The big book & the sword: A study of Native American disappointment with white morality

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THE BIG BOOK & THE SWORD: A STUDY OF NATIVE AMERICAN
DISAPPOINTMENT WITH WHITE MORALITY

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THESIS

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ABSTRACT

THE BIG BOOK & THE SWORD: A STUDY OF NATIVE AMERICAN DISAPPOINTMENT WITH WHITE MORALITY

by

Brendan McCaughey

University of New Hampshire, September, 2011

The following thesis investigates the sources of Native American disappointment with white morality from the mid-eighteenth century into the early nineteenth century. Countless studies have focused on violence and resistance in the American backcountry throughout the late colonial period as well as the native revitalization movements that often fueled that resistance.

This study focuses on a group of people who were constantly in contact with examples of white morality. After witnessing the examples of white missionaries, Native Americans were repeatedly perplexed by white settlers who did not adhere to the principles of their religion. This disappointment continued in the Republican period. The transgressions of their white neighbors led many Native Americans to believe that they were a people that could not be held to their word and that those who trusted in them walked a path that would lead them to destruction.
INTRODUCTION

During the 1830s, Cherokee Chief John Ross was desperately working to stall the removal of his people from their ancestral homeland in parts of what is now Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee. With the passage of the Indian Removal Act under President Andrew Jackson in 1830 and the intense pressure from the state government in Georgia, his efforts may have seemed futile at the time. Unlike other Indian nations, the Cherokee did not go to war in order to resist their removal to the west of the Mississippi. Instead, their leadership attempted, through the political and legal process, to prove that their removal would be unconstitutional and therefore illegal.

In January of 1831, Ross wrote Representative David Crockett who had come out against the removal of the Cherokee. Throughout his letter, Ross expresses his firm belief in the justice promised by the United States. “Whether this day will come in time to save the suffering Cherokees from violence and fraud,” he wrote, “it is for the wisdom, magnanimity & justice of the United States to determine.” Later that decade in 1835, Ross wrote to then President Andrew Jackson. In an attempt to alter the President’s decision he appealed to the morality of the issue:

Actuated by an unextinguishable love of country, confiding implicitly in the good faith of the American Govt. and believing that the Govt. priding itself, as it does upon its justice and humanity would, not only not, disregard its own plighted faith, but would eventually interpose to prevent it from being disregarded, and trampled into dust by the State of Georgia.

These two excerpts show a Cherokee Chief who had great faith in the American system and believed that it could work for his people as it had worked for white Americans. He
put faith in the American justice system and believed that by working within the system he could ultimately save his people from being removed from their ancestral lands.

This was a culmination of sorts of the relationship between whites and Native Americans east of the Mississippi. From the mid-1700s up until the removal of the “Five Civilized Tribes,” Native Americans had been shaping their opinions of their white neighbors in moral terms. Through contact with Christian missionaries they were exposed to the moral values and teachings of Europeans. Yet these Europeans often neglected to follow these values and Native Americans saw through their hypocrisy and brought that hypocrisy to light. In many cases, Native Americans believed in the tenets proposed to them by Europeans and later Americans. The Moravian Indians were seen as some of the most devout Christians by their white neighbors but they were still targeted by mobs of white settlers. This study addresses the disappointment of Native Americans with white virtue and corruption. Simply put, it is about their disappointment with whites and their inability (or refusal) to keep their word.

One of the most studied subjects of this period in Native American history is regarding the prophetic revitalization movements of the mid-1700s in the Mid-Atlantic backcountry. Historians, like Gregory Evans Dowd, argue that the prophets such as Neolin and Tenskwatawa were preaching concepts that were rooted in Algonquian spirituality. Dowd contends that because Native American prophets preached separation from white society even while they invoked Christian doctrine, their position was inherently anti-Christian. He references a quote in which a Delaware prophet, Scattameck preached that the Great Spirit told him that Indians, “should come to him by another way than that used by the white people.” While this quotation certainly seems anti-white or
anti-European as does much of the revitalization preaching of this period, I argue that it is not anti-Christian in its roots. The Native Americans of this area had had extensive contact with missionaries and would have understood where these ideas had originated. The act of coming back to the Great Spirit shows a rejection not of Christianity but a broader rejection of European culture and ways of living along with pointing out how whites were abandoning their own tenets of Christianity. In some ways, Native Americans were now instructing whites of Christian values and how their actions were incompatible with those beliefs.

Like Dowd, Alfred A. Cave seeks to return the focus of study to the traditional aspects of the prophetic revival. He argues that those who argue that religious innovations made by the prophets during the mid 18th century were essentially non-indigenous greatly overstate their case. He agrees that many aspects of the prophets’ message include aspects which are borrowed from Christianity and in some cases appear to have no counterpart within traditional Native American spirituality. Cave’s article, “The Delaware Prophet Neolin,” acts as a reexamination of native revitalization movements in an effort to show that they were primarily traditionalist in nature which was why they had such a wide appeal to the people hearing the prophets’ teachings. Ultimately he seeks to balance the scholarship by acknowledging Christian influence while also stressing indigenous ideas.  

Richard White, in his book *The Middle Ground: Indians, empires, and republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815*, argues that Neolin and the other prophets were moralists and that is why they took such interest in Christianity initially. He goes on to write that, “These Delaware Prophets, with their long exposure to Quaker and Moravian
proselytizing, were actively integrating the concept of sin into the Algonquian worldview." He notes that Algonquians generally believed in the tendency of manitous to punish those who failed with ritual offerings and that this shift from concern over ritual failings to concern over issues of morality occurred gradually throughout the 18th century. White’s concern in this book is primarily on the syncretism that developed between traditional Indian belief systems and European Christianity. This syncretism initially created what White calls a middle-ground of accommodation between Indians and Europeans. By the time my study begins, this middle-ground was beginning to disappear as Native Americans began to notice how Christian Europeans quite often neglected to follow the religious teachings they were providing them.

Jane T. Merritt touches upon my argument in her book, *At the Crossroads: Indians & Empires on a Mid-Atlantic Frontier, 1700-1763*. In her chapter on The Indian Great Awakening, she briefly argues how religious syncretism was not used only to revive traditional native spirituality but as a tool to try to keep white settlers in check. “To understand Christianity and its moral precepts,” Merritt argues, “gave Indian leaders a powerful language to urge white immigrants to live up to their own principles when they interacted with Indians.” Like White, Merritt sees the Native American use of Christianity as creating moralists. These Native American reformers were concerned with their own people’s sins but they understood where those sins had originated. Merritt’s analysis only briefly touches this point at the end of this chapter but it is a point that is worth exploring further.

Herbert G. Gutman, in his article “Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America, 1815-1919,” makes the argument that the cultural shift caused by an
industrializing country happened at different times for different individuals. He looks at three periods between 1815 and 1919 and addresses how different groups came into contact for the first time through industrialization. “In each of these distinctive stages of change in American society,” he writes, “a recurrent tension also existed between native and immigrant men and women fresh to the factory and the demands imposed upon them by the regularities and disciplines of factory labor.” While Gutman’s work focuses on American Industrialization, his argument of successive waves of change confronted by different populations can also be applied to Native Americans and their encounters with white Christians in the 18th and early 19th century. Throughout this study, the experiences of different groups of Native Americans will be analyzed throughout the mid-Atlantic. Their experiences varied but many times led them to the same conclusions regarding their white neighbors.

The majority of the literature on the subject of the prophets and the revitalization movements focus on the scholarly debate between an indigenous traditional movement and a radical non-indigenous Christian movement. This study will show a people who took spiritual concepts from Christian missionaries and then used them to speak out against white hypocrisy and to attempt to restore their culture to a former state prior to the white invasion. The Delaware prophets and other Native Americans saw white men as hypocrites who did not practice what they preached. Their disappointment with Europeans and later with the United States carried on from this period into the early republican period. After espousing their values to them, whether from a Christian source or an enlightenment source, the Native Americans expressed disappointment when white actions did not match their rhetoric.
It should be noted that the vast majority of sources used in this study (as well as the majority of those available) are the writings of white Anglo-Americans. In chapter 1, I focus on the Moravian Records, the Journal of James Kenny, the writings of John Heckewelder, and the account of Indian captive James Smith, among others. All of these individuals had their own reasons for recording what they did and sometimes, in the case of Heckewelder, their writing occurred years after the events they describe. Writings of missionaries sometimes exaggerate their successes among Native American congregations and many times they interpret native expression in Christian European terms. With this in mind, it is my intention to portray the Native Americans in question in as close to their own terms as the sources will allow. However, it is also important to note that trying to decipher the intentions of those who lived hundreds of years in the past can be problematic, especially through a white-centered lens. Despite this issue, this study will attempt to do just that. The focus of chapter 1 revolves around Native Americans making sense of Euro-American morality as it pertains to Christianity. With exposure to Christian ideas, Native Americans incorporate these beliefs into their own spiritual systems. Becoming knowledgeable of Christian morals and values, they then used such knowledge to express their discontent with Euro-Americans who were seen as living contrary to those beliefs.

In chapter 2, I pull more from the Moravian sources, relying primarily on the narrative of John Heckewelder and the Diary of David Zeisberger. The focus of this chapter is the Moravian interactions with the Native Americans of the Mid-Atlantic Frontier and their records of the interactions between white settlers and Native Americans. It begins at the earliest periods of Moravian missionary activity and continues
through the period of the American Revolution. The Native Americans referred to are primarily those within the towns and missions in which the Moravians lived. As with chapter 1 these Moravian sources present their own biases, mostly to present their missionary work in a particular light and in many cases show their way of life as following in the suffering of Christ. Chapter 2 focuses on a time when Native Americans began to truly experience white Christian hypocrisy. Throughout the chapter, Native Americans are exposed to various acts of violence at the hands of their white neighbors. At the same time, the Moravian missionaries that live within these towns give a contrasting view of Euro-American Christianity. For much of the period, they lived together in peace as the world around them raged with warfare.

Chapter 3 moves forward in time and examines the life of Tecumseh, the Shawnee Chief. The sources I focus on for this section include accounts from historians writing in the early to mid-nineteenth century about the events of Tecumseh’s life. These authors inevitably put their own spin on the situations they convey (there are several different accounts of the death of Tecumseh) but these are some of the best sources available for the period in question. I also focus on the speeches of Tecumseh in which he expresses his outrage at white actions towards Native Americans. These were speeches he delivered both to white audiences and Native American audiences. These speeches were also predominantly recorded by white witnesses. On top of these sources, I also present sources from individuals who were close to Tecumseh or who had significant interactions with the Shawnee Chief. With chapter 3, Tecumseh is presented as the culmination of this relationship between Native Americans and Christianity as it pertains to the expression of anger and disappointment with their white Christian neighbors.
Tecumseh pursued violent resistance and in this way departs from other Native Americans I have mentioned earlier in this study. He is an important figure in this study as he represents the result of white hypocrisy toward Native Americans. Using Christian language, his oratory skills gathered support for a pan-Indian movement even while it impressed his white adversaries. This pan-Indian confederacy would be the last significant resistance to Euro-American power on the continent.

Throughout this study, I will show a pattern of Indian disappointment with their white neighbors from the mid-eighteenth century into the early nineteenth century in the mid-Atlantic backcountry which encompasses what is now the states of Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana. Many of these Indians had been preached to by missionaries for years regarding the “right way to live” and the love of Jesus Christ. Some of them took these messages to heart while others rejected them. Both groups were able to spot the hypocrisy of their white neighbors and ultimately express their outrage in moralistic terms when they felt they were being pushed too far. The following is a look into Indian disappointment with Christian morals and values.
Notes


2 Chief John Ross to Andrew Jackson, The Papers of Chief John Ross, 317-318.


CHAPTER I

"WHAT SORT OF PEOPLE ARE THE WHITES?"

Sometime in the year 1760 the Delaware Prophet Neolin undertook a spiritual visionary journey in which he met the Master of Life. During his vision, he came upon three different paths. Each path was slightly narrower than the last. After taking the wider paths and encountering a growing fire as he approached, he took the narrowest path, which led him to a white mountain. Here the prophet met a beautiful woman in white who told him he must purify himself before climbing the mountain. After purifying himself in a stream, he began his ascent to the top of the mountain. Upon reaching the top, he saw three villages, each “prettier than his own.” 1 Arriving at one village, the prophet met the Master of Life who gave him instructions and laws about how he and his people should live. Neolin then returned to his village and told the chief what the Master of Life had told him and so the prophet’s message spread. 2 John M’Cullough, a colonist captured in 1756 during the French and Indians War, recalls hearing about the prophet from his adopted Indian brother:

My brother was gone to Tus-ca-la-ways, about forty or fifty miles off, to see and hear a prophet that had just made his appearance amongst them; he was of the Delaware nation; I never saw nor heard him. It was said, by those who went to see him, that he had certain hieroglyphics marked on a piece of parchment, denoting the probation that human beings were subjected to whilst they were living on earth, and also, denoting something of a future state. They informed me, that he was almost constantly crying whilst he was exhorting them. I saw a copy of his hieroglyphics, as numbers of them had got them copyed and undertook to preach, or instruct others. The first, (or principal doctrine,) they taught them, was to purify themselves from sin, which they taught they could do by the use of emetics, and abstainence from carnal knowledge of the different sexes; to quit the
use of firearms, and to live entirely in the original state that they were in before the white people found out their country, nay, they taught that fire was not pure that was made by steel and flint, but that they should make it by rubbing two sticks together . . . .

It was said, that their prophet taught them, or made them believe, that he had his instructions immediately from Keesh-she'-la-mil'-lang-up, or a being that thought us into being, and that by following his instructions, they would, in a few years, be able to drive the white people out of their country. 3

The visions and preachings of the Delaware Prophet Neolin are one of many instances of Native Americans taking aspects of Christian teachings and turning them against Anglo-Europeans. Many individuals prior to the prophet as well as many after infused similar beliefs into their own teachings in an attempt to revitalize Native American society and prevent white encroachment on their lands. During the middle of the eighteenth century in the mid-Atlantic frontier of British colonies in America, many Native Americans began to become disillusioned with what they saw as hypocrisy on the part of the white people. Those who had lived in missionary towns, like the Moravian town of Bethlehem in Pennsylvania, and those who had significant contact with missionaries had learned much of the Christians faith. When they saw these same individuals, who preached love and the glory of Jesus Christ, committing acts that seemed contradictory to their teachings many Native Americans turned against them. Whether by committing violence against their people or cheating them in trade negotiations, the actions of white Europeans appeared to go against their Christian teachings and many Native Americans became aware of this and spoke out. This anti-Christian Christianity that was embraced by Native American society during this period worked to revitalize their culture as well as separate themselves from white society.
The prophetic and revitalization movements among the Native Americans during the mid-eighteenth century have been studied and scrutinized for a variety of reasons. For this study, I offer the argument that these same Native Americans were attracted to many of the ideas present in Christianity. The rise of revitalization movements and their ultimate goal to sever their links from white society, while occurring for a host of reasons, were significantly fueled by the view that European Christians were not practicing what they preached. The fusion of Christian beliefs with traditional Native American spiritualism during this period was an act of protest in which Native Americans saw Europeans as not living up to their God’s teachings and therefore not worthy of the spiritual power it entailed. For Native Americans, religion was an important basis of their identity. When witnessing the transgressions of whites against them in ways that were counter to their religion, Native Americas were both perplexed and disappointed with white morality. This disappointment only deepened as time went on and little changed.

The Moravian Church was incredibly successful in its mission to Christianize Native Americans in the backcountry of Pennsylvania and later Ohio and Indiana. For many of the Indian groups they encountered, it was their first exposure to ideas of Christian morality. In the spring of 1762, John Gottlieb Ernestus Heckewelder accompanied Moravian Christian missionary Frederic Post on a mission into the far west of the Pennsylvania backcountry. Interested in the ministry among the Indians, Heckewelder was eager to begin his “labors in the Gospel.” Unfortunately for him, their arrival in the area corresponded with the Indian uprising known at the time as, Pontiac’s Conspiracy. Having to remove to the town of Bethlehem, Pennsylvannia, Heckewelder
was forced to wait to fulfill his dream. He would not have to wait long, however.

Between 1765 and 1771, Heckwelder was summoned various times to preach among the Christian Indians at a Moravian town on the Susquehanna River.

In 1771, he began his actual evangelical career in the Moravian mission. During his ministry among the Indians, he came to know and understand their rituals, customs, and attitudes towards the Europeans. He recalls the words of a Delaware orator in 1787 warning a group of Christian Indians to beware the white man:

I admit that there are good white men, but they bear no proportion to the bad; the bad must be the strongest, for they rule. They do what they please. They enslave those who are not of their colour, although created by the same Great Spirit who created us. They would make slaves of us if they could, but as they cannot do it, they kill us! There is no faith to be placed in their words. They are not like the Indians, who are only enemies, while at war, and are friends in peace. They will say to an Indian, “my friend! my brother!” They will take him by the hand, and at the same moment destroy him. And so you will also be treated by them before long. Remember! that this day I have warned you to beware of such friends as these.

Heckewelder points to various examples such as these throughout his tome on the Pennsylvannia backcountry. While Christian missionaries preached love and peace, Europeans acted against those ideas consistently when dealing with the Indians. The Indians themselves were already recognizing and preaching against this hypocrisy well before 1787.

Efforts to convert Native Americans to Christianity during the middle of the 18th century met with varied results. In mission towns like the Moravian town of Bethlehem Indians and missionaries lived in one community practicing the tenants of Christianity as taught by the missionaries. Some Indians became devout followers of these teachings and even took on European cultural norms as suggested by the missionaries, although this was not always the case.
In attempting to understand native religious ritual and belief, with the intent to be better positioned to eliminate them, the Moravians during the 1740s and 1750s began to actually accommodate those beliefs. Merritt writes that, “as they incorporated native idioms and rituals into their attempts to bring Indians into a common Christian faith, Moravian missionaries, perhaps unwittingly, acted more and more like shamans, their native counterparts.” The Moravians participated in native rituals by blessing hunters before the hunt, interpreting messages in native dreams, and presiding over ceremonies for the dead. In this way the Moravians, like the French Jesuits before them, used the medium of native tradition to convey the message of Christianity. In doing so, they participated in the religious syncretism that would eventually turn against them.

Similar religious syncretism occurred in West Africa when European missionaries first made contact with indigenous Africans. Robin Horton writes that, when dealing with the indigenous Africans they came across, “missionaries ‘extracted’ basic religious ideas and terminology from the peoples they encountered and reinterpreted or translated them in terms of Christian discourse.” Like in Native North America, Christianity in West Africa was “shaped as much by the ‘converts’ from below as by the missionaries from above.” In this way Native Americans took aspects from Christianity that they felt were useful and ignored those they thought ill fitted their society. Armed with aspects of Christian teachings, Native Americans were empowered to express their discontent with whites in non-violent ways that were more effective.

One symbol of Christianity that sparked interest among Indians was the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The Moravians were fascinated with the blood and wounds of Christ and had with them pictures of the bleeding lord. Especially among Indian men,
young warriors, this image of the suffering but calm and resolute man sparked admiration and wonder. A group of Nanticoke and Shawnee warriors who were visiting the town of Bethlehem in 1753 viewed such pictures with awe. “Do but look, how many wounds he has!” said one of them, “how much blood flows forth! I have also heard lately from the Brethren, th[a]t he was very sick, and prayed, and then sweat very much; th[a]t his sweat ran like blood from his body.”

This image must have been powerful for these young men, who saw Jesus Christ being tortured while remaining calm and collected. Indeed, to remain dignified while under severe torture was a quality that many Native American warriors desired. Wars between the Iroquois and Wyandot produced many captives for both sides and torture of captives was a common practice. In *The Jesuit Relations*, French missionaries describe the ritual of torture among these groups in great detail. It should be noted that this example is from one hundred years or so earlier than the date of this study though torture was still a part of life for warring Native American groups. For these men in 1753, Jesus Christ essentially became the warrior prophet and the syncretism of native cultural values and the tenants of Christianity continued in earnest. When living in a missionary town at this period, it would not be entirely clear to onlookers which was the dominant culture.

Charles Beatty, a Presbyterian minister, preached among the Indians for a time in the Ohio Country during the year 1766. Beatty and his fellow ministers often found themselves preaching to attentive and receptive audiences. They preached the gospel and hoped to root out vices present in Indian communities. They especially came out against the consumption of alcohol, which so devastated the Indian way of life. Following one such speech, the head of the Delaware nation approached Beatty remarking that his
preaching against the consumption of alcohol was agreeable to his people. He continued, saying, “Brothers the Fault is not all with us but begins with our Brothers the white People, for if they will bring out Rum some of our People will Buy it...they must Buy it, it is for that it is Brought.” 13

He goes on to plead with Beatty and his people to stop bringing rum into his nation due to the effects it has on his nation. The Delaware leaders were well aware of who was to blame for their misfortunes. After this, he also tells Beatty that, “there is another thing that we do not like, and complain of very much.” 14 The Delaware leader then informs him that, “there are some that do at times hire some of our Squaws to go to Bed with them & give them Rum for it...this thing is very Bad.” 15 The Delaware leader and his people had heard the moral preaching of Beatty and hoped that he could talk sense into the white men who were taking advantage of them through the use of alcohol.

James Kenny, a Quaker who traded with the Indians, writes in his diary of an Indian named John Doubty who expressed to him a similar opinion of the devastating consequences of alcohol among his people. “Indians,” he told Kenny, “were much better people before any white people came among them, then now.” 16 Doubty continued by telling Kenny that they prayed morning and night to the Good Spirit who preserved them. He concluded by remarking how “after the White people brought Rum & supplied the Indians with it, they forgot God & lost their former Devotion.” 17 Once again, this illustrates how the Indians clearly viewed their new behavior (however negative it was perceived) as being a result of their relationship with white men who were perverting Christian values. Doubty conveys to Kenny that the Indians were in fact men of God until the white men appeared and tempted them with the lure of alcohol. In this way white men
are again portrayed not only as acting contrary to their moral beliefs, but deliberately perverting Christian values.

James Smith was captured in 1755 at the age of 19 by Indians during the French and Indian War. Adopted into a family of the Conewago tribe, Smith traveled around the area of the Ohio Territory on the tribes migratory route. Apparently adopted to fill the role of a “great man,” he learned much in the way of wilderness survival and over time came to appreciate native culture and tradition. When recalling the Native American stance that they never stole from one another or cursed one another before the white men came, he relates this exchange between himself and Tecaughretanego, one of his Indian brethren.

I remember that Tecaughretanego, when something displeased him, said, God damn it. – I asked him if he knew what he then said? he said he did; and mentioned one of their degrading expression, which he supposed to be the meaning of something like the meaning of what he said. I told him that it did not beare the least resemblance to it; that what he had said, was calling upon the Great Spirit to punish the object he was displeased with. He stood for some time amazed, and then said, if this be the meaning of these words, what sort of people are the whites? 18

The words of Tecaughretanego in 1755 give a glimpse into how Native Americans of the area were dealing with the contradictions that presented themselves between white words and white action in regards to Christianity. In the years leading up to the Delaware Prophet’s revelation, Native Americans would continuously ask the question, “what sort of people are the whites?” As they became more and more versed in the message and teachings of Christianity as proclaimed by missionaries, they would also become more and more disillusioned with how those teachings were practiced by the Europeans themselves. It was at this point in the mid-eighteenth century that some Native
Americans began calling Europeans hypocrites for not following the tenets that they insisted Indians should follow.

During the 1740s and 1750s, Native Americans, armed with new religious tools with which to express their discontent, began confronting European hypocrisy with righteous outrage. The prophet Papoonan chastised Europeans for their greed when it came to trade in manufactured goods. He denounced the Pennsylvania Provincial Council saying, “You alter the price that you say you will give for our Skins, which can never be right; God cannot be pleased to see the prices of one & the same thing so often alter’d and Changed.” In this way, Papoonan uses the British colonists own beliefs against them as well as inadvertently pointing out the moral contradictions inherent in the European market economy. Coming out against greed and using guilt to convey their message, Native Americans expressed their discontent with how Europeans were contradicting their own beliefs. Papoonan also came out against greed among his own people, urging them to return to their old traditions and resist the draw of white culture. He was already becoming aware at how reliant his people had become on goods and trade with British colonists.

In 1742 Kachhowatchiy, the Shawnee chief, told Count Zinzendorf, a Moravian nobleman, that he had no wish to become European. According to his beliefs, “God had been very kind to him even in his old Age and would continue to look well after him.” He continues saying, “God was better pleased with the Indians, than with the Europeans. It was wonderful how much he helped them.” The Shawnee chief seems to express here that one can follow the basic teachings of Christianity without indeed becoming a
European. In this way, he is able to keep his own peoples’ culture while including aspects of Christianity.

There is a sense of Christian morality in the chief’s response as it makes the claim that God is less pleased with the Europeans. This is most likely due to Indian observations of their conduct towards their Indian neighbors. This plea for morality is exhibited in an interaction between James Kenny and a Delaware man in 1762. When weighing skins for fair trade, the Indian told Kenny that, “I(Kenny) must not Chate (cheat) or it would offend the Good Spirit above.” 21 This is another example of the use of Christian morality as a tool for leveling the field between Indians and Europeans. By using Christian principles against Europeans it was believed that it might be easier to ensure fair deals with them by appealing to them through their own religious worldview.

Kenny, while proclaiming that his Quaker principles led him and his fellow believers to better ends than the Indians’ principles did them, began a conversation with Indians who had come to trade regarding their recent decision to go to war against the colonists. He asked one Indian named John Armstrong why his people went to war when the council fire in Philadelphia had been lit and peace had been pledged between the two peoples. To this, Armstrong replied, that “the white people covets the land and Eat them out by Inches & that they are doing the same here, which was against the Will of God.” 22 The language used here, if they are indeed an accurate representation on the part of Kenny, show an affinity with Christian language. Here again, Indians use the common God to try to convince Kenny that what the colonists are doing to them is contrary to what they have heard from preachers and missionaries.
As the native idea of separate creations began to gain acceptance among Indian
groups, Native Americans saw themselves as separate from the white settlers. In the early
1770s, missionary David Zeisberger overheard a Mingo man say that, “Indians are men,
even as are whites, but God has created them differently.” When Zeisberger told the man
that Christ had come to the earth and died for all men, the Indian replied, “then the
Indians are certainly not guilty of his death, as the whites are.” 23 This became a common
argument for Native Americans to make. It was a rational interpretation of what was
being preached to Native Americans during this time. In the Early American Republic,
this argument continued. Cornplanter, the prophet Handsome Lake’s half brother, told
Quaker missionaries that, “it was the white people who kill’d our Saviour.” 24 In this way,
Jesus Christ was a victim of white greed and violence as the Native Americans and the
center figure of Christianity came to be a symbol for anti-European sentiments. In other
words, white people killed Christ and therefore they do not deserve the spiritual power
that he and his teachings possess. This response insinuates that this spiritual power could
indeed be harnessed and used by Native Americans.

In the Moravian town of Kuskuski, Zeisberger encountered more questions and
accusations about Christianity and the true motives of the white missionaries. One Indian
man, who identified himself as an ex-Christian, proclaimed, “that he had read the Bible
from beginning to end and that it is not written in it that the Indians should live like white
people, or that they should change their lives.” 25 This was in response to Moravian
efforts, similar to most missionary efforts in this area, to turn the Indians into European
farmers along with converting them to Christianity. Voices like these, recorded in the late
1760s, show a people resisting European culture and ways of living while still embracing
aspects of Christianity that had been taught to them. For this Indian man and many like him, one could still follow the basic teachings of Christianity without becoming a European.

Zeisberger, attempting to preach to the Shawnees in 1773, met with resistance from Chief Gischenatsi who told the missionary that the Europeans, “always profess to have great wisdom from above, at the same time, they deceive us at will for they regard us as fools.” By this time, the Native Americans of the area had become disillusioned with white men who would say one thing and then do another. For Chief Gischenatsi, it was clear that white missionaries and settlers alike wanted to take his peoples lands for their own. In many cases, as the perceived hypocrisy of white Christians fueled discontent and more and more, nativist interpretations of Christianity and a separate creation ideology became more attractive to Native Americans.

Different versions of this separate creation ideology existed in different time periods. Moravian missionary, John Heckewelder in an account written in the early 19th century, recalls his experiences with the prophet Wangomend who preached in the mid to late 1760s. “He would make his followers believe,” Heckewelder writes, “he had been permitted to take a peep into the heavens, of which there were three, one for the Indians, one for the negroes, and another for the white people.” He goes on to write that Wangomend saw the Indian heaven as being the happiest of them all and in contrast, the white heaven was the unhappiest. Heckwelder writes that Wangomend’s explanation for this was that, “they were under chastisement for their ill treatment of the Indians, and for possessing themselves of the and which God had given to them. They were also punished for making beasts of the negroes, by selling them as the Indians do their horses and dogs,
and beating them unmercifully, although God had create them as well as the rest of mankind." 27 Wangomend in this instance is preaching as a moralist who denounces white policies not only against his own people but against African slaves as well. Though he preached primarily to bring his people back to the old ways and away from the damaging culture of the whites, his message in many ways serves as a warning to whites who have displeased God by not following his teaching. The concept of guilt, taken from Christian missionaries, became a tool used against whites themselves.

In 1754, Moravian missionaries encountered an Indian preacher. This preacher had with him a book. According to the Moravian accounts, in the book was written “everything that they should know about God, about the world, about men, about deer, about hunting, and about other things.” 28 James Kenny was shown a religious book by an Indian named Simon in the early 1760s. Kenny describes the book as portraying an image of the Son or “little god” which the Indians said prayers to. He concludes his journal entry by saying that there is “no good at the Bottom of their Religion.” 29 The use of religious paraphernalia (especially literature) by Native Americans shows a further step in resistance to whites in regards to religion. Not only were native preachers using Christian principles against whites but now they were competing with missionaries for the souls of Indian country with their own prayer books. As mentioned in the opening of this study, the Delaware Prophet Neolin also possessed a type of prayer book which he carried with him that contained pictographs depicting the proper way to live. It also showed a path to heaven and a path to hell which he believed his people were on.

As the anti-European reform movement picked up steam, Indians began to ask much more pointed questions of missionaries. In 1761, the reformer Papunhank asked the
Quaker missionaries he was meeting with why “white people were very wicked, as they had so great an advantage of that book, and lived so contrary to it.” Obviously referring to the Bible, Papunhank was very critical of the wickedness of white people and the influence that wickedness had on Indians either directly or indirectly. From an Indian’s point of view, they did not even have a book before the white men came and yet they did not steal or cheat one another. Papunhank saw the Bible as a guide for life that the Europeans were not following, the same Europeans that were telling his people how to live. This inconsistency continued to cause discontent among the Native Americans.

John Heckewelder also relates the sentiments of Indians who are confounded by the fact that Europeans have a book of morals and yet choose to go against it. While it is debatable whether a real individual spoke the words quoted in his book, the message is the same. He begins, “And yet,” say those injured people,

These white men would always be telling us of their great Book which God had given to them, they would persuade us that every man was bad who did not believe in it. They told us a great many things, which they said were written in the good Book, and wanted us to believe it all. We would probably have done so, if we had seen the practice what they pretended to believe, and act according to the good words which they told us. But no! while they held their big Book in one hand, in the other they had murderous weapons, guns and swords, wherewith to kill us, poor Indians! Ah! and they did so too, they killed those who believed in their Book, as well as those who did not. They made no distinction!

It is not clear how much of this quotation is in fact the word and opinions of the author himself. The fact that no one figure is mentioned as saying these words suggests that Heckewelder is trying to convey a general sentiment felt among the Indians at this time. Still, it is a powerful indictment of the Europeans who profess to be doing God’s work while actively working contrary to it. The Indians, by this time, had become accustomed to this hypocrisy and were actively using Christian teachings to fight against it.
Jane T. Merritt offers an excellent analysis of Native American attitudes towards white Christians and how they express it in moralistic terms. She offers various quotations that give more insight into her argument. One instance is one in which the Delaware Chief asked David Brainerd “why he wanted ‘the Indians to become Christians seeing the Christians were so much worse than the Indians are in their present state. The Christians would lie, steal, and drink worse than the Indians.’” Here the Chief criticizes white Christians and offers Brainerd a enlightened and interesting question. Why should we become Christian if Christians can’t even live by their own rules? Merritt continues, offering a quotation from an Indian travelling through the Moravian town of Bethlehem in 1744. The man stated that, “he wanted nothing to do with [Christian] teaching. For he saw that even if many Indian and white people observe the Sabbath, they were still just as wicked as them.” Like the Delaware Chief, this man already recognized in 1744 that white Christians were not living up to their teachings. They were wicked, and Indians had to separate themselves from white society before it tainted their own.

Many sources testify to the syncretism of Christianity with traditional Native American beliefs during the mid to late eighteenth century. This period saw a rise in missionary activity along with a rise in white immigration and degenerating social problems among Native American communities. Native Americans, recognizing that newly arrived whites with which they had dealings were the problem, began to speak out against them. The white men that they saw were devoid of morality. They lied to them, they cheated them, they stole from them, and sometimes even killed them. All of these actions contradicted what they had been taught of Christianity from the
missionaries that lived near them. Using aspects of Christianity in their rhetoric, they condemned the white man.

The prophets of this period combined Christianity with native understandings of the cosmos as a way of taking spiritual power away from those who apparently did not follow it anymore. Taking Christian teachings and incorporating them into their lives also allowed Native Americans to attempt to make white Christians alter their own behavior, as they tried on many occasions. When these attempts did not work, the ideology of separate creations and separate afterlives ultimately led to war as Native Americans attempted to rid themselves of white influence (as well as the whites themselves).

The blending of native traditions with Christianity was not simply the result of an internalization of white culture, nor was the revitalization and reform movement a purely indigenous one. Native Americans had learned about the teachings of Jesus Christ in the years before and seen over time how Europeans were failing to follow those teachings. Native Americans then used those same teachings against Europeans while attempting to restore their own power in the Old Northwest.
Notes


2 Ibid. 8-17.


5 Ibid. vii-viii.

6 Ibid. 80-81.

7 Jane T. Merritt, At the Crossroads, 106.

8 Ibid. 106.


11 Moravian Records, Mar. 20, 1753, in English, reel 40, box 3500, folder 16.


14 Ibid. 66-67.

15 Ibid. 66-67.


17 Ibid. 165-166.


Zeisberger, “1769 Diary,” 144-150.

David Zeisberger, “Diary 1772-81, in MAB, reel 8, box 141, September 19, 1773, 13: 17-18


*Moravian Records*, July 5, 1754, reel 28, box 217, folder 12, item 4.


Merritt, *At the Crossroads*, 124.
CHAPTER II

INDIANS AND MORAVIANS

On the night of December 27, 1763, William Henry Esq. was witness to a horrific sight in his hometown of Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Upon spotting a group of armed men rushing towards the local jail, he and his companions decided to follow them and discover what all the commotion was about. "We met from twenty-five to thirty men, well mounted on horses, and with rifles, tomahawks, and scalping knives, equipped for murder," Henry writes. ¹ It was only upon entering the jail yard that Henry would fully realize just how horrific the events of this night would end. Near the backdoor of the prison were the bodies of four Indians. An old man and his wife, along with their two children laying across their chests, their heads split and scalped with tomahawks. Along the western wall lay a man who had been shot through the chest, his hands and legs having been hacked off by tomahawk. A rifle ball had been "discharged in his mouth," Henry continues, "so that his head was blown to atom, and the brains were splashed against, and yet hanging to the wall, for three or four feet around.... In this manner lay the whole of them, men, women, and children, spread about the prison yard: shot – scalped – hacked – and cut to pieces." ²

The time period in which these Indians began critiquing European Christians on their moral ambiguity was chaotic and frenzied, with both groups of people living on the edge and with atrocities being committed on both sides. Peter Silver's book, Our Savage Neighbors, does an excellent job documenting and presenting the general feeling of
uneasiness on the mid-Atlantic backcountry from this period and into the early republic.

According to Silver, white settlers were constantly aware of the real possibility of Indian raids and that this awareness sometimes translated into what could be called paranoia. This paranoia could often transform into horrific actions, against those who were least responsible. Silver repeatedly cites Moravian mission records which point to the growing conflict that was beginning to surround missionaries and their Christian Indian congregations.

John Heckewelder describes the situation, in the mid-1700s, that the Brethren (the Moravians) and Christian Indians had to deal with.

The loss the whites sustained in not having these Indians in their interest and under control as formerly, when they were accustomed to take unlawful liberties and advantages of them, by defrauding them of their just due for labor, by imposing liquor upon them, thereby encouraging intoxication for the sake of gain, was considered by them as a serious loss; added to this, the Indian converts would frequently detect and reprimand offenders, which these white men could not relish; and ascribing the cause of the change in the life and morals of those Indians, to the missionaries, the sought by every stratagem to get rid of them, and some even offered liquor to any Indian that would kill them. (emphasis added)

This passage by Heckewelder explains how Indians, when presented with the teachings and tenets of Christianity, noticed almost immediately the inconsistencies posed by the transgressions of the white man against their people. This in turn further aggravated relations between the Indians and their white colonial neighbors. While Heckewelder specifically refers to the persecution of the Moravians by white settlers for this reason (the beginning of his narrative is a laundry list of the wrongs visited upon the Brethren for their dealings with the Indians), the Indians themselves were retaliated against more and more as they began to speak up against the white settlers. This, coupled with the real
armed conflicts between what Heckewelder repeatedly deems “hostile Indians” and white settlers, puts the missionaries and Christian Indians in a precarious position.

Over all, the Christian Indians as well as the Brethren would both suffer accusations and violence during this period of uncertainty. Their location on the map of the frontier would also offer them an interesting perspective as peoples living in two worlds. These two worlds were almost always at odds with one another, but there were also periods where the two could find common ground. Both of these instances should be addressed when trying to understand this period and ultimately to understand Indian disappointment in European morality. The subsequent sections of this chapter will illustrate the myriad examples of Euro-American actions which struck Indians as profoundly un-Christian and hypocritical.

The rampage of the “Paxton Boys” which William Henry witnessed in Lancaster was considered one of the biggest atrocities committed against peaceful Indians at the time. In the short term, it was denounced by many whites, including Benjamin Franklin who wrote in his *Narrative of the Late Massacres* in 1764 that the Conestoga Indians “would have been safe in any Part of the known World, -- except in the Neighbourhood of the CHRISTIAN WHITE SAVAGES of Peckstang and Donegall!” This brutal attack against peaceful Indians, some of them like Will Sock who was considered “esteemed by the people of the town, on account of his placid and friendly conduct,” was certainly not the first and would not be the last in a series of atrocities along the mid-Atlantic backcountry. The Moravian missionaries and their Christian Indian converts had been experiencing hostility from both hostile white settlers as well as hostile Indian groups.
A previous instance of violence against Christian Indians involved a Indian family who had traveled to a general store in order to exchange their recently acquired peltry for new clothing. At the time, in 1763, troops were being raised in the backcountry to help fight against hostile Indians. The general store, also selling liquor, was at the time serving a contingent of soldiers, all of whom were well intoxicated. According to Moravian missionary John Heckewelder, as soon as this Indian family stepped inside, “These soldiers… together with their officers, being in a high state of intoxication, fell upon these defenceless Indians, and murdered the whole of them.” Heckewelder’s description is one of what would become many atrocities committed on peaceful Christian Indians by white settlers. He goes on to write about how, fearing reprisals, these soldiers moved against the relatives of the victims at Wechquetank (a Moravian Indian town) but were convinced to leave by the Brethren. As this former act of murder went unpunished, Heckewelder goes on to say that these whites formed a mob threatening to “kill every Indian both at Wequetank and Nain.” Ultimately, the party responsible for the initial murder were themselves murdered by an Indian raid, to the outrage of the white settlers. As a result, renewed calls for the murder of Christian Indians caused fear among the populations in the Christian towns of Nain and Bethlehem.

Heckewelder also mentions reports of fires breaking out in the Christian Indian towns of Wechquetank and Bethlehem, the former being burnt to the ground. He seems to be of the opinion that these actions were attributable to white mobs which may be the case. As Heckewelder mentions earlier in his text, mobs of white settlers, angry with Indian transgressions (real or imagined) had indeed threatened to kill every Indian in these settlements. These calls for the death of Indians and spontaneous attacks would
culminate in the events in Lancaster at the hands of the Paxton Boys. On the whole, these back and forth attacks were common in the mid-Atlantic colonies at this time.

On the eve of war in the colonies, the governor of the Virginia colony, Lord Dunmore, declared war against the Indian nations around the Ohio River. Heckewelder describes the atrocities committed by the Virginia militia towards the Indian communities. “The whole country on the Ohio river,” he writes, “had already drawn the attention of many persons from the neighbouring provinces; who generally forming themselves into parties, would rove through the country in search of land, either to settle on, or for speculation.” Land hungry colonists roamed the land around the Ohio River looking to stake out land. Heckewelder continues, “some, careless of watching over their conduct or destitute of both hounour and humanity, would join a rabble, who maintained, that to kill and Indian, was the same as killing a bear or a buffalo, and would fire on Indians that came across them by the way.” Much like the Paxton Boys, parties of Virginians (as the Indian nations of the mid-Atlantic backcountry would come to call all inhabitants of the colonies) would ravage the countryside, killing Indians indiscriminately. It is clear by his writings that Heckewelder was deeply upset with this behavior on the part of the colonists.

While Christian Indians received the brunt of white aggression, their Moravian neighbors were seen by many whites as the enablers of these Indians. They were not only angry at them for teaching Indians the gospel but they were often afraid, not being able to distinguish friendly Indian from hostile Indian. John Heckewelder addresses another belief held by some whites in the backcountry in regard to their Indian neighbors. After hearing reports of attacks from hostile Indians along the Ohio River, many white
Christians began to offer their own interpretations. Heckewelder writes, “Such accounts were eagerly caught at by fanatics, to serve the doctrine they heretofore had held, viz; that the Indians were the Canaanites, who by God’s commandment were to be destroyed; and that this not having been done by them at that time, the present war might be considered as a just punishment from God for their disobedience.” In this version of the narrative, white settlers were not being punished by God through Indian raids because of their questionable treatment of the Indians but because they had not rid the land of their people entirely as God willed the Israelites to do in Canaan.

As for teaching Indians the tenets of Christianity, many white settlers were strongly opposed to the idea. There were various reasons for this. One, as Heckewelder alludes to, is that it would give the Indians knowledge to use against their white oppressors. He writes that, “the Indian converts would frequently detect and reprimand offenders, which these white men could not relish.” According to Heckewelder, when Indians were taught the basic tenets of Christianity it became more difficult for white men to then take advantage of them.

The fear of losing control over indigenous peoples could also be seen in the prospect of African slaves being taught Christian principles. In Frey and Wood’s book, *Come Shouting to Zion*, they touch upon these fears in the southern colonies. They write that slaveholders in the Low Country of South Carolina, slaveholders “feared that slaves might employ Christian doctrines as a means of securing either an amelioration of their conditions of servitude.” Later in that chapter, Frey and Wood find examples of southern slaveholders holding the view that “Christianity not only made bond-people ‘prouder’ but also ‘infuses them with thoughts of freedom.’” White Euro-Americans
feared teaching Indians Christianity as much as they did the teaching of African slaves primarily because it provided an insight into their own moral shortcomings and gave the other group power to recognize and address those shortcomings.

The distrust of the Moravians, who many white settlers saw as upsetting the balance of power between themselves and the Indians, often erupted into open hostility. On a journey to Philadelphia, Heckewelder writes, “after suffering much on the journey, both from the inclemency of the weather, and from the insults and threats thrown out against them by the inhabitants of some places, who declared that hanging and burning ought to be their doom....” Many white settlers saw their work as counterproductive and, at its worst, consorting with the enemy.

Heckewelder goes on to describe the soldiers’ refusal to allow them to lodge in the barracks and the appearance of a mob, which surrounded the Brethren. “Meanwhile a great mob had assembled around them,” he writes, “deriding, reviling, charging them with all the outrages committed by the enemy, at the same time threatening to kill them on the spot; to all which they were silent, not uttering one word, but relying wholly on the providence of God, to whom they afterwards ascribed their preservation.” Moravian preachers would soon begin to find their ability to minister to their Indian congregations compromised as hostilities between white Euro-Americans and their Indian neighbors began to increase. When the language of Christianity used by Indians failed to elicit the desired effect on white Euro-Americans, some turned to war as a way of getting their point across.

With Indian hostility intensifying during the American Revolution, the Moravians and their Indian congregations were put in a precarious position. In his diary, David
Zeisberger wrote about the events which took place in and around the Moravian Indian town of Lichtenau in what would become Ohio. As the conflict intensified and the Governor of British held Detroit incited the hostile Indians tribes, threats towards the white ministers in the town became more frequent. One morning in November of 1776, John Heckewelder opened the door on his house to find six Minque (Mingo) warriors wandering around the town. When approached by an Indian minister and asked what their business was at the Delaware Christian town they replied, “We are looking for White people so we can beat in their heads.” At first the minister replied that there were no white people in the town and asked them why they would be searching for white men in the Delaware villages. They replied that they knew some were here and they wished to see them. The Indian minister told them that the only white people in the town were the white teachers and that they were their friends and they would not let anyone harm them. The warriors replied, “We know they are there (and pointed to our house) and if we had wanted to kill them, we would have done so before you knew anything about it.” Zeisberger writes that they were apparently looking for traders that had passed through the town on their way to the Shawnee.

This instance is an example of what the Christian Indian towns faced from hostile Indians during the revolution in the colonies. Though the warriors did not commit any acts of violence towards the inhabitants of the town their threats of violence, along with theft upon their departure, was an obvious attempt to keep the town on the edge. Even more likely, actions such as these were meant to frighten the inhabitants and cause them to cast out their white Christian ministers who many non-Christian Indians saw as trespassing on Indian land.
Despite the danger their position in the backcountry posed, Zeisberger argued against moving the Indian congregation closer to the white settlements. “If we had our choice,” he wrote, “we would prefer to stay here in Indian Country despite all the wars, because we can see in advance that some harm will be done if we go to the Settlements of the White people.” This is no doubt a reference to the events in Lancaster in 1763 involving the Paxton Boys. Certainly Zeisberger remembered the atrocities committed by the white settlers and saw it as more of a risk to move closer to them then to stay in the middle of hostile Indian nations. For whatever reason he thought it better for the congregation to be closer to the Indian nations that to the white frontier settlements. This could also possibly be because he understood the resentment that many frontier settlers had towards the Moravians and their Christian Indians; many of them having suffered the loss of loved ones due to Indian raids.

The Christian Indians’ position became even more precarious as the Colonies began to actively fight against the Indians in the backcountry. Later that November, Indian Minister and messenger from Philadelphia, Gelelelmind returned with news from the treaty proceedings. The Congress in Philadelphia was warning the Delaware Indians not to go out hunting. Gelelelmind related the message to Lichentau saying, “that because the Minque and Wyandot had done so much harm in the Settlements and had murdered their people, innocent women and children, they could no longer hold back their Captains and warriors who were ready to go after their enemies.” Many in the town feared that these open engagements so close to the town would mean trouble for the Delaware. Throughout this period, the Moravians were constantly trying to keep them neutral during these conflicts between the Indians and the colonies. Many now feared that should this
attack on the hostile Indians fail, they might take retribution against the peaceful
Christian Indian town and kill the white ministers.

In February of the next year, the Indian congregation at Lichentau began to
receive direct threats from the hostile Indian nations. An Indian had come from the
Mingo town of Kinhanschican to tell the Indians of a council held by the Wyandot,
Chippewa, Tawa, Mingo, and Shawnee nations in which they discussed the white men.
Zeisberger writes in his diary that Kinhanschican told the Indians that they,

…wanted to destroy them, and when they had finished with them they would
remove those Indians who had not helped them from the face of the earth. They
would come here and thro the Delaware’s Ministers out of the houses and beat
them to death. If the Indians intervened and opposed them, they would not treat
them any better. 21

This was one of the first threats directed at the town itself and in which the Delaware
Indians had been implicated. The hostile Indian nations were angry that the Delaware
remained neutral in a war that they believed all nations should unite.

In late 1777, news reached Lichentau of a new general being put in charge in
Pittsburgh. According to the news, “He would not Pardon any Indian, friend or foe, but
wanted to eradicate all of them.” 22 Now the Indian congregation not only had to fear
attack from hostile Indians to the west but also the possibility of armed Pennsylvania
militia marching through their towns and killing at will as had happened over a decade
prior in Lancaster. The threats continued from the hostile Indians as well. In 1778,
Zeisberger writes, “The Munsee have started causing havoc, beating out cattle to death,
acting proud and saying we should just wait another 3 or 4 weeks; then we would see
something we have never experienced before. Supposedly there would not be any Indian
congregation before long.” 23 The congregation was caught in the middle of what would
become a brutal conflict in the backcountry. For a time at least, the presence of the Delaware kept the white men safe while the presence of the white men kept the Delaware safe. This arrangement would not always prove so successful.

As the war raged on around them, the Delaware Indians were split on whether to engage in the war or not. Some sided with the colonies while others moved west towards Detroit and sided with the British. Those in the Moravian towns remained neutral as best they could but the prospect of being forced into service was always present. In 1779, a report came to Lichentau of General McIntosh having handed the “War Belt” to the Delaware Chiefs the year before. Zeisberger writes, “If this had been executed, it might have meant that our Indians had to serve in the war...Until now we had reassured ourselves that it (the conflict) would pass by quietly and have no further consequences. Now, however, the General is claiming it and insisting upon it. Therefore he asks for 2 Captains with 60 men for his use.”

Again, the missionaries and their congregation found themselves in a difficult position. The Delaware nation had split loyalties in this conflict and now it seemed that the Moravian Indians that had desperately tried to remain neutral would end up being forced to fight.

Despite the horrors and atrocities committed during the mid-1700s in the mid-Atlantic colonies, there were indeed instances in which both groups came together. This cooperation was mostly prevalent in and around the Christian Indian towns. John Heckewelder recounts a story from February of 1761 in the Christian Indian town of Nain. A white man and his wife arrived in the town weeping. Their child had gone missing and they feared the worst. Approaching the Indians, the white man begged for their aide in finding the child, who had already been missing for a day. According to
Heckewelder, “several of the Indian brethren immediately went to the house of the parents, and discovered the footsteps of the child, and tracing the same for the distance of two miles, found the child in the woods, wrapped up in its petticoat, and shivering with cold.” For many white people living in the vicinity of Nain, their deep-seated distrust and misgiving about living alongside the Indians disappeared. Heckewelder writes, “this incident was the means of making them easy, and causing them to rejoice, in having such good neighbours.”

It is clear that Heckewelder attributes this incident primarily to the fact that these Indians who helped this man find his child were converted Christians who were living in a Christian town. Nevertheless, the incident shows that such cooperation between the two peoples was indeed possible and did occur. Earlier in the narrative, Heckewelder describes the astonishment of many of the white settlers when seeing how a “savage race should be brought to live in peace and harmony, and above all devote themselves to religion.”

The Moravian mission towns themselves also serve as an example of cooperation between whites and Indians. Zeisberger’s time among the Delaware Indians provides numerous examples showing this. Even during the war in the colonies, the town stayed strong against both hostile Indians and rampaging militia. The dedication of the Christian Indians to the protection of their white teachers can be seen time and time again. Without this dedication and admiration, it would be easy to imagine a scenario in which hostile Indians did indeed murder the Moravians. Their Indians supporters, however, worked hard to avoid this end. Zeisberger recounts the words of an Indian named Isaac who lived in Lichentau. As the prospect of an Indian attack on the town becomes more likely, he
tells Zeisberger that, “if he saw that their teachers were being harmed, he would say to them, Before you kill our teachers, you should kill me. As long as I am alive, you will not do anything to them.” Isaac then goes on to tell Zeisberger of a time in which he was injured in a fall and could not move. Upon hearing of warriors seeking out the white ministers in town, however, his strength returned and he went to aid the ministers without the thought of pain. This is one of many examples of the mission Indians themselves being so dedicated to the white ministers that they would give their own lives for them if it came to it. The Moravian missionaries relied on the Indians to survive and they in turn provided them with the message of Christianity which to many of them was an attractive exchange.

The records kept by the Moravian missionaries who lived among the Delaware like Heckewelder and Zeisberger present the conflict between both Native Americans and Euro-Americans during this period. The repeated actions of violence committed on Christian Delawares are key to understanding why Native Americans viewed their white Christian neighbors the way they did. In truth, Euro-American actions spoke much louder than their words and such actions confirmed Native American suspicions that they were indeed hypocrites that didn’t practice what they preached. The Christian Indians in the Moravian congregations as well as the “hostile” non-Christian Indians were both peoples who saw their spirituality as extremely important in their life. When they saw Christian Euro-Americans going against the words of their holy book, their dismay would eventually lead to a profound disappointment in white moral values. The relationship between the Christian Indians and their Moravian ministers present an island in the middle of a turbulent sea.
In March of 1782, in the midst of the American Revolutions, the basis of this relationship would be brutally tested. The accounts of the event vary; John Heckewelder writes a brutal account of the event from what he heard from Indians who were witnesses. Before providing the account, it is first important to recount the series of events that led up to what would become known as the Gnadenhutten Massacre. In late 1781, the Indian nations who were allies of the British in Detroit arrived outside the Moravian Indian towns and implored the Christian Indians to move further west towards Detroit. They were then forced to move by the Indians led by Captain Elliot of the British, missionaries included, and leave the majority of their belongings and livestock behind. They arrived on the 11th of October at a town on the Upper Sandusky on the east branch of the river. Here they found a land that paled in comparison to the land they were forced to leave. According to Heckewelder, “The cattle finding no good pasture were continually attempting to return,” and, “Provisions of all kinds were wanting, and when the women went into the woods, or on the river banks, to look for, and dig roots as a substitute, they either could not find what they were in search of, or the ground was too hard frozen to get at them.”

On the 25th of the same month the missionaries Zeisberger and Heckewelder, along with some others, were taken from their new settlement to the British held settlement in Detroit. Once in Detroit they were brought before the commandant and a council consisting of British and Indian individuals. Here they were accused of treason through the act of carrying on communications with the enemy (the United States). After testifying to the contrary and having received supportive testimonials from Indians in the
council, the missionaries were acquitted of the charges against them and permitted to leave Detroit and return to their homes in their new settlement on the Sandusky.  

At the start of 1782, the congregation on the Sandusky were weathering a brutal winter in their small huts. Their livestock suffered, many of them perishing due to the cold and the lack of suitable pasture. A famine began to take place in the settlement and many were forced to eat the dying cattle that were littering the street. In this situation, the Indians in the town made the decision to return to their home towns further east and gather up their crops which they had buried before they left. Shortly after their departure, the missionaries were again recalled to Detroit where they were yet again being accused of communicating with the rebels. They were to be removed from their congregation and moved to Detroit. It was when the missionaries were preparing to leave for Detroit that they received word of the horrific events that had befallen their congregation at Gnadenhutten.

In Gnadenhutten, Ohio, the Indian congregation had recently returned to harvest their crops. As they began to pack up their belongings and ready themselves to leave in the next morning, 160 Pennsylvania militia approached the town, rounded up the Indians and accused them of raiding across the border into Pennsylvania. The Indians denied this and the militia held a vote in which they decided to kill the captured Indians. On March 8th, the next morning, the militia bound the Indians and clubbed them with mallets. Afterwards they scalped them all and burned the bodies within the town buildings. They then grabbed as much of the Indians possessions as they could fit on their horse, possessions which they had accused the Indians of stealing. In total, ninety-six Moravian Indians were murdered while two children escaped to tell of the massacre.
Heckewelder’s narrative describes the event as follows: “On the day our Indians, were bundling up their packs,” he writes, “intending to set off on the next morning; a party, of between one and two hundred white people, from the Ohio settlements, made their appearance at Gnadenhutten.” He goes on to tell of the fate of Joseph Shabosh, the son of one of the Moravian brethren, who was murdered by the militia before they reached the town. Heckewelder continues to tell of the arrival of the group of white men in town and how they approached the Indians working in the fields addressing themselves as friends there to relived them from the attacks of their enemies. They informed them that they should retire to the town center and prepare to leave for the east where the Americans would protect them.

From this point things quickly got out of hand. The Indians gave up their arms, firmly believing the promises of the white settlers. Soon they were being told that they were not Christians but warriors. They were declared enemies by the colonists and were told that all their belongings in the village had been stolen from the settlements. Heckewelder writes:

They were further told: “that the horses found with them, had been taken from white people, they being branded with letters, with which Indians were unacquainted; that the axes found with them, had the names of white people stamped upon them. Pewter basins and spoons were stolen property, the Indians making use of wooden bowls and spoons. Tea-kettles, pots, cups, and saucers, was also declared stolen property. In short everything they possessed, was said to have been taken from the white people whilst at war with them; and to this they would swear. 32

After this, the Indians requested that they be given some time in which they began to kneel and pray while the white settlers convened and decided that they would be put to death. They then took the Indians and one of the group grabbed a mallet from one of the houses and one after another, knocked down each Indian. They were then scalped them
and proceeded to set fire to the houses in the town. Two young Indians managed to escape the massacre and make it back to the Moravians on the Sandusky. ³³

Obidiah Holmes, Jr. was one of the militiamen present at the massacre at Gnadenhutten. His account offers the perspective of one who was on the other side of the attack on that day in March. According to the account, he was one of the few present that voted against putting the Christian Indians to death and was disgusted with the events that took place. Not only was he against the actions taken that day, but he in fact rescued a young Indian boy whom he then raised as his own. He recounts the event and the actions of one Nathan Rollins who, “had a father & uncle killed, took the lead in murdering the Indians.” He continues that he, “had tomahawked nineteen Moravians, & after it was over he sat down & cried, & said it was no satisfaction for the loss of his father & uncle after all.” ³⁴ Despite this account there are still very few that describe the actual events in significant detail.

The attack on the Christian town of Gnadenhutten in 1782 was a culmination of sorts for the Moravian mission in the American backcountry. For many years the white missionaries and their Indian congregation were able to live in peace in their Moravian towns, each side providing their own type of protection to the other. When hostile Indians approached, looking to kill the white missionaries, their Indian ministers stepped in to defend their teachers. When mobs of white settlers showed up in their towns, the missionaries themselves defended their congregation as true Christians, no longer the “savages” that the white settlers had been fighting against.

The events of 1763 and 1782 showed what happens when these two pieces of the equation are separated. Ultimately, the Moravian missionaries could not protect the
Christian Indians against a group of white backcountry settlers who cared not whether they were peaceable or Christian but only that they were Indians and as such were responsible for the wrongs caused them. The message was they had no place in this new nation. They believed in the morals of Christianity but instead of being welcomed into the fold because of that belief, they were cast aside or brutalized in spite of it. Following the massacre at Gnadenhutten, a Delaware chief responded to the atrocities with these words:

And yet these white men would be always telling us of their great Book which God had given them. They would persuade us that every man was bad who did not believe in it. They told us a great many things which they said were written in the book; and wanted us to believe it. We would likely have done so, if we had seen them practice what they pretended to believe – and acted according to the good words which they told us. But no! While they held the big Book in one hand, in the other they held murderous weapons – guns and swords – wherewith to kill us poor Indians. Ah! And they did too. They killed those who believed in their Book as well as those who did not. They made no distinctions.35
Notes


2 Ibid. 78-79.

3 John Heckewelder, *A Narrative of the Mission of the United Brethren Among the Delaware and Mohegan Indians, from Its Commencement, in the Year 1740, to the Close of the Year 1808*, (Philidelphia, 1820), 22-23.

4 Benjamin Franklin, *Narrative of the Late Massacres*, (Philidelphia: 1764), 27.


7 Ibid. 69-72.

8 Ibid. 76-77.

9 Ibid. 130-131.

10 Ibid. 130-131.

11 Ibid. 67-68.

12 Heckwelder, A Narrative, 22-23.


14 Ibid. 65.

15 Ibid. 75-76.


17 Ibid. 341.

18 Ibid. 341.

19 Ibid. 337.

20 Ibid. 343-344.

21 Ibid. 359.

22 Ibid. 407-408.
23 Ibid. 466.

24 Ibid. 499-500.


26 Ibid. 57-58.

27 Ibid. 57-58.


29 Heckewelder, A Narrative, 282.

30 For a more detailed account of the removal of the Moravians and the Christian Indians as well as the missionaries’ experience in Detroit, see Heckewelder, A Narrative, 223-298.

31 Ibid. 299-310.

32 Ibid. 317.

33 For Heckewelder’s complete description of the attack, see Heckewelder, A Narrative, 213-227.


CHAPTER III

“THE GREAT SPIRIT IS ANGRY WITH OUR ENEMIES.”

Following the American victory against the British in the Revolutionary War, Britain’s Indian allies were left in a precarious position. The 1783 treaty proceedings in Paris mentioned nothing of the Indian nations that fought. On the contrary, through the treaty Great Britain gave up all her lands east of the Mississippi. This included lands that were not technically theirs to give away. These were the lands that in the coming years would erupt into conflict between the United States and the Indian Nations north of the Ohio River. Following the treaty, an Indian confederation fought with settlers for control of this territory. They refused to recognize American authority in the area. In August of 1793, the council of Indians sent an address to the Commissioners appointed by then President George Washington who were working towards some sort of settlement. In it, the Indians wrote, “You make one concession by offering to us your money, and another by having agreed to do us justice, after having long and injuriously withheld it; we mean, in the acknowledgment you have now made that the King of England never did, nor ever had a right to give you our country by the treaty of peace.” ¹

Throughout the address, the Indian confederacy reminds the United States that they would not recognize the treaty that gave away their lands without their consent. The address closes thusly, “Brothers: We shall be persuaded that you mean to do us justice, if you agree that the Ohio shall remain the boundary line between us. If you will not consent thereto, our meeting will be altogether unnecessary.” ² A year later, this Indian
confederacy under the leadership of Blue Jacket and Little Turtle would be defeated by an American force under the leadership of General Anthony Wayne at the Battle of Fallen Timbers.

The American victory in the Battle of Fallen Timbers was not necessarily an overwhelming defeat for the Indian confederacy. According to Sugden, they had “lost less than forty men killed, for whom they had slain forty-four Americans and wounded eighty-nine.” What wounded the confederacy even more was the fact that upon retreating to the British held Fort Miami, they found the gates closed and were denied entry. To many in the confederacy this signified that they could expect no help from the British like they had expected. They had turned the Indians away in their time of need. The confederacy gradually crumbled, which laid the groundwork for the events that surrounded the signing of the Treaty of Greenville the next year.

In terms dictated mostly by Wayne himself, despite Indian suggestions for changes, the Indian confederacy gave up claims to the southern two-thirds of Ohio and a small portion to the west in what would become Indiana. They also approved the construction of US military outposts as well as trading outposts within Indian territory. The Indians were also informed that they should make no treaties with any foreign entity besides the United States. On top of this, the treaty introduced the annuity system that almost guaranteed a frequent flow of Euro-American goods to the Indian settlements.

The treaty at Greenville would foster animosity towards the new nation and the white settlers which continued to encroach on Indian lands as would the constant flow of Euro-American products, especially free-flowing alcohol. The Shawnee warrior Tecumseh, while having fought in the Battle of Fallen Timbers, did not attend the signing
of the Treaty of Greenville. According to Sugden, he would not attend so as not to appear to approve of the outcome of the proceedings. The Shawnees had lost much of their land, not only hunting grounds but their villages as well. In the following years, Tecumseh would rise to prominence among his people and mount one of the most significant challenges to the United States in its early history.

Stephen Ruddell, who was captured by the Shawnees in 1780 and later became a close friend of Tecumseh, writes that the Chief was born in 1768. His name in English meant “blazing comet.” His father was a great statesman and warrior who fought against the Kentuckians in many battles throughout the late colonial period. According to Ruddell, Tecumseh had four brothers and a sister. One of those brothers, Lalawethika who would become known as the Prophet, will be discussed later. Ruddell writes that he had met Tecumseh when the both of them were around twelve years of age and he was apparently present for many of the raids in which Tecumseh took part.  

B.B. Thatcher, who wrote of Tecumseh in 1832, declared that “previously to the treaty of Greenville, when he was probably about twenty-five years of age, he is said to have signalized himself so much, as to have been reputed one of the boldest of the Indian warriors.” He continues, “No individual was more regularly engaged in those terrible incursions by which the first settlers of Kentucky were so much harassed; and few could boast of having intercepted so many boats on the Ohio river, or plundered so many houses on the civilized shore.”

Descriptions of Tecumseh’s early life tend to follow the same narrative of a great warrior confident in his ability and generous in his charity, especially within his own tribal group. To many writers of the mid-nineteenth century, he was the perfect
embodiment of the “noble-savage.” John McDonald writes of an skirmish with a group of Indians in 1792 in which Tecumseh was a part. In the engagement, famed Indian fighter Simon Kenton, attempted to ambush Tecumseh’s group at night but were repelled. McDonald writes, “The celebrated Tecumseh commanded the Indians. His caution and fearless intrepidity made him a host wherever he went.”  

He continues, “Kenton trusted to something like this on the present occasion, but was disappointed; for where Tecumseh was present, his influence over the minds of his followers, infused that confidence in his tact and intrepidity, that they could only be defeated by force of numbers.”  

Tecumseh’s skill in battle and his generosity among his people led to him becoming a civil and war chief for the Shawnee. After the signing of the Treaty of Greenville, he and his followers went back to hunting and other peacetime activities.

Around 1805 Tecumseh’s brother Lalawethika, who would become the prophet, underwent a significant change. He was a healer in his brother’s village and had become overwhelmed with the suffering of his people due to the effects of newly introduced epidemic diseases. Lalawethika began to believe that his people’s suffering was punishment from the Great Spirit. In November, he had a disturbing dream which was very similar to that of the Delaware Prophet Neolin who came before him. In the dream he saw two paths, one which led to heaven and another which led to eternal punishment based on offense. He witnessed the punishments of wife-beaters as well as drunkards, of which he himself was an offender. Following this dream, he became determined to prevent this punishment from being visited upon his people and he began to preach a proper way to live for his Shawnee brothers and sisters.
Like Neolin, Tenskwatawa (as he was now known, meaning “Open Door”) preached of the separation of whites and Indians. He declared that whiskey was made for whites and that Indians should never drink it. Some of his preaching even displayed Christian influence in his calls for an end to murder and warfare. Overall, his teachings pointed to a revitalization of lost Indian culture as well as highlighting the separation of Indians and whites. Tenskwatawa didn’t advocate violence against whites at this point. In fact, he preached that the whites would be overthrown by supernatural forces for their offenses.

It was around this time that Tenskwatawa began advocating and conducting witch-hunts in the surrounding Indian communities. Among these instances lies the tragic story of the Delaware. Two decades after the massacre at Gnadenhutten, the Delaware nation like its neighbors was dealing with epidemic disease. Believing that the disease was the result of witches being present in the community, the Delaware summoned Tenskwatawa to their communities in order to root out the witches there. While among the Delaware he pointed out several older individuals, most of whom were seen as too close with the whites. Those seen to have adapted the ways of the white man the most were seemingly targeted first. Some Moravian missionaries were witnesses to the horrific fate of the Indian Chief Tetepachsit. Within their sight, several Delawares with their faces painted black constructed a fire, tomahawked the chief and then threw him into the swirling flames. The warriors then went into the Moravian town for provisions. The missionaries pleaded for information about one of their Christian Indians named Joshua but received only war cries as the Indians left. “We shall never forget how we felt
in that terrible hour,” wrote the missionaries. They later would find that Joshua was among those executed as witches.  

As Tenskwatawa conducted his witch-hunt, he began to overreach himself. Relatives and supporters of the individuals he claimed were witches began to league against him. Even William Henry Harrison, who became the governor of the Indiana territory in 1800, beseeched the Delaware to cast out the Prophet and to cease with their witch-hunting. “He tells you that the Great Spirit commands you to punish with death those who deal in magic, and that he is authorized to point them out,” proclaimed Harrison. “Is, then, the Master of Life obliged to employ mortal men to punish those who offend him?”  

This is an interesting quotation when one goes back to the writings of John Heckewelder, as cited in chapter 2 (p. 31-32), who described many of the backcountry settlers as fanatics who believed that God had commanded them to destroy the Indians like the Israelites destroyed the Canaanites. He continues, “My Children! do not believe that the great and good Creator of mankind has directed you to destroy your own flesh; and do not doubt but that, if you pursue this abominable wickedness, his vengeance will overtake and crush you…”  

It is interesting to note that by this point, Christian language had become the shared vocabulary between the United States and the Delaware Indians. The governor himself was using this shared language as a way to negotiate with them. This effort by Harrison, along with the efforts of those who supported the victims, helped to bring an end to Tenskwatawa’s witch-hunt among the Delaware.

Tenskwatawa pursued witch-hunts among other tribes after the Delaware but was mostly unsuccessful. Historians from the mid-nineteenth century generally hold the belief
that his brother Tecumseh disapproved of these rituals. Benjamin Drake writes, “We have met with no evidence that Tecumseh favored the destruction of the Delawares, whose unhappy fate has been detailed. On the contrary, it is stated by a credible authority, that he was opposed to it.” 16 Gilbert, writing in 1989, believed that Drake and others of his time were merely elevating Tecumseh’s character. He argues that Tecumseh had the power to stop the witch-hunts if he wanted to and he believes that he let them continue as a way to set an example for those who would cooperate with whites. 17 It is still not clear whether Tecumseh was an avid supporter of these practices or not. What is clear is that Tecumseh saw something in the teachings of his newly changed brother and a plan began to form for uniting the scattered Shawnee peoples.

By this time, Tecumseh and his followers had settled at Greenville. Suspicion was beginning to rise among the white settlers in the area who were uneasy and believed the Indians were planning to do them harm. The Prophet, then preaching on the Wabash, presented himself to Governor Harrison in a seeming attempt to alleviate their fears. “Father,” Tenskwatawa addresses Harrison, “It is three years since I first began with that system of religion which I now practice. The white people and some of the Indians were against me; but I had no other intention but to introduce among the Indians, those good principles of religion which the white people profess.” 18 The Prophet continues, “I was spoken badly of by the white people, who reproached me with misleading the Indians; but I defy them to say that I did any thing amiss.” 19

Here Tenskwatawa proclaims to Harrison that his religious teachings are no different from the teachings of the Christians in their aim. He goes on to declare that their intentions are nothing but peaceful and that the whites have nothing to worry about. He
continues, “Brother, I speak to you as a warrior. You are one. But let us lay aside this character, and attend to the care of our children, that they may live in comfort and peace. We desire that you will join us for the preservation of both red and white people.”

He concludes his speech by telling Harrison that, “Formerly, when we lived in ignorance, we were foolish; but now, since we listen to the voice of the Great Spirit, we are happy.”

Here the Prophet professes a message of peace between whites and Indians while still maintaining his aim to keep their cultures separate.

The year after the Prophet delivered this speech to the Governor, a treaty was made which further strained relations between Tecumseh’s confederacy and the United States. In 1809, the Treaty of Fort Wayne was signed between the United States, represented by Governor Harrison, and the Miami, Delaware, Pottawatomie, Wea, and Kickapoo nations. The Treaty would cede over three million acres of Indian land mostly along the Wabash River for settlement by whites. Harrison pushed hard to persuade the Miami, Wea, and Kickapoo nations to give up their claims as they were the most opposed to the land cession. In return for subsidies, he was eventually successful in gaining the new territory for the United States and by 1810 the treaty was finalized. Shortly after its passage, the Treaty of Fort Wayne became the catalyst in the deterioration of relations between the United States and Tecumseh’s confederacy. Tecumseh would arrive at Vincennes to speak with Harrison in August of that year.

When Tecumseh spoke to the governor he implored him to return the land that was given in the treaty or risk suffering the consequences. “Brother,” he addressed Harrison, “since the peace was made, you have killed some of the Shawnees, Winnebagoes, Delawares, and Miamis, and you have taken our land from us, and I do not
see how we can remain at peace if you continue to do so. You try to force the red people
to do some injury.” 23 Here Tecumseh blames the influence and policies of the whites for
the violence on the frontier.

It was a typical trend after land cessions were made that settlers would overstep
their bounds and settle in Indian territory. The Indians, seeing that the treaty was being
violated, would retaliate by raiding these settlements and ultimately causing conflict
along the frontier. Usually the US Army would respond with overwhelming force and
force a new treaty in which the defeated would lose even more land.

Tecumseh continues, “Brother, I was glad to hear your speech. You said that if we
could show that the land was sold by people that had no right to sell, you would restore it.
Those that did sell did not own it. It was me. These tribes set up a claim, but the tribes
with me will not agree with their claim.” 24 Here, Tecumseh presents the fairly recent
idea among the confederacy that the land of the Indians was common to all nations. No
land could be sold unless all agreed with the sale. He goes on to tell Harrison that if this
treaty is not reversed, he will be forced to kill the chiefs who made the land sale.
Tecumseh declares, “I now wish you to listen to me. If you do not, it will appear as if you
wished me to kill all the chiefs that sold you the land. I tell you because I am authorized
by all the tribes to do so.” 25

At the close of his speech to the governor, Tecumseh presents some interesting
points along with veiled threats that if the land is not restored to the Indian confederacy,
there will be war with the United States. “How can we have confidence in the white
people?” he asks, “When Jesus Christ came on earth, you killed him and nailed him on a
cross. You thought he was dead, but you were mistaken.” 26 Identifying his confederacy
with Christian symbolism in order to convey a more powerful message to the whites, Tecumseh moves towards taking Christ away from the whites and for his confederacy. In this way, Tecumseh takes control of the Christian narrative and the spiritual power that it contains. Christ had come back from the dead and so could Indian resistance. He closes his speech to Harrison by subtly threatening him and telling him that he will seek an alliance with the British if his demands are not met. 27

Tecumseh’s gift for oratory impressed even his white adversaries. Governor Harrison referred to him as “one of those uncommon geniuses which spring up occasionally to produce revolutions, and overturn the established order of things.” 28 In 1811, Tecumseh embarked on a campaign in the South in an attempt to bring more Indian nations to his cause. In September of that year he gave a speech to the Choctaw Council in Mississippi. When addressing the history of the Indians in North America, Tecumseh asks, “Where today is the Pequod? Where the Narragansetts, the Mohawks, Pocanokets, and many other once powerful tribes of our race? They have vanished before the avarice and oppression of the white men as snow before the summer sun.” 29 He then goes on to tell the Choctaw that they will not be able to escape that same fate if they do not join in the cause. “The annihilation of our race is at hand unless we unite in one common cause against the common foe,” he continues. 30

The rest of Tecumseh’s speech turns into a moralistic argument against the injustices that the Indians have been forced to endure at the hands of the whites. Here is where we seeing Tecumseh channeling the collective disappoint of the Indian nations with the policies of the whites. “Every year our white intruders become more greedy, exacting, oppressive, and overbearing,” he declares. 31 “Every year contentions spring up
between them and our people and when blood is shed we have to make atonement whether right or wrong, at the cost of the lives of our greatest chiefs, and the yielding up of large tracts of our lands." 32 His speech shapes up into a sort of list of grievances against their white neighbors. These grievances take the form of righteous indignation touching on Christian vocabulary and tones. Like other Native Americans before him, Tecumseh was condemning the whites for their hypocrisy and making a case for violent action.

Tecumseh goes on to critique the values of the Americans by referring to their racialized institution of slavery. “Do they not even now kick and strike us as they do their black-faces?” he asks those gathered, “How long will it be before they will tie us to a post and whip us, and make us work for them in their corn fields as they do them?” 33 He concludes by assuring the assembled Choctaw and Chickasaw that they have good reason to oppose the whites. “Complaint is just towards friends who have failed in their duty; accusation is against enemies guilty of injustice. And surely, if any people ever had, we have good and just reasons to believe we have ample grounds to accuse the Americans of injustice.” 34 Tecumseh finishes his speech by declaring that the Americans seem to have no remorse for the offenses committed upon their people and warns the Choctaw council that if they do not band together, then in the near future they will be alone against the cruelty of their white neighbors. 35 This prediction is indeed an interesting one, as the Choctaws, Chickasaws and the other “civilized tribes” would be forcibly removed from their lands by the Americans only twenty or so years later. The Choctaw Chief, Pushmataha, spoke against Tecumseh and refused to let his nation join his cause. He and the Choctaw nation would ally with the Americans during the War of 1812 and while
they were eventually forcibly relocated, they were able to survive longer than Tecumseh or his confederacy.

In October of 1811, Tecumseh and his warriors arrived at the Creek nation to attempt to bring them into the confederacy. An excerpt of his speech is recorded by General Sam Dale, who was accompanying then Indian Agent Colonel Hawkins. It presents a far more violent and impassioned tone for the Indian leader. “Accursed be the race that has seized our country, and made women of our warriors! Our fathers, from their tombs, reproach us as slaves and cowards; I hear them now in the wailing winds.”

He goes on to tell those assembled, “They seize your land; they corrupt your women; they trample on the ashes of your dead. Back, whence they came, upon a trail of blood, they must be driven. Back! Back, ay, into the great water whose accursed waves brought them to our shores!”

The presentation of this speech is much more markedly aggressive in tone. It resembles more of a pre-battle speech given to incite and encourage the warriors during a battle. This could also be attributed to the speech being recalled by a white spectator with no love for Tecumseh or his cause. Regardless, it is clear from this account that war with the United States was now inevitable. The Creeks would offer some assistance as the Red Stick faction broke off from the nation to aid in Tecumseh’s confederacy in the south. They would play a part in the Creek War as well as see involvement during the War of 1812.

In the winter of 1811-12 Tecumseh brought his case to the Osages on the Arkansas River west of the Mississippi. By this time, William Henry Harrison’s forces had already defeated the Prophet’s forces at the Battle of Tippecanoe, and tensions
between the British and the Americans were beginning to reach a boiling point. Still part of his campaign in the south, Tecumseh was now attempting to garner support from the nations west of the Mississippi. The speech itself is retold by Indian captive John D. Hunter, who lived among the Osage during his childhood. He writes,

I wish it was in my power to do justice to the eloquence of this distinguished man: but it is utterly impossible... The occasion and subject were peculiarly adapted to call into action all the powers of genuine patriotism; and such language, such gestures, and such feelings and fullness of soul contending for utterance, were exhibited by this untutored native.  

He then goes on to write how no audience “either in ancient or modern times ever before witnessed.” Hunter is one of many white witnesses who expressed their admiration of Tecumseh’s oratory skills in that they were very similar to Euro-American techniques. In this way, Tecumseh sought not only to rouse his Native American audience but also get his point across to Euro-American audiences.

In the speech itself, Tecumseh addresses the Osages and their guests in an attempt to gain their support for his confederacy. Like the previous speeches, Tecumseh focuses on the wrong done by the white man. “The blood of our fathers and brothers has run like water on the ground, to satisfy the avarice of the white men. We ourselves,” he continues, “are threatened with a great evil; nothing will pacify them but the destruction of all the red men.” From here, Tecumseh retells how the white men first arrived and were taken care of by their Indian neighbors. “The white people came among us feeble; and now we have made them strong, they wish to kill us, or drive us back, as they would wolves and panthers,” he continues.

Tecumseh reaffirms that the white men are no friends of the Indians and not only do they desire their land but they desire the eradication of the Indian people. He then
continues to address their lack or rejection of morality. "Brothers, - The white men despise and cheat the Indians; they abuse and insult them; they do not think the red men sufficiently good to live," he declares. As Tecumseh winds down his speech, he again makes the same argument he made among the Choctaw. One that in hindsight appears prophetic. "Brothers," he says, "If you do not unite with us, they will first destroy us, and then you will fall an easy prey to them. They have destroyed many nations of red men because they were not united, because they were not friends to each other." Like the Choctaw and Chickasaw, the Osage would be forced to give up their ancestral lands a little over a decade later.

Tecumseh concludes his speech by declaring that the Great Spirit is with their cause. "The Great Spirit is angry with our enemies," he proclaims, "he speaks in thunder, and the earth swallows up villages, and drinks up the Mississippi. The great waters will cover the lowlands; their corn cannot grow; and the Great Spirit will sweep those who escape to the hills from the earth with his terrible breath." Hunter remarks that the Osage present were very impressed by the skill and content of Tecumseh's speech. However, they ultimately would decide against joining in his Indian confederacy.

The Great Spirit, invoked here by Tecumseh, shares much more with the Judeo-Christian god than its previous incarnations. Here can be seen the logical conclusion following years of disappointment felt towards Euro-Americans. Seen as hypocrites for preaching something that they themselves failed to follow, they were now the targets of anger from that very same Great Spirit. While at first Native Americans attempted to use Christian language in order to prevent aggression on the part of Euro-Americans, by the time of Tecumseh's confederacy it was being used as a way to rally support for a war
against the United States. The power of the Great Spirit and that of Jesus Christ would now be directed at white Euro-Americans who were seen as unworthy to possess that spiritual power themselves, having violated its principles. Many Native Americans who rallied to Tecumseh’s cause had seen the abuses of the white man and recognized that hypocrisy. The war to be fought would essentially decide who would have control of the land east of the Mississippi River. Those Native Americans left, including those who sided with the United States, would soon know all too well that same hypocrisy and it would leave them profoundly disappointed not only with white Christianity but also with American ideas of liberty and freedom.

With the onset of hostilities between the British and the Americans, Tecumseh’s Indian confederacy would have support and arms from the British who hoped to use the Indian nations as a buffer between them and the United States. While the British Indian alliance would enjoy many victories throughout the year, the arrival of 1813 showed a shift in the war in favor of the United States. While I will not go into a full account of the war in the Northwest, I will address events at the close of the war. Tecumseh’s celebrated speech to General Proctor upon hearing of his plans to abandon his posts at Detroit and Amherstberg in the face of the American advance will now be examined.

Tecumseh’s speech to General Proctor in Malden presented the culmination of a relationship between the Indians and their British allies. Tecumseh feared that the British were about to abandon their Indian allies to their American enemies in the same way they had at the Treaty of Paris in 1783 and after the Battle of Fallen Timbers in 1794. He says to Proctor, “Our ships have gone one way, and we are much astonished to see our father tying up everything and preparing to run away the other, without letting his red children
know what his intentions are.” Later on in his speech Tecumseh admonishes his British father saying, “You always told us you would never draw your foot off British ground; but now, father we see you are drawing back, and we are sorry to see our father doing so without seeing the enemy.” Seeing the British so ready to turn away from their Indian allies instead of fighting must have brought back memories of his disappointment with the British after the American victory at Fallen Timbers, when the British forces at Fort Miami refused to let their former allies find shelter within their walls. In fact, he even references this event to Proctor. “At the battle of the Rapids, last war, the Americans certainly defeated us; and when we retreated to our father’s fort at that place, the gates were shut against us.” He continues saying that, “We were afraid that it would now be the case.”

Tecumseh closes his speech invoking the Great Spirit while standing firm and resolving to stay and fight, with or without British aid. “Father! You have got the arms and ammunition,” he proclaims, “which our great father sent for his red children, If you have any idea of going away, give them to us, and you may go in welcome, for us. Our lives are in the hands of the Great Spirit. We are determined to defend our lands, and if it is his will, we wish to leave our bones upon them.” The British and their Indian allies would fall back and make their stand near Moraviantown on the Thames, where Tecumseh’s final battle would be fought.

After the defeat of the British fleet on Lake Erie, the British forces around Amherstburg were cut off from the supply routes and were forced to abandon their posts and head north towards Niagara. They stopped near Moraviantown on the Thames River and prepared to hold their position against their American pursuers led by General
William Henry Harrison. Outmanned and outmaneuvered by their American counterparts, the British and Indian forces were defeated at the Battle of the Thames and the war in the northwest ended. Tecumseh would fall in this battle as would his dream of a united Indian front against American land hunger.

Various accounts tell of the fate of the Shawnee leader on that day, as one would expect for such a contentious figure. Sugden writes of the event and the desecration of the leader’s body during and after the battle. He concludes his biography of the Shawnee Chief by following a couple of Americans involved with removing the remaining Shawnee people from Ohio in 1830. Accompanied by a local man, they were given a tour of the battlefield and shown where both the British and the American dead were buried. A little ways away from the field, they were shown a grave that the man told them contained the remains of Tecumseh. Near the grave, carved on a wooden post in Indian characters, the Americans wrote: “Sleep on brave chief! Sleep on in Glory’s arms! Freed from men’s malice, and from War’s alarms; Distinguished savage, great in mind and soul, Rest here in peace, while ceaseless ages roll.”

Tecumseh’s fight to unite the Indian nations in an attempt to drive out the white men who were encroaching upon their ancestral lands was one of the last attempts of its kind. He serves as a face not only for Indian resistance to white land hunger but also as a face for the results of white oppression. Surely a figure such as Tecumseh could not have been so successful without a common enemy with which to juxtapose his confederacy. His speeches to his potential allies speak of moral indignation towards the actions of white settlers and traders. His words were representative of the attitudes of many Indians in the Northwest at the time. Tecumseh represented a culmination of Indian and white
relations in this area. The backcountry of the Old Northwest had long been an area where cultures clashed, often violently. The Indians who inhabited that area often questioned the morality of their white neighbors who professed to believe in a loving god while at the same time grabbed up their land and cheated them in trade. With the formation of the American Republic, the questions pertained more to professions of American liberty. This liberty, many Indians found out, pertained not to them but only to their white neighbors.
Notes

1 Council of Indians at the foot of the Miami Rapids, August 13, 1793, to the Commissioners appointed by the President of the United States, quote by William E. Stone, *Life of Joseph Brant-Thayendanegea, including the Indian Wars of the American Revolution* (New York, 1838), 354-355.

2 Ibid. 354-355.


4 Ibid. 90-91.


8 Ibid. 184-187.


10 Ibid. 256-257.


12 Ibid. 121-122.


14 Governor William Henry Harrison, Speech to the Delware 1806, from Moses Dawson, *Historical Narrative of the Civil and Military Services of Major-General William H. Harrison* (Cincinnati, 1824), 83-84.

15 Ibid. 83-84.

16 Benjamin Drake, *Life of Tecumseh*, (Cincinnati, 1841), 91-92. The “credible authority”, according to Drake is Anthony Shane, the son of a French-Canadian man and Shawnee woman and personal acquaintance of Tecumseh.


19 Ibid. 107-109.

20 Ibid. 107-109.

21 Ibid. 107-109.


24 Ibid. 182-186.

25 Ibid. 182-186.

26 Ibid. 182-186.

27 Ibid. 182-186.

28 Letter from Governor Harrison to the War Department, August 6th 1811, in Benjamin Drake, *Life of Tecumseh* (Cincinnati, 1841), 141-142.

29 Tecumseh to the Choctaw Council, 1811, quoted in H.B. Cushman, *History of the Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Natchez Indians* (Greenville, Texas, 1899), 303.

30 Ibid. 303.

31 Ibid. 303.

32 Ibid. 303.

33 Ibid. 303.

34 Ibid. 303.

35 Ibid. 303.


37 Ibid. 50-62.


39 Ibid. 43-48.

40 Ibid. 43-48.

41 Ibid. 43-48.

42 Ibid. 43-48.

43 Ibid. 43-48.

44 Ibid. 43-48.
Tecumseh’s Speech to General Proctor in Council, September 18th, 1813, from Major John Richardson, *War of 1812* (Brockville, Canada West, 1842), 119-120.

46 Ibid. 119-120.

47 Ibid. 119-120.

48 Ibid. 119-120.

CONCLUSION

Between 1836 and 1839, the Cherokee people were forced to embark on a harrowing journey from their ancestral home to the newly formed Indian Territory in present-day Oklahoma. Along with the other nations that made up the “Five Civilized Tribes” they refused to join Tecumseh’s confederacy and remained loyal to their allies the United States. During the Creek War and the War of 1812, these allies fought for the United States under then General Andrew Jackson. Despite their loyalty, when Jackson was elected President, it was decided that they had to leave.

The history of interaction between Native Americans and their white neighbors is one of both cooperation and violence. This is especially true in the area of the Old Northwest. In the backcountry areas of Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana, groups of people from widely disparaging backgrounds interacted on a day to day basis. Having been exposed to Christian missionaries, the Native Americans of the area were able to spot European hypocrisy more readily and point it out. The Moravian Indians who, many white settlers remarked, were the most devout Christians were attacked by their white neighbors on a number of occasions bringing into question their own devotion to their religion. Tecumseh, early in the next century, spoke eloquently of the offenses committed by whites on his Indian brethren. He spoke out against their policies and warned his listeners that their word could never be trusted. All of these instances show an Indian population who were constantly disappointed by their white neighbors’ inability to
practice what they preached. This went for European Christians in the colonial period as well as for the United States in the following period.

Chapter 1 explored a world in which Native Americans attempted to figure out the moral character of their new white neighbors. After contact with Christian missionaries, they were introduced to set of morals and values that they at first believed all whites would follow. They would find out over time that this was not always the case. This led many Native Americans to believe that Euro-Americans were hypocrites and no longer worthy of the spiritual power that was present in Christianity. Many spoke out against their white neighbors in an attempt to remedy injustices committed upon them.

Chapter 2 looked at the events that befell the Moravian Indians. Presented were various examples of atrocities committed on Christian Indians by white settlers. This violence in turn cemented the belief that white Euro-Americans did not practice what they preached. In contrast, the experience of Moravian missionaries among the Native Americans served as a view of how whites and Native Americans could live side by side in cooperation. For Native Americans white settlers resembled unholy demons while the Moravians resembled the ideals of Christian morals incarnate.

Chapter 3 presented the culmination of Christian ideas within the Native American community. The figure of Tecumseh is in many ways the result of moral outrage on the part of Native Americans against their white oppressors. The words of the Indian leader exude Christian influence and speak outrage toward the abuses of their Euro-American neighbors. While Tecumseh’s pan-Indian movement turned to violent resistance against white expansion, his words spoke to the Indian people and rallied them
to his cause while at the same time he chastised white Americans for not following their own morals and values.

This study follows a group Native Americans who were presented with new set of morals and values that were in some ways foreign to their own. Some took more from Christianity than others but almost all incorporated some aspects into their traditional spirituality. Having been told repeatedly about the power of God’s love and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, they took these messages to heart. Native Americans included Christian discourse into their dealings with Europeans in order to ensure they were treated fairly. They used them to express their outrage towards white settlers who violated their trust repeatedly. The principles and values of Christianity allowed them to identify hypocrisy amongst their white neighbors. Finally, Christian language inspired the speeches made by Tecumseh that helped to rally peoples of different nations to his cause. They united people who would no longer stand for the hypocrisy of white Christians without acting. They would speak to future generations who would know that their nation could not live up to its own values when it was inconvenient to do so. It would not be the last time.

What the Cherokee (along with the Creeks, Seminoles, Chickasaws, and Choctaws) had to endure on the Trail of Tears was a culmination of this disappointment with white morality. Essayist Sarah Vowell, herself a Cherokee descendant, wrote about the Cherokee Chief John Ross while retracing the steps of her ancestors. “He believed in the liberties the Declaration of Independence promises, and the civil rights the Constitution ensures,” she writes, “And when the U.S betrayed not only the Cherokees but its own creed I would guess that John Ross was not only angry, not only outraged, not only confused, I would guess that John Ross was a little brokenhearted. Because that’s
how I feel. I’ve been experiencing the Trail of Tears not as a Cherokee, but as an American.”¹ Ultimately, the disappointment of the Native American people has also become our own disappointment with ourselves.
Notes


Franklin, Benjamin. *Narrative of the Late Massacres.* Philadelphia: 1764.


