> EEB to SP, August 8–9, 1755, in *Journal*, 142.

<sup>76</sup> Demos, *Unredeemed Captive*, 35.

Rowlandson's captivity during King Phillip's War and the tale of warning about Esther Wheelwright, who was captured by the Wabanaki at the age of seven, catechized into the Catholic Church, and became the mother superior of the largest convent in New France.<sup>77</sup> Certainly, her mind would have been drawn to the familiar tales of physical and spiritual torment as she languished over the future of her children. Washed in the discourse of captivity, which itself was buttressed by the omnipresent currents of anti-popery, Burr was certain that enslavement and forced conversion was, for body and soul, a fate worse than death. Family remained a primary concern of hers that fall, and she kept abreast of news from and about Stockbridge. As her father's town became more imperiled, Burr hoped her siblings would not return home to be with their father who was surely in danger himself.<sup>78</sup>

Jonathan Edwards, too, was aware of the temporal and eternal significance of the Battle of the Monongahela. "'Tis an awful rebuke of the Most High of our pride and vain confidence," he preached at Stockbridge on August 28, a fast day marking Braddock's defeat. "[God is] most loudly and awfully calling on the whole nation to deep humiliation and repentance." Edwards saw the same providential message in this military loss that his kin in Newark did, though he developed his interpretation of it on the foundation of his doctrinal understanding of warfare: "The affair of war is one of the most important of all affairs of the universe: the state of the world of mankind principally depends upon it." But, it was not only men who were concerned

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<sup>77</sup> For more on the narratives mentioned here, see Mary Rowlandson, *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* [. . .] (Boston, 1720), Eighteenth Century Collections Online; and, Ann M. Little, *The Many Captivities of Esther Wheelwright* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016). Within the vast collection of scholarship on Indian captivity and captivity narratives in colonial North America, see, for example, Roy Harvey Pearce, "The Significances of the Captivity Narrative," *American Literature* 19 (1947): 1–20, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2920438>; Alden T. Vaughan and Edward W. Clark, eds., *Puritans among the Indians: Accounts of Captivity and Redemption, 1676–1724* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986); Hartman, *Providence Tales*; and Teresa Toulouse, *The Captive's Position: Female Narrative, Male Identity, and Royal Authority in Colonial New England* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

<sup>78</sup> EEB to SP, August 8–9, 1755, in *Journal*, 142; and EEB to SP, August 6, 1755, in *Journal*, 141–142.



about war. Certainly, he reasoned, God controls all things, but in war “God is wont, especially, to make his hand visible . . . order[ing] the events of war in such a manner that it shall be plain that all depends on his sovereign will.” Thus, the events of war “are purely providential” and “absolutely dependent on God’s power and pleasure.” In Edwards’s view of the entirety of human history, in wars both sacred and profane, a people could expect nothing but defeat, disappointment, and danger without “the Lord of hosts and armies”—“danger of losing their liberties, all their civil privileges, all the temporal possessions, and very often their spiritual, too.” Significantly, Edwards believed it was by this suffering and danger wrought by war that “chiefly, God has executed judgements on sinful nations.” This providential interpretation was a pessimistic reversal of that which Edwards made during King George’s War, which he saw not as God’s hand striking against a sinful people, but rather a warning that such retribution and desertion would come if the godly community did not amend their ways. The events of the war of the 1740s proceeded despite the spiritual degradation of God’s chosen people, not because of it. Now, the opposite was true. Ironically, the doctrinal portion of this 1755 sermon was directly lifted from one composed in Northampton during King George’s War. While his theological understanding of warfare and its providential implications had not changed, Edwards now faced an entirely different situation. In his view, a disastrous war was just punishment for a people who had done nothing but turn away from the true cause of God’s kingdom which he represented.<sup>79</sup>

Here, Edwards also assumed the striking posture of a strategist at the pulpit. The Battle of the Monongahela, he explained to the English congregation at Stockbridge, was not only a devastating loss for the British, but it greatly strengthened the French position as well. The failure to take French Fort Duquesne left the Middle Colonies largely exposed and deprived the

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<sup>79</sup> JE, “God’s People Tried,” in *WJE*, 25:696, 689, 690. Also see Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 587n6.

colonies of General Braddock, their newly-appointed commander-in-chief. Edwards predicted that the French victory, which gave them a stronger geographical position along with the British provisions, artillery, and other arms and ammunition they seized, “will tend mightily to encourage and animate our enemies—there and everywhere—[and] tend to increase [their] number.”<sup>80</sup> The people of Stockbridge would soon realize how correct Edwards was in his strategic assessment. Native peoples, motivated by the desire for access to trade and security in their possession of land—in addition to plunder, information, scalps, and captives—were inspired to join French raiding parties in the wake of this great victory.<sup>81</sup> Throughout the fall, reports came to Stockbridge about increasing violence by Indian war parties against English settlers on the Pennsylvania-Virginia frontier and the expanding circle of French influence over native peoples.<sup>82</sup>

This new strategic reality was certainly distressing, but even more so were its larger geopolitical and spiritual implications—though few would have seen a difference between the two. To Edwards, it was abundantly clear the French had long been scheming and maneuvering to gain total possession over all of North America, competing directly with Britain for “civil and religious dominion” of the continent. Thus, Braddock’s defeat presented “dark circumstances and threatening appearances” over the very fate of the British empire and “God’s church . . . on earth.”<sup>83</sup> This reality was no reason for passivity—to face the wrath of God or pray that God mercifully join their side. The British nation had reason to hope and to act. The interpretive practices of military providentialism and millenarianism came together seamlessly in Edwards’s mind. His fascination with the millennium and the course of providential history had not waned

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<sup>80</sup> JE, “God’s People Tried,” in *WJE*, 25:695.

<sup>81</sup> See, for example, Steele, *Betrayals*, 70–73.

<sup>82</sup> Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 108–110.

<sup>83</sup> JE, “God’s People Tried,” in *WJE*, 25:695, and 696.

since King George's War, and despite spiritual, geopolitical, and personal setbacks, he had never been more confident that *this* moment in history held immense, if not ultimate, providential importance: "It is now a time distinguished from all others that ever have been, in this respect, that never was a time wherein the civil and religious liberties and privileges of the British plantations in America, and all that is dear to us, was so threatened as at this time." This belief, buttressed by the theological assumption that God used the events of war in particular to make His divine will and sovereignty known, guided Edwards to see the meaning God had ascribed to this moment and the message He was sending to the British people. This humiliation was a reminder from heaven of humanity's total dependence on God.

His message that day was for Christians to once again humble themselves before God, repent of their sins, and continue battling with the hope that God would "be with them and . . . retrieve their affairs," as He had done throughout history. This hope that God would aid a penitent people was not unfounded, as they were encouraged by the fact that this present war was waged against the Antichrist. Hope also flowed from his belief that God was not just chastising the British, but also calling them "to look to him for help by his appearing ready to help in so remarkably succeeding our forces in the eastern parts," referencing their success in Nova Scotia that June. Certainly, Edwards remarked, God "both corrects with his rod and draws us with bonds of love."<sup>84</sup> Repeating the common wartime call to action, Edwards concluded that the present war was one of godly violence, endorsed the undertaking with public appeals to justice, sanctified it with the mark of holiness, and encouraged the godly to joyfully take up arms against their enemies with God at their side.

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<sup>84</sup> JE, 25:694, 696, and 693.

A notable feature of this unpublished sermon delivered to the English congregation at Stockbridge is Edwards's appeal to his listeners' racial prejudices. He described this humiliation as especially chastening since it came from "a very despicable enemy—a number of barbarous savages" who had killed and butchered "so great a number of the chief officers" and paraded their scalps "through the French settlements of America." Edwards presented this barbarity, however, as being closely linked to the Antichrist—these "heathenish" and Catholic Indians, aligned with France and the Pope, were among the "open enemies of God's church." While playing on these greatly affecting tropes, Edwards was careful not to associate such ideas with the Protestantized Indians of Stockbridge and elsewhere in North America, many of whom fought alongside Shirley's and Johnson's armies in the war and, as Protestant converts, were spiritual soldiers in the eternal war between God's true church and the forces of the Antichrist.<sup>85</sup>

On September 15, Aaron Burr returned from a trip to New York with word of the British victory against the French Baron de Dieskau at the Battle of Lake George. "O that we may ascribe praise to him, to whom it belongs!" Esther quickly scribbled to Prince, "Tis a most signal deliverance, and the hand of a kind God evidently in it."<sup>86</sup> In the immediate context, the Burrs had much for which to be thankful. Braddock's recent defeat at Monongahela had been a military and spiritual blow for the colonies. The first wave of news from Lake George made it appear as though the northward expedition could still achieve its ultimate goal of taking Fort St. Frédéric and destroying the French hold over the region. William Johnson's forces were supported by Massachusetts provincials under the command of Colonel Ephraim Williams, Jr., and Chief Hendrick's contingent of Mohawks. During the opening encounter on September 8, later known

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<sup>85</sup> For more on Edwards's carefully differentiated ministrations to native peoples at Stockbridge, see Rachel Wheeler, "'Friends to Your Souls': Jonathan Edwards' Indian Pastorate and the Doctrine of Original Sin," *Church History* 72, no. 4 (December 2003): 736–765, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/4146371>.

<sup>86</sup> EEB to SP, September 15, 1755, in *Journal*, 151–152.

as the “Bloody Morning Scout,” fifty of these supporting troops were killed. By that night, Johnson’s forces were able to drive off the French and Indian assault, capture Dieskau and several other French prisoners, and secure the fate of the recently constructed Fort Edward and the position for Fort William Henry.

Several key British officers were lost at the Battle of Lake George, including Captain William McGinnis of New Hampshire, Colonel Williams, a member of one of the founding families of Stockbridge and a staunch opponent of Edwards, and, most significantly of all, Chief Hendrick (Theyanoguin). Hendrick, the chief spokesman of the Mohawks, was the very icon of the English-Indian alliance.<sup>87</sup> He commanded a loyal following of native peoples in upstate New York, held an audience with Queen Ann in 1710, and, in a manner symbolic of his influential blended persona, was memorialized in death with the dissemination of an engraving of him as a noble but scarred warrior, dressed in a British frock coat and tricorne hat and holding a raised tomahawk and wampum belt. Hendrick had established a lasting economic, diplomatic, and personal relationship with Johnson, who married his granddaughter, Degonwadonti (Molly Brant). As a converted Christian, he epitomized the spiritual and political implications of the spreading of the Protestant empire. He was also among the Mohawk leadership who gathered at Stockbridge in 1751 and, in Edwards’s assessment, “opened the door for all nations, that they might come and bring their children hither to be instructed.”<sup>88</sup> The death of Old Chief Hendrick had actual and symbolic implications about the future of British and Indian diplomacy.

Following the Battle of Lake George, the Mohawks departed from Johnson, greatly disaffected.

Their diminishing confidence in the English cause would only spread among native peoples

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<sup>87</sup> For more on Hendrick, see Eric Hinderaker, *The Two Hendricks: Unraveling a Mohawk Mystery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), as well as Hamilton, *Sir William Johnson*.

<sup>88</sup> JE to Hubbard, August 31, 1751, in *WJE*, 16:398.

during the next several years of the war. The Indians of the strategically-crucial *pays d'en haut*, the Great Lakes region, either aligned with the French or remained neutral, much to the suffering of the English—most notably in the “massacre” at Fort William Henry in August 1757.<sup>89</sup>

Despite the nominal victory against Dieskau, the wounded Johnson was in no position to continue north to his ultimate goal at Crown Point, with over two hundred dead and about one hundred wounded, low morale and sickness spreading among the living, meager supplies, and the expectation of “another and more formidable attack” arriving at any moment. Despite Johnson’s disappointment and fear, he exaggerated the success of the battle in his first report to Shirley, estimating, for example, that nearly one thousand French soldiers had died, when in fact the number was only 149. Understandably, Shirley gladly received this sanguine report and urged Johnson to take advantage of his “favorable opportunity” and push forward to Crown Point as planned, expecting that “the slaughter” the French had reportedly “suffered” would result not only in their own retreat, but “a total dissipation of the Indians . . . [or] at least a great desertion among them, and of the Canadians, to.”<sup>90</sup> Immediately after the Battle of Lake George, the unfounded optimism of both Johnson and Shirley led to an air of hope which spread across the home front. From Esther Edwards Burr’s perspective in Newark, news of a victory against the French and the construction of new fortifications outshone the expedition’s grim prospects and likely instilled in her a sense of safety for herself and her family on the Massachusetts frontier.<sup>91</sup>

Among those who survived the Battle of Lake George was Seth Pomeroy, now a lieutenant colonel, who took great pride in serving in “the most violent Fire Perhaps that Ever

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<sup>89</sup> See Steele, *Betrayals*.

<sup>90</sup> William Shirley to William Johnson, September 19, 1755, in *Correspondence of William Shirley*, 2:271–273; and Steele, *Betrayals*, 54–56. The official French causality count minimized Indian losses, but was nevertheless nowhere near Johnson’s estimate.

<sup>91</sup> For more on the Battle of Lake George, see Steele, *Betrayals*, 28–56; and Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 108–123.

was heard of in this Country” which “kill’d and . . . Brooke to Peaces” the armies of the enemy. The general success in holding off the French was offset by Pomeroy’s personal experiences of suffering and loss at Lake George, however, as he led the “most meloncoly Peace of busaness” of burying 136 fallen men, including his brother, Daniel. As he recorded his experiences on the shores of the newly-christened Lake George, Pomeroy made no indication of God’s presence on the battlefield, as he was so wont to do at Louisbourg. This changed cosmology defined all of his private remarks during the French and Indian War. Although Pomeroy recorded his attendance at sermons, meetings, and prayers led by the army chaplains, he noted these events with the same factual tone with which he wrote about uneventful troop movements, the construction of fortifications, and the food provided at camp. Even when a Sabbath meeting was interrupted by a report that three hundred Indians were attacking the wagons just as the prayer had begun, Pomeroy made no effort to divine the will of God in such a coincidence. Even the most casual providential rhetoric which were so deeply ingrained in Pomeroy’s vernacular and worldview during his time in Nova Scotia in 1745 had vanished. Whereas previously the events of a day were preceded by phrases like “So it was ordered By Divine Providence,” and considerations of future plans were conditioned by the hope that “Providence Permit (& Spares my Life),” now the Northampton officer wrote in his private diary with a factual, secular pen.<sup>92</sup>

Pomeroy’s religious sense of purpose had not entirely departed, however; it was now relegated entirely to his correspondence with his wife, Mary, still in Northampton. Upon hearing that her husband had departed Albany for the campaign season of 1755, Mary wrote to him that it raised “a commotion in my anxious breast for you.” Amidst this fear for her husband’s

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<sup>92</sup> Seth Pomeroy, September 8, 1755–September 12, 1755, in *Papers of Seth Pomeroy*, 114–116; Seth Pomeroy, July 17, 1755, in *Papers of Seth Pomeroy*, 108; Seth Pomeroy, June 21, 1745, in *Papers of Seth Pomeroy*, 37; and Seth Pomeroy to Mary Pomeroy, April 18, 1745, in *Papers of Seth Pomeroy*, 59.

threatened safety, she turned to the same steadfast source of comfort as she did a decade prior: “I endeavored to calm myself, and commit you to Him who has heretofore protected you, trusting that He will still care for you and for us.” Mary Pomeroy also engaged in her own military providentialism, searching for the work of God in times past, present, and future. In the wake of Braddock’s defeat, she found reason to rejoice at “the salvation of the whole army from destruction [that] was made, under God, by a young American officer named George Washington,” who had at least salvaged the retreat of Braddock’s army. Remembering the Book of Joshua, then, which described the Lord turning against enemies of His people after they had first suffered a defeat at Ai, she mused that “such things he has done for his people and will do again.” Lieutenant Colonel Pomeroy, then, matched his wife’s pious sentiments in his response: “I hope Since God has Inclined So many good men to venter in So fatiguing an Expedition he will go with us If So I am Sure of Success.” The physical sense of safety which Pomeroy derived from this godly undertaking could not completely erase the deadly threats of war, though he and his wife found some sense of eternal security, knowing that if he died in battle that they “Shall both Rejoyce together . . . [and] glorify God in a better world.”<sup>93</sup> The absence of God in Pomeroy’s private diary makes his closing sentiment to his wife all the more confounding: “My greatest Concer[n] is to Serve God In Every Stasion in life So that I might be usefull In this world & hope to be return’d again & have the satisfaction of living in Peace & Safety with my family.”<sup>94</sup> Were it not for this clear statement of purpose, Pomeroy’s pious commitment in the affairs of the French and Indian War would be virtually invisible. His retreat from open providentialism during the final Anglo-French war is further confused by the fact that this

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<sup>93</sup> Mary Pomeroy to Seth Pomeroy, August 9, 1755, in *Papers of Seth Pomeroy*, 133; and Seth Pomeroy to Mary Pomeroy, August 9, 1755, in *Papers of Seth Pomeroy*, 133.

<sup>94</sup> Seth Pomeroy to Mary Pomeroy, August 18, 1755, in *Papers of Seth Pomeroy*, 135.



trajectory ran opposite to the general pattern of lay discussions of war and politics within the “traditional religious paradigms [of] providentialism.” As Erik Seeman has argued, religious concerns and understandings of political events did not appear in lay discourse until the French and Indian War.<sup>95</sup> Pomeroy’s break from this pattern suggests that something about his unique and personal religion and politics held a great bearing on his providential cosmology and the rhetoric with which he explored it.

This transformation may have been a signal of Lieutenant Colonel Pomeroy’s efforts to guard the higher and more public civic position which he now held in the provincial military establishment, while his personal writings with his wife provided the space to express more deep-seated commitments and perspectives. Such an explanation is in keeping with the pattern of gentrification which occurred among men in mid-eighteenth-century British America, described in one case study by Cornelia Hughes Dayton: “talk among the men . . . centered more on secular concerns than the preoccupation with sin and God’s anger.”<sup>96</sup> Pomeroy’s move away from such an overtly providential view of the world may have also been a reflection of the changes in his religious life, most notably the development of his staunch opposition to Edwards’s doctrine in the Northampton religio-political milieu and Edwards’s subsequent absence from Pomeroy’s congregation. During King George’s War, Pomeroy was an active and supportive parishioner of Edwards’s, and the two friends engaged together over their military providentialism and the godly interpretation of the capture of Louisbourg. After Pomeroy and his father led the charge in Edwards’s removal, he not only created a political enemy and severed a friendship, but silenced a powerful and constant source of providentialism in Northampton. Thus, Pomeroy’s distance

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<sup>95</sup> Seeman, *Pious Persuasions*, 197.

<sup>96</sup> Cornelia Hughes Dayton, “Taking the Trade: Abortion and Gender Relations in an Eighteenth-Century New England Village,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (January 1991), 42, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2937996>.

from Edwards supports the positive relationship between one's military providentialism and their position in the evangelical networks studied in this thesis.

In December 1755, Jonathan Edwards's view of the Battle of Lake George, informed by sufficient hindsight, was far more sanguine than that of his daughter and son-in-law. Reflective of his dreadful view of 1755, he described the British performance there as only "a kind of victory"—a true conquest would have definitively driven the French from their region altogether, not just to the northern shore of the lake.<sup>97</sup> Edwards reacted to the battle not just with a keen strategic assessment and solemn providential considerations, but also with a sense of personal loss. He shared personal, albeit contentious, relationships with several of the fallen, including his cousins Colonel Ephraim Williams, Jr. and Captain Elisha Hawley, as well as several young men from his old post at Northampton. Also among those known to Edwards who were lost at the Battle of Lake George was Chief Hendrick (Theyanoguin), with whom he developed a working relationship. Not only was Hendrick instrumental in bringing Mohawk students to the Hollis School in Stockbridge and was an exemplar of an English-aligned Christian Indian, but he also aided in quieting the open rivalry between Edwards and Ephraim Williams at the onset of war in service of the defense of Stockbridge and the community's Indian relations. The friendship Edwards and Hendrick shared, however, became tainted shortly thereafter by Indian disillusionment with English politics and mission work and by the Mohawk's ultimate departure from Stockbridge.<sup>98</sup>

At the close of 1755, Edwards obliged John Erskine's request for his personal view of events when the Scottish minister was dissatisfied with mainstream colonial news from Boston

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<sup>97</sup> JE to the Reverend John Erskine, December 11, 1755, in *WJE*, 16:680.

<sup>98</sup> Chief Hendrick featured prominently in some of Edwards's epistolary accounts of the Stockbridge mission, including JE to Hubbard, August 31, 1751, in *WJE*, 16:394–405; and JE to TP, May 10, 1754, in *WJE*, 16:629–643. Also see Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 416–417; and Sweeney, "River Gods," 481.

and Philadelphia. Despite the falling off of the Concert of Prayer in the colonies, Edwards maintained a healthy line of communication with his Scottish colleagues. “I would say that it appears to me,” Edwards began, “that notwithstanding some remarkable favors of heaven, of which we are very unworthy, it has in the general been a year of great frowns of providence on the British America.” This remark about the colonists’ unworthiness to receive the few victories they did—namely the victories in Nova Scotia and Johnson’s capture of Dieskau—signaled that he shared the Burr’s view about the sorry state of colonial piety. To Edwards, the worldly losses of 1755 were certain proof that God was dissatisfied with the British people.<sup>99</sup>

Near the end of his account to Erskine, which he likely assumed would be distributed to William McCulloch and others, Edwards waxed political. He condemned “the ministry at home” for allowing British officers—who know nothing of the people (“Americans” nor “Indians”) or the landscape in North America—to lead the war effort. As the French continued to foster their strong military relationships with their native allies, the British-Indian failings looked even more pronounced. His critique joined a rising chorus of colonists’ displeasure with interference from the home island: “Let New England men manage the business their own way; who alone understand it . . . as they did in the expedition against Cape Breton.”<sup>100</sup> Indeed, London’s military architects were largely ignorant of geographic, political, and military realities in North America; a myopathy which, in historian Fred Anderson’s analysis, “foredoomed [the Crown Point expedition] to failure.”<sup>101</sup> The one exception in Edwards’s assessment of continental superiority was his rather positive evaluation of Colonel William Johnson. The militarily and diplomatically astute superintendent of the Six Nations had supported and aided Edwards and the

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<sup>99</sup> JE to Erskine, December 11, 1755, in *WJE*, 16:680. On the cooling of the Concert of Prayer in America, see Stein, “Editor’s Introduction,” in *WJE*, 5:46–48.

<sup>100</sup> JE to Erskine, December 11, 1755, in *WJE*, 16:681.

<sup>101</sup> Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 88.

Stockbridge mission since the beginning of the decade, as he had Eleazar Wheelock's Indian Charity School in Connecticut. Although a vigorous patron of the Church of England, Johnson understood the broad importance of missionary work—Anglican or evangelical—in cementing Indian alliances in the British interest. Edwards's broad formulation for military success was “arms, ammunition, money and shipping” from England, planners, officers, and soldiers from the colonies, and, most importantly, the favor from God: “we ought to remember that neither New England men nor any other, are anything unless God be with us . . . we can't expect prosperity unless the accursed thing be removed from our camp.” Edwards and Johnson found common cause in the protection and furtherance of mission work, even if they approached this cause from different theological and ideological places. Clearly, a providential worldview and an attunement to and participation in political discourse were not mutually exclusive—rather, for Edwards, they were complementary.<sup>102</sup>

### **“All is Dark as Egypt”: Esther's View from the Frontier**

Early on the morning of November 18, 1755, Burr witnessed another signal of God's disfavor with the people of British America as an earthquake shook the entire east coast for several minutes, toppling chimneys, rending docks asunder, and creating panic throughout the colonies. In the providentially-observed world of wonders of the eighteenth century, earthquakes were one of the most manifest signs of God's displeasure and frequently provoked religious response—a sizeable earthquake in 1727 actually incited a year of revivals throughout northern Massachusetts and New Jersey.<sup>103</sup> Thomas Prince quickly took to the pulpit, castigating his flock

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<sup>102</sup> JE to Erskine, December 11, 1755, in *WJE*, 16:678–681. For more on Johnson's Anglican patronage, see James H. O'Donnell, “Johnson, William Sir (1715–1774),” in *Colonial Wars of North America*, 326.

<sup>103</sup> For general treatments of providential interpretations of earthquakes and the 1727 revival, see Hall, *Worlds of Wonder*; Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 121–122; Seeman, *Pious Persuasions*, 149–154; and Winiarski, *Darkness*

for their ignorant and “provoking Sins against . . . every Means that GOD has used for our Reformation!”<sup>104</sup> The Boston pastor and Esther Edwards Burr both believed that this was certainly God’s most recent judgment and call for reformation in a string of wars, plagues, and all means of suffering that had been ignored by a backsliding people. Over the next several days, as aftershocks continued to rock the Middle Colonies and rumors swirled of a French army ten thousand strong closing on the British position at Lake George, Burr’s distress grew into outright panic. Her thoughts weaved seamlessly between the earthquakes and the war, as both were terrible judgments from heaven and equally cause for suffering and worry. She confided in Sarah Prince that she was “greatly concerned for fear there will be an eruption soon . . . perhaps some of us may be swallowed up alive.” Amid this fear, she turned to her steadfast belief in providence, finding “exceeding comforting consideration, that God does Rule and order all things, and he will have his glory out of this Wicked World.” Burr’s comfort and confidence in God’s unfolding plan for the ultimate deliverance of the world appears as a rarity among laypeople, once again suggesting the critical influence of her husband and father on her own theological worldview. Still, her certainty about her own salvation and that of the whole world could not stave off the fears of her own precarious mortality. She continued to think seriously and often “on the religious improvement we ought to make of Earthquakes” and upon hearing that Sarah Prince’s father printed a sermon on the matter, immediately requested a copy.<sup>105</sup>

Burr’s surge in acute fear for the sake of her body and soul occasioned by the earthquake that fall was but a foretaste of what the next year would bring. Indeed, physical and spiritual fear

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*Falls*, 53–59. For the specific literature on the 1755 event in North America, see Eleanor M. Tilton, “Lightning-Rods and the Earthquake of 1755,” *New England Quarterly* 13, no. 1 (March 1940): 85–97, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/360683>; and Whitney Barlow Robles, “Atlantic Disaster: Boston Responds to the Cape Ann Earthquake of 1755,” *New England Quarterly* 90, no. 1 (March 2017): 7–35, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2640583>.

<sup>104</sup> TP, *An improvement of the doctrine of earthquakes* [. . .] (Boston, 1755), Eighteenth Century Collections Online, 5.

<sup>105</sup> EEB, *Journal*, 167–187, specifically the entries from November 18, 19, and 23, 1755, and February 1, 1756.

was not just wrought by specific expeditions and battles, but rather by the very existence of war, whose dark cloud of violence spread far beyond the battlefield. Certainly, key events in the summer of 1756, such as French General Montcalm's capture of the British forts at Oswego, occasioned fearful responses. But as Esther Edwards Burr's trip to Stockbridge that fall demonstrates, the reality of war colored the daily lives of many—especially those physically closest to the fighting. Burr's crushing terror during her time on the frontier and her husband's powerful wartime jeremiad delivered that same fall underscore again the significant situatedness of providential activities. One's proximity to violence, political bent, and spiritual condition all had critical impact on their search to understand God's will for themselves and their nation.<sup>106</sup>

Esther Edwards Burr spent most of September 1756 in Stockbridge at the excited and “extreamly urgent” behest of her family, who were hopeful to see her before the Burrs' move to Princeton later that year.<sup>107</sup> The last she heard from her father before her trip was in March, when he wrote to congratulate her and her husband and to “bless God” for “the smiles of heaven” on the birth of their son, Aaron Burr, Jr.. Edwards's spring communiqué, in which he updated the Burrs on family news, colonial politics, and the present state of Stockbridge, was remarkably optimistic: “We in this place have of late been free from alarms, through supposed appearances of Canadian Indians, as I think have the people on all our frontiers in New England.”<sup>108</sup> Perhaps Burr shared her father's projected optimism as she made the nine-day journey from Newark to Stockbridge with her infant son, but once she arrived she found a much different scene: “O how dreadfully does this World look! . . . It looks to me that this Land is to be given to the hands of

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<sup>106</sup> Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 154–157.

<sup>107</sup> EEB to SP, August 6, 1756, in *Journal*, 216. Esther Edwards Burr departed from Newark for Stockbridge on Saturday, August 21, 1757 and returned home on Thursday, September 30. She details her trip in 34 journal entries which were then sent to Sarah Prince. See, EEB, *Journal*, 217–229.

<sup>108</sup> JE to AB, March 14, 1756, in *WJE*, 16:683.

our enemies to be scourged and that severly—I am looking for persecution—but alas I fear, I fear, I am not able to stand the firery trial! And O what an awful dreadfull thing to be left to deny Christ and loose our souls forever!” Upon her arrival, Esther shared with her family the “dreadful tidings” of General Montcalm’s victories in mid-August at Oswego on Lake Ontario, which resulted in the French capture of key British forts.<sup>109</sup> This news, which Burr likely learned in New York on her voyage from Newark, had not yet reached the frontier community.<sup>110</sup>

If the ongoing war had been lurking in Esther’s mind in Newark, it was a forceful reality that was impossible to ignore on the frontier. Despite the fact that the main fort there was constructed around the Edwards’s home—a spatial reality that certainly made the military conflict even more visible—Burr felt incredibly exposed there in the New England wilderness, predicting that “10 Indians might with all ease distroy us intirely.”<sup>111</sup> These fears, which consumed her waking moments and caused nightmares that kept her from sleep, were caused by several factors. She was indeed scared for her own safety during her short time at Stockbridge. But she also came to realize the danger her family faced on a daily basis and would continue to live with after her return to Newark. Moreover, perhaps her mind wandered to consider what would happen if the French took Stockbridge and the English frontier, pushing ever inwards toward the rest of her family in the Middle Colonies. Burr, who the year before had balked at Elizabeth Anderson Breeze for being overly anxious and alarmist about the war and its eternal implications, was now deeply affected by her new circumstances.<sup>112</sup> Indeed, their situation was “Dark as Egypt.”<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 150–157; and William G. Godfrey, “Oswego, Battle of (1756), in *Colonial Wars of North America*, 537–538.

<sup>110</sup> EEB to SP, September 8, 1756, in *Journal*, 221.

<sup>111</sup> EEB to SP, September 8, 1756, in *Journal*, 221.

<sup>112</sup> EEB to SP, January 22, 1755, in *Journal*, 83.

<sup>113</sup> EEB to SP, September 13, 1756, in *Journal*, 223.

That very week in Boston, Sarah Prince was also reeling: “My heart is often rising up in secret dissatisfaction with the Providence of God . . . The Aspect of Providence both on Public, Private, and Personal Concerns appear dark indeed.”<sup>114</sup> Although Prince would not hear of her beloved friend’s frightful and sleepless month in Stockbridge until late December, both women spent that fall trying to square the omnipotence and mercy of providence that was so important to their faith and to their worldview with the present circumstances that tortured their thoughts. In her confusion and dissatisfaction, Burr did not stray from her faith in providence, but rather turned to it for assurance: “I want to be made willing to die in any way God pleases, but I am not willing to be Buchered by barbarous enemy nor can’t make myself willing . . . *The Lord Reigns*, and why ant I satisfied, he will order all for the best for the publick and for me, and he will be glorified let all the powers of Earth and Hell do their worst.”<sup>115</sup> Burr’s spiritual trials on the precarious frontier were shaped by her present situation, where she found herself closer to the prospect of real violence than she ever had before; the enemies once only imagined in captivity narratives and war reports appeared more real and more threatening on the borderlands. During this time of psychological distress, when her fears of a violent suffering were at their most palpable, Burr’s instinct for physical safety came into conflict with her clear sense of providentialism. Ultimately, her faith in God’s justice won out, but at the cost of intense spiritual anguish.

These difficulties, moreover, were not only brought about by the French and Indian War, but also by the contours of Burr’s and Prince’s personal lives. By the third week of her trip, Burr was fiercely homesick and missed her “dear Mr Burr and Little Sally,” as well as her mother and

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<sup>114</sup> SP, “My Chosen and Only Sure Friend”: The Spiritual Narrative of Sarah Prince Gill, in *The Silent and Soft Communion: The Spiritual Narratives of Sarah Pierpont Edwards and Sarah Prince Gill*, eds. Sue Lane McCulley and Dorothy Z. Baker, (Knoxville, TN: University Press of Tennessee, 2005), 37.

<sup>115</sup> EEB to SP, September 10, 1756, in *Journal*, 222.



sister, Mary Edwards Dwight, who had left for Northampton shortly after Esther arrived in Stockbridge. Meanwhile, in the information epicenter of Boston, Prince was struggling to see God's grace and mercy in her own life and the life of the nation. The events of the war certainly shaded her frustration with the Lord, but it was her "Undue Love to things below—The World, Friends, Comforts and pleasures of life," that were the root cause of her dejection.<sup>116</sup> For Burr and Prince alike, the threats that wartime violence posed to their lives and the lives of their children and families created in them a spiritual source of dread—a fear of going against the pressure, placed on women in particular, to accept the will of God and to "sublimate mourning, to block and then redirect its vigor" elsewhere.<sup>117</sup>

Amid Burr's trials at Stockbridge—which she referred to as a "Christian warfare" within her soul—she sought the guidance of her father. She "opened [her] difficulties to him very freely and he as freely advised and directed."<sup>118</sup> While she did not share with Prince the specific counsel Jonathan Edwards gave her, she was immeasurably grateful for the openness of their discourse and the wisdom of her loving father. One can only wonder what father and daughter shared with each other in confidence that evening. Esther's concerns and her father's advice were fundamentally spiritual, but it is easy to imagine that the worldly tumult which brought forth those fears was discussed. Perhaps Jonathan Edwards told his daughter about his own fears, which he shared with Gideon Hawley several days later: "God indeed is remarkably frowning upon us everywhere . . . God is making us, with all our superiority in numbers, to become the object of our enemies' almost continual triumphs and insults." Edwards, like his daughter, was blind to the purposes of his God and troubled by the fact that he could "see very little good effect

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<sup>116</sup> SP, "My Chosen and Only Sure Friend," 37–38.

<sup>117</sup> Mitchell Robert Breitwieser, *America Puritanism and the Defense of Mourning: Religion, Grief, and Ethnology in Mary White Rowlandson's Captivity Narrative* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 8.

<sup>118</sup> EEB to SP, September 12, 1756, in *Journal*, 222.

of the awful frowns of heaven upon us.” If this was punishment—which he and his kinfolk believed it to be—God’s chosen people had yet to appease the Almighty. Perhaps the private acts of piety (“keep the soul near to God”) and public observations Edwards counseled his daughter with were the same ones with which he encouraged Hawley, who was currently serving as the army chaplain with the Crown Point expedition: “Let us unite in earnest, humble cries to the God of armies and the God of sovereign and infinite mercy, which alone can be our hope.”<sup>119</sup> Despite the impending gloom, neither Burr nor her father seriously doubted God’s wisdom and instead steeled themselves with providential assurance.

Since the beginning of the war, and likely even before that, the Reverend Aaron Burr had developed a reputation for leveraging his influence—the little Influence I have,” he once remarked, humbly—in the public sphere in active service of the British nation. He explained before the leading clergy of the Middle Colonies that he had long been energetically “animating my *Country-men*, to a vigorous Defence of their *Lives and Liberties*, in the use of all proper Means” in the present conflict, amid these “*alarming Calls* of divine Providence.” While his wife was traveling home from Stockbridge, Burr addressed the Synod of New York, convened in Newark. On this occasion, he spoke to the ongoing wars—both temporal and eternal—and reprised the three actions that had been central to his wartime message: dependence, repentance, and reformation. Moreover, he made an impassioned plea for all to “harmoniously unite . . . and nobly exert themselves in the *common Cause . . . under God.*” Burr’s communal rhetoric throughout this entire sermon underscored his conflation of true Christians and Britons, the interconnectedness of national and religious identity, and his belief in the importance of unity in

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<sup>119</sup> JE to the Reverend Gideon Hawley, October 9, 1756, in *WJE*, 16:689–691.

all things. Burr's ultimate frustration with the British nation not heeding this call colored his thoroughly pessimistic vision for the future of the war.<sup>120</sup>

“I wish it were in my Power, to awake in [all Britons] a greater *Sense* of the Necessity of being alive, and thoroughly engaged in this matter,” he explained from the pulpit, “But I must freely declare, I have no Expectations of Safety to the *Nation* or *Land*, from any of our *Preparations*, till a Sense of our *Dependence* on God, and a Disposition to return to him by *Repentance* and *Reformation* prevails.” Significantly, Burr claimed that dependence on God's will and admission of God's ultimate sovereignty over all of existence was necessary to being “alive” and “engaged” in the war effort. Burr and Edwards had both explored this idea before, but never before had it been articulated so forcefully. This powerful statement on the relationship between God and humanity in times of war was certainly grounded in Burr's ultimate belief in providence. It was also critically shaped by the present state of affairs—what Burr saw as the terrible dispensations of providence wrought by war across the colonies: the “*Train of destructive Consequences*” that followed Braddock's final defeat; perpetual military failures; death and suffering for Britons in New England, the Middle Colonies, and most recently in the South; enemy control of the many products of British wealth and labor, including shipping and trade networks, artillery, and other stores of war; and political strife and infighting among colonial authorities and the expectation that the few Indian allies they still had would “probably forsake us.” Across the Atlantic, too, was the arm of God stretched out against them, as military losses in the larger Seven Years War compounded with an expectation that Britain would soon find new enemies in those “*Popish Powers*,” the kings of Poland, Sicily, Sardinia, and elsewhere. Providence had been calling out to the Christians of the British nation for too long,

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<sup>120</sup> AB, *The Watchman's Answer to the Question, What of the Night* [ . . . ], (New York, 1757), 42, 44, 43, 46.

Burr believed, and for too long had that call gone unanswered. In these moments, Burr was frustrated with the sloth and irreligion of his supposed brothers and sisters in Christ, fearful of what would come of God's chosen nation temporally and eternally, and sure of his duty as a Christian and a Briton to correct the flock.<sup>121</sup>

Like Esther Edwards Burr and Jonathan Edwards, Aaron Burr never questioned or rebuked God for the current state of suffering, but believed it was just punishment for the Protestant empire's actions. He found some comfort in the present darkness, believing it to be a sign that God had not yet forsaken them and was still trying to correct the course of this godly people. With that self-aggrandizing undercurrent of the classic jeremiad, he declared that Britain was still a nation chosen by God. This undying faith in the righteousness of providence revealed his belief in the infallibility of God, his own vision of sin and irreligion alive in the church, and his still-unfulfilled hope that this providential punishment could change the hearts and minds of the British people who would finally recognize their dependence on God. Moreover, Burr's theological conception of providential warfare mirrored that of Jonathan Edwards. The terrible dispensations of providence were just and their cause obvious: the Lord continued to punish the British nation because they had been violating every law of heaven and, most egregiously, in their "*Deadness* to spiritual and divine Things," had placed their hope for deliverance in their commanders and soldiers, while "*The Hand of God* is disregarded." This plea for reformation would be one of Burr's last, as he delivered it nearly one year to the day before his death.<sup>122</sup>

For years Burr had watched God rebuke the British people in England and America for living in "*Profanity and Infidelity, Luxury & Debauchery, Pride and Oppression.*"<sup>123</sup> His cynical

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<sup>121</sup> AB, 43, 29, 28.

<sup>122</sup> AB, 42, 43.

<sup>123</sup> AB, 42.

view of Anglo-American piety and the ever-worsening state of military affairs were inextricably bound together and critically shaped his pessimistic millennialism—a significant departure from Edwards’s eschatological optimism.<sup>124</sup> Burr was unconvinced by Edwards’s assessment that the slaying of the witnesses had already occurred and that the world was already moving toward the millennium. Arguing directly against Edwards before the Synod of New York, Burr developed his chiliasm which held that the church’s worst days were yet to come and the world was still cast in a “*Pagan, Popish, & Mahometan* Darkness” that would only worsen until God’s final and ultimate intervention.<sup>125</sup> Contrasting this to Edwards’s optimism, Nathan O. Hatch has keenly observed that “instead of sounding a trumpet of hope, Burr issued an exhortation to endurance; instead of projecting a vision of progress, he renewed the jeremiad theme.”<sup>126</sup>

Despite his belief that nothing but God’s very hand could defeat the Antichrist and establish the kingdom of heaven on earth, Burr’s providentialism and eschatology was not fatalistic—his brothers and sisters in Christ still had a role to play in this cosmic drama: “Let us be *awakened* in this dark and difficult Day, to a faithful zealous *Discharge* of the Duties of our Stations . . . to greater *Fervency* in Prayer, and look forward with more *earnest* Expectations, for the *Dawn* of that *glorious Day*.” Among the most important of these duties was to continue the war effort:

“A *vigorous Defense* of their Lives and Properties, by setting before them all the Horrors of *Popery, Slavery, and Death*, which may follow the *victorious Arms* of our antichristian Foes, on the *One Hand*; and on *the other*, all the invaluable *Priviledges* of unadulterated

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<sup>124</sup> For more on the differences between Burr’s and Edwards’s postmillennialism, see Hatch, “Origins of Civil Millennialism in America,” 415–416; and Hatch, *Sacred Cause of Liberty*, 34.

<sup>125</sup> AB, *Watchman’s Answer*, 32. For the uses of Islam among Christians in early America, and specifically its significance in Burr’s eschatology, see Thomas S. Kidd, “‘Is It Worse to Follow Mahomet than the Devil?’: Early American Uses of Islam,” *Church History* 72, no. 4 (December 2003): 766–790, especially 779–780, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4146372>.

<sup>126</sup> Hatch, “Origins of Civil Millennialism,” 416.

*Christianity; British Liberty and Property, in a delightful and fruitful Country, which may be the happy Consequences of our vigorously exerting our selves to bring them to honourable Terms of Peace. – Priviledges of infinite Value! for which we should bravely resolve, to spend our last Breath, In Prayer; the last Penny of our Estates, and the last Drop of our Blood.”*

In a quintessential conflation of the spiritual and the political, the eternal and the temporal, Burr unleashed a partisan and violent call to action. Even at his most pessimistic, he did not demonstrate passivity, but encouraged Christians against such sins. While they were to joyfully and penitently endure the current and coming darkness, the faithful could not let what little was left of God’s church die before Christ’s return and final salvation.<sup>127</sup>

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Unfortunately, Aaron Burr did not live to see either the happy providential dispensations bestowed upon the British nation in the later years of the war or the glorious coming together of heaven and earth that he had expectantly waited for. At the beginning of September, he traveled to Elizabethtown to deliver the eulogy for Governor Belcher, who had died on August 31, 1757. Burr returned to Newark soon after with shaking chills and a fever, and died three weeks later from malaria.<sup>128</sup> After Burr’s death on September 24, 1757, Esther told her mother she was certain God was speaking to her, guiding her to recognize her utter dependence in the Lord: “I would speak it to the glory of God’s name, that I think he has, in an uncommon degree, discovered himself to be an all-sufficient God, a full fountain of all good.”<sup>129</sup> Just as God was using the violence of war and the suffering it caused to correct a sinful nation and demonstrate

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<sup>127</sup> AB, *Watchman’s Answer*, 41, 45.

<sup>128</sup> Karlsen and Crumacker, “Introduction,” in *Journal*, 17.

<sup>129</sup> EEB to Sarah Edwards, October 7, 1757, in *Journal*, 293.

their ultimate dependence, Burr also believed God had created this personal suffering in her own life to do the same. She eagerly told her father that the her troubling crisis of faith—the “Christian warfare” in her heart—had subsided: “[God] enabled me to say that altho’ thou slay me yet will I trust in thee—In this time of trial I was lead to enter into a renewed and explissit Covenant [wi]th . . . God.”<sup>130</sup> Edwards, who would soon replace the late Burr as President of the College of New Jersey, was delighted to hear of his daughter’s spiritual reformation. Nevertheless, using the familiar wartime rhetoric, he cautioned her of its longevity: “How good and kind is your heavenly Father! . . . But don’t be surprized . . . if after this Light, Clouds of Darkness should return. Perpetual sunshine is not usual in this World, even to Gods true saints.”<sup>131</sup> Although Aaron Burr’s death may have caused a distraction from the affairs of the world, Edwards was sure not to forget the importance and impact of the violence that raged around them. He and his daughter both searched for and interpreted the work of God, finding special importance in their suffering, whether from a husband lost or a world at war.

In the fall of that year, smallpox was on the rise in the Middle Colonies. Edwards vigorously advocated for his family, now in New Jersey, to receive the inoculation, a somewhat risky procedure but one that was proven to be greatly beneficial, which they did on February 23. While his children and grandchildren were recovering from their inoculations successfully, Edwards contracted smallpox and it soon became apparent he would not survive. On March 22, nearly one month after this inoculation, he passed away peacefully. Upon hearing of her husband’s death while she lay ill in Stockbridge, Sarah Pierpont Edwards wrote to Esther with the same providential certainty with which they saw all the blessings and sufferings of their lives: “A holy and Good God heas cover’d us with Dark Cloud. . . . He Heas made me adore his

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<sup>130</sup> EEB to JE, November 2, 1757, in *Journal*, 295; and EEB to SP, September 18, 1756, in *Journal*, 224.

<sup>131</sup> JE to EEB, November 20, 1757, in *WJE*, 16:730.

goodness that we had him so Long. But my God Lives and he heas my heart.”<sup>132</sup> It is unlikely that Esther ever received news of her father’s death. In the course of several days, Esther contracted a mundane fever which quickly gave way to “a violent Headake and [she] soon [became] delirious” until her death on April 7.<sup>133</sup> In late April, Sarah Prince received word of the passing of her closest friend, for whom she quickly composed a private eulogy. Interpreting the loss of her “dear Sister” as the next and greatest affliction in her ongoing spiritual trial, Prince lamented that “God in Holy but awfull severity has Again struck at one of My Principle springs of Earthly Comfort. . . . O Painfull Seperation! O Desolate World . . . My God hides his Face! Can’t see Love in this dispensation! All seems anger yea Wrath to me!” In this, one of the final recorded acts of providential interpretation made by the Edwards network, the crucial impact of one’s situation on their understanding of God’s work in the world was put on display. Whereas the confident piety of Jonathan and Sarah Edwards and Esther Edwards Burr found sure comfort in God’s ordering of things and having called His servants home to eternal life, Prince rebuked the death of her “whole dependance for Comfort in this World.”<sup>134</sup> This personal, worldly, and visceral reaction was in keeping with her pessimistic faith at the time and her ongoing sense of spiritual degradation. Nevertheless, Prince’s personal sorrow and her frustration and anger with God was grounded in the belief which led Edwards and Burr to find comfort from the pain of losing their loved ones—the fundamental belief that all things, for good or ill, were providentially ordered as God communicated with the community of believers.

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<sup>132</sup> Sarah Pierpont Edwards to EEB, April 3, 1758, in *Journal*, 301.

<sup>133</sup> Sarah Edwards Parsons to Mary Dwight, April 18, 1758, in *Journal*, 303.

<sup>134</sup> SP, “Sarah Prince’s Eulogy for Esther Burr,” in *Journal*, 307–308. This remains as one of the few extant writings of Sarah Prince.



For those in Jonathan Edwards's close personal network, their understandings of King George's War and the French and Indian War, and of the blessings and sufferings these years of violence wrought on their own lives and the life of the British nation, were fundamentally shaped by their providentialism. The final two Anglo-French wars were many things for the godly who experienced them: they came as terrible judgments and remarkable mercies; confirmed and denied the holiness of God's chosen people; presented opportunities to establish unity throughout British Protestantism; grounded the call for spiritual reformation and revival; informed predictions of the hastening millennium; justified the violent pursuit of war; and provided comfort and meaning in times of fear and chaos. Despite these different, shifting, and sometimes contradictory interpretations and actions, the common foundation of providential belief, focused by war, created the space and means for all people to find some sense of meaning from the violence around them. All of the varied interpretive efforts of these members of the Edwards network were bound with the common connective tissue among them—a deeply spiritual view of the world as one guided by the very hand of God.

In their belief that God purposefully ordered all things on earth and in heaven, the Christians in Edwards's personal sphere found meaning and purpose amidst a time of profound violence and suffering. While their common belief in providence was an essential condition of their worldview, the wars of this era conditioned and focused that religious paradigm. The shared language of providence undergirded other essential facets of their national and religious discourse, including their sense of the Protestant empire, virulent anti-papery, and fear of suffering in Indian captivity, all of which were sharpened by the common experience of being a people at war. At the same time, one's own position in the ecclesiastical, political, and social spaces of the British Atlantic, as well as their relation and proximity to violence, the present

shape of military and political events, and the beliefs and actions (or lack thereof) of those around them, all greatly impacted how one interpreted and responded to the common contours of military providentialism. In the confluence of a common language and collection of beliefs; a shared series of events of local, colonial, and transatlantic importance which themselves commanded the need to find meaning and comfort; and the unique shape of each believer's own identity established a dynamic and important discourse about God's work on earth.

The Edwards family lived through, but not beyond, the nadir of the British war effort in North America, and thus their understanding of and actions during the war demonstrate the inextricable connection between providence and suffering for eighteenth-century Protestants. Careful, focused exploration of the lives of these believers also underscores the situatedness of their providential expressions. Their understanding of providence during the war did not prescribe a fixed or formulaic reaction, but rather was highly dependent on one's present situation. These deeds of searching for, interpreting, and acting upon God's will—and encouraging others to do the same—illustrate the active, not passive, response that providentialism occasioned. Significantly, these interactions between belief and experience took place in the midst of real anguish wrought by the violence of war. In this context, and through individual and communal acts of interpretation sprung a great number of religious and political messages for change, gentle words of guidance and fierce consternation, and, perhaps at the root of it all, deeply human hopes and fears.

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