<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Approaching Doomsday: The Contours of American Apocalyptic Belief</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The American Apocalyptic Legacy</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Signs of the Endtimes: Hal Lindsey and Dispensationalist Prophecy Beliefs</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Apocalyptic Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in New York City</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Secular Apocalyptic Themes in the Nuclear Era</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Fatalism and Apocalyptic Beliefs</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The Transformation of Apocalyptic Traditions in the Post–Cold War Era</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Emergent Apocalyptic Beliefs about UFOs and Extraterrestrial Beings</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Index</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3

Signs of the Endtimes

Hal Lindsey and Dispensationalist Prophecy Beliefs

To the skeptic who says that Christ is not coming soon, I would ask him to put the book of Revelation in one hand, and the daily newspaper in the other, and then sincerely ask God to show him where we are on His prophetic time-clock.

—Hal Lindsey, There’s a New World Coming

Premillennial dispensationalism, with its emphasis on interpreting current events as the prophetic fulfillment of a precise endtimes scenario, is the predominant form of popular apocalypticism in the United States today. From the early 1970s through the 1990s, the individual most responsible for promoting dispensationalist beliefs about the imminence and inevitability of the end of the world has been Hal Lindsey. Lindsey’s role as the primary popularizer of contemporary prophecy belief is indisputable, and the apocalyptic scenario that he presents in his writings is familiar to most premillennialists today. As noted, his book *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1973 [1970]) was the largest-selling American nonfiction book of the 1970s, outselling every other work except the Bible (Halsell 1986:4); by 1991, the volume had sold more than twenty-eight million copies, making Lindsey the most widely read interpreter of prophetic apocalypticism in history (*Los Angeles Times*, February 23, 1991, F16; S. Graham 1989:249; Weber 1987:211). Lindsey’s subsequent books have been extremely successful as well, with sales in the millions. He is one of the few authors ever to have had three books on the *New York Times* best-seller list at the same time (Lindsey 1981:179). Within the dispensationalist subculture he is referred to as “the father of the modern prophecy movement,” and his books are estimated to have had a combined worldwide sales of more than thirty-five million (Lindsey 1994:back cover).
Prior to his interest in biblical prophecy, Lindsey was an agnostic, a business major, a member of the Coast Guard, and a tugboat captain on the Mississippi River (Kirsch 1977:30). After a conversion experience and then later hearing a sermon on prophecy in 1956, Lindsey became convinced that many recent historical events were forecast in the Bible. He soon launched his lifelong career of decoding the symbolic meanings of Scripture (S. Graham 1989:247–248), pursuing his interest in biblical literalism at the Dallas Theological Seminary, which is the main center for such studies in the United States and from which numerous independent, nondenominational dispensationalist expositors have received their education. Lindsey later worked as a missionary for the Campus Crusade for Christ in California, proselytizing on UCLA’s Bruin Walk in the 1960s and on other campuses, and ultimately heading the campus ministry at UCLA, to which he gave the title “The Jesus Christ Light and Power Company” (Kirsch 1977:31).

In 1970, Lindsey collaborated with writer Carole C. Carlson to publish The Late Great Planet Earth. In this work, as in all his subsequent books, Lindsey declares that biblical prophecies are being fulfilled and that the Battle of Armageddon is imminent and inevitable. At the outset of the book, he attempts to establish his credibility as a prophecy interpreter, noting the failure of previous prophets and Bible students who, he asserts, have been overly anxious in their attempts to interpret the signs of the End. According to Lindsey, these earlier prophets overlooked the importance of the nation of Israel in biblical prophecy: the establishment of a Jewish nation in the land of Palestine in 1948 and Israel’s taking of Old Jerusalem in 1967 are the crucial events prophesied in the Bible that conclusively indicate that the end of the world is at hand. Once these events occurred, the doomsday clock was accelerated: “This has now set the stage for the other predicted signs to develop in history. It is like the key piece of a jigsaw puzzle being found and then having the many adjacent pieces rapidly fall into place” (Lindsey 1973:47).

At the beginning of the book, Lindsey also attempts to establish the legitimacy of the tradition of Christian prophecy, declaring that Christ’s life had been completely foretold in detail by the Old Testament prophets and that Christ “showed simply and clearly how prophecies were being fulfilled by His life” (1973:21). Calling these fulfilled predictions Christ’s “credentials,” Lindsey says that “Jesus said that the signs leading up to His coming were just as clear as the face of the sky. Let’s examine these signs, these credentials” (1973:22). After enumerating various fulfilled prophecies regarding Christ’s life, Lindsey examines predictions about the Second Coming of Christ that “are related to the specific pattern of world events which are precisely pre-
dicted as coming together shortly before the coming of the Messiah the second time” (1973:31). Employing what he calls a “deductive” means of analysis, Lindsey subsequently infers and decodes the meaning of prophecies that he believes God literally or symbolically has communicated in the Bible. For instance, biblical references to flashes of lightning are interpreted by Lindsey as missiles; hailstones are ICBMs; beasts and “locusts with scorpion tails” are armored tanks and Cobra helicopters spraying nerve gas from their tails. The biblical passage “And the ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that shall arise” is presumed to be the revival of the Roman Empire in the form of ten nations belonging to the European Common Market (what is now the European Community; Lindsey 1973:82–85). Other signs predicted in the Bible that foretell the end of the world include the invention of nuclear weapons; the prominence of a Russian confederacy as the powerful “nation of the North”; the rise of China as the “nation in the East” with an army of 200 million soldiers; disasters (earthquakes, famine, strange diseases, unusual weather changes); increased crime, drug abuse, and violence; and widespread interest in the occult, new religions, and the appearance of false prophets, all identified as manifestations of the “Babylonian Mystery Religion” that Lindsey declares is predicted in the Book of Revelation.

The following scenario, which Lindsey maintains is foretold in the Bible, embodies many of the basic elements of dispensationalist endtimes belief. Prior to Armageddon, the “Roman Empire” will be revived through an alliance of ten European Common Market nations, and this new world power eventually will be controlled by a great charismatic leader who will protect Israel, resolve disputes in the Middle East, and bring peace to the world. This global leader, who will have miraculously recovered from a fatal head wound, is the Antichrist, and he will be worshipped as the world’s savior in the form of a one-world religion consisting of secular humanism, “faithless Christianity,” and “occult practices” such as astrology, witchcraft, and drug-induced mind expansion (Lindsey 1973:103–123). The Antichrist, who will dominate the world through the European Common Market, will be symbolized by some representation of the number “666” (the “Mark of the Beast”), which will be required of all individuals for buying and selling. To control people economically, the Antichrist will demand that the number be imprinted or tattooed on the hand or forehead (1973:100–102). The Antichrist’s rise to power will initiate the seven-year tribulation period of Christian and Jewish persecution, disasters, and worldly suffering that “will make the regimes of Hitler, Mao, and Stalin look like Girl Scouts weaving a daisy chain by comparison” (Lindsey 1973:99). During his rule the Muslim Dome of the Rock Mosque in Jerusalem
will be destroyed and the ancient Jewish Temple of Solomon rebuilt on its orig-
inal site in its place. (Jewish terrorists actually have been convicted of plotting
to destroy the Dome of the Rock and allegedly have received financial support
from Christian Zionist organizations intent on expediting Christ’s return
[Halsell 1986:9].)

According to Lindsey, once the Temple is rebuilt, the end of the world is
imminent. At this point, a Russian confederacy (assumed to be the Soviet
Union during the Cold War) and its Arab and African allies will invade Israel
and take Jerusalem. Lindsey states that the European forces, led by the
Antichrist, will then obliterate the “Red Army” in Israel, as well as the Russian
confederacy, most likely in a nuclear attack. Soon afterward, an army of 200
million “Red Chinese” will mobilize and challenge the Antichrist’s world dom-
ination, attacking his forces at the Mount of Megiddo and the plain of Jezreel
(Lindsey 1973:135–157). In the ensuing battle one-third of the population and
all the major cities of the world will be destroyed, and just as the carnage esca-
lates to its climax, Christ will return to defeat the evil forces, judge the faith-
less, and protect the faithful. The “bright spot” of this scenario, according to
Lindsey, will be the conversion of a great number of Jews to Christianity
(1973:156). These recent Jewish converts living in Jerusalem will be miracu-
lously saved from the devastation of Armageddon when the ground separates
at the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. Jesus’ feet will first touch the earth there
when he returns, creating a crack in the earth into which the converts will
escape. After Armageddon, an earthly paradise, established out of “atomic
materials,” will then exist for one thousand years. At the end of that time, this
millennial paradise will be threatened by a rebellion of unbelievers led by Satan,
which Christ will suppress, after which a new heaven and new earth will be cre-
ated and the faithful will become immortal (Lindsey 1973:158–168).

Throughout this and other books, Lindsey emphasizes the rise of the
nation of Israel as the most important fulfillment of endtimes prophecy; in
one book he refers to Israel as the “Fuse of Armageddon” (1973:34), and in a
documentary film he says that “the most important sign of all—that is the Jew
returning to the land of Israel after thousands of years of being dispersed”
(Lindsey 1973:iii). From the Puritans to the present day, the return of the Jews
to Palestine and their conversion to Christianity in the endtimes has been an
enduring theme in numerous American prophecy traditions and an idea that
has been especially embraced by dispensationalists. As Paul Boyer notes, cur-
rent dispensationalist beliefs about the role of the Jews and Israel in God’s plan
have precedent in ancient prophecy traditions and are a complex and para-
doxical phenomenon, privileging the Jews as the chosen people and express-
ing support for Israeli causes and yet encouraging the view that anti-Semitism is foreordained by God and that the future persecution of the Jewish people is inevitable (1992:180–22.4). Lindsey, for example, condemns anti-Semitism and attributes it to Satan’s influence but asserts that previous tragedies suffered by the Jewish people are foretold in the Bible and that the prophesied persecution of the Jews will inevitably increase in the last days before the end of the world (1984:159, 1973:35).

The prophetic significance of Israel’s role in the last days is so important to the worldview of dispensationalists that some advocate military support for Israel in order to accelerate the prophetic timetable and hasten Armageddon in the Middle East. This dispensationalist-Israeli relationship has been examined by journalist Ruth Halsell (1986), who traveled to Israel as a member of one of Jerry Falwell’s tour groups that was intended to establish ties between Israeli Jews and the Moral Majority. In her discussion of the political dimensions of “Armageddon Theology” and its promotion by televangelists, Halsell notes that numerous individuals with political and financial power in the United States assert that the Battle of Armageddon is foreordained and that any attempt to prevent a nuclear scenario in the Middle East is heretical. For instance, television evangelist Jim Robison, who was invited by Ronald Reagan to deliver the opening prayer at the 1984 Republican National Convention, states, “There’ll be no peace until Jesus comes. Any preaching of peace prior to this return is heresy; it’s against the word of God; it’s Anti-Christ” (Halsell 1986:16). Like Robison, Lindsey also declares that world peace is impossible, promising his readers that Judgment Day and Jesus’ return will occur a generation after the establishment of Israel, which was proclaimed a nation on May 14, 1948.1

The concept of the “Rapture,” a word used to describe the protection and salvation of the Christian faithful prior to worldly cataclysm, is central to dispensationalist visions of the end of the world. Belief in the Rapture is characterized by the notion that devoted Christians will be physically “lifted up” to meet Christ in the air at some point prior to doomsday and exist with Christ in the heavens until the Second Coming, at which time they will return to earth with glorified bodies. Popular beliefs about the Rapture stem from the following biblical quote from the apostle Paul:

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

(1 Thessalonians 4:16–17)
Although the Rapture is generally interpreted by mainstream Christian theologians to represent the Second Coming of Christ, premillennial dispensationalists such as Lindsey say that there will be two Second Comings and that a secret Rapture will actually occur prior to Christ’s final return, involving the divine rescue of the Christian faithful, who will be the only people who will see Christ in the clouds. The timing of the Rapture within God’s prophetic plan is a subject of debate among premillennialist Christians. Pretribulationists believe that the Christian faithful will be raptured prior to the coming of the Antichrist and the seven-year tribulation period. Midtribulationists believe that the Rapture will occur sometime during the tribulation period, after the Antichrist has risen to power, but prior to the period of divine retribution involving God’s vengeance and judgment of humanity. People who identify themselves as posttribulationists believe that the Christian church and the faithful will endure the tribulation period and be raptured at the time of Christ’s return (Weber 1987:11).

Beliefs about the Rapture are quite pervasive. According to wide-ranging estimate, somewhere between 30 percent and 44 percent of Americans embrace beliefs about the Rapture of the church (see Tufts 1986:vi; U.S. News and World Report, December 19, 1994, 64). In her study of attitudes about nuclear war among fundamentalist Christians in Amarillo, Texas, A. G. Mojtabai writes that dispensationalist Rapture beliefs are characterized by the theme of “blessed assurance,” involving the promise of exemption from the disasters and suffering that will befall others. She states, “For millions of Christians in the United States today, the Rapture is seen as the final solution for all our human ills” (Mojtabai 1986:xi). Jerry Falwell, who in the past has asserted that the faithful will be raptured prior to nuclear Armageddon, describes the Rapture as follows:

You’ll be riding along in an automobile. You’ll be the driver perhaps. You’re a Christian. There’ll be several people in the automobile with you, maybe someone who is not a Christian. When the trumpet sounds you and the other believers in that automobile will be instantly caught away—you will disappear, leaving behind only your clothes and physical things that cannot inherit eternal life. That unsaved person or persons in the automobile will suddenly be startled to find the car is moving along without a driver, and the car suddenly somewhere crashes. (Cited in Lukacs 1986:7)

Rapture believers may proclaim their views through bumper stickers with slogans (“The Rapture—What A Way To Go!”; “Warning—driver will abandon car in case of Rapture”; “Beam me up, Jesus!”) and by purchasing framed
paintings, postcards, watches, and other items depicting the Rapture, which are sold at Christian bookstores and are available through mail order. The Bible Believers’ Evangelistic Association in Sherman, Texas, for instance, distributes an assortment of Rapture merchandise, such as laminated Rapture dinner place mats, which depict an open-armed Christ returning above the skyscrapers of an urban center as raptured Christians float out from automobiles crashing on a freeway and dead Christians rise from their graves in a cemetery. Some people who anticipate the Rapture have arranged for their unraptured relatives or friends to become the legal heirs of their property after they are lifted up to meet Jesus; the Mutual Insurance Company of New York has even agreed to allow individuals to draft riders to their life-insurance policies that guarantee raptured Christians the same status as deceased clients, with the benefits of the policies going to the next-named beneficiary (Woodward et al. 1977:51).

Hal Lindsey is a pretribulationist. In his books he assures his readers that the true church will have already been raptured prior to the seven-year tribulation period and the Battle of Armageddon. Referring to the Rapture with vernacular expressions such as “The Ultimate Trip” and the “Big Snatch,” Lindsey describes Jesus’ lifting up the believers to be reunited with Him in heaven: “He is coming to meet all true believers in the air. Without benefit of science, space suits, or interplanetary rockets, there will be those who will be transported into a glorious place more beautiful, more awesome, than we can possibly comprehend” (1973:126). Like other dispensationalist writers, Lindsey also offers descriptions of the startled reactions of the nonraptured when the true believers suddenly disappear, as well as the ensuing disasters and worldwide panic that will occur immediately after the Rapture. For instance, he provides numerous conversational portrayals of how nonbelievers will interpret the mysterious disappearance of Christians, such as the following: “There I was driving down the freeway and all of a sudden the place went crazy . . . cars going in all directions . . . and not one of them had a driver. I mean it was wild! I think we’ve got an invasion from outer space!” (1973:125). Lindsey’s promise that the faithful will be delivered in the Rapture from the terrors of nuclear apocalypse and the horrors of the tribulation period has an obvious psychological appeal, the escapist and fatalistic implications of which will be discussed later in this study. The assurance of planetary escape by means of the Rapture is especially appealing given Lindsey’s assertions that nuclear apocalypse is predicted in the Bible and thus an inevitable part of God’s ultimate plan.

In each of his books, Lindsey details the ways that nuclear war and its aftermath are important parts of the divine script, methodically interpreting
Scripture that refers to mass destruction or fiery cataclysm in terms of nuclear annihilation. A passage from Revelation (6:14) about the atmosphere being torn and pushed apart like a scroll rolled together, for example, is regarded as a “perfect picture of an all-out nuclear exchange” which will shake every mountain and island from its present position (Lindsey 1984:98). The fourth seal judgment in the Book of Revelation (6:7–8) about the arrival of a “pale horse” of death is viewed as a prediction indicating that between one-fourth and one-half of humanity will be killed in a global nuclear war (Lindsey 1984:88); the catastrophic trembling of the earth that is part of the sixth seal judgment (Rev. 6:12) leads Lindsey to believe “that the Apostle John is describing an earthquake set off by many nuclear explosions”; the prophesied darkening of the sun and the moon (Rev. 6:12) resembles the radioactive contamination of “dirty” cobalt bombs and an ensuing “nuclear winter” scenario (Lindsey 1984:96–98).

Lindsey declares that the ancient biblical prophets could not adequately describe the sophisticated technologies of nuclear destruction conveyed in their revelations and thus referred to ICBMs and nuclear firestorms, for example, in terms of “hail and fire mixed with blood.” (Lindsey asks, “How could God transmit the thought of a nuclear catastrophe to someone living in the year A.D. 90!” [1984:12, 117].) The invention of nuclear weapons suddenly has made these unfathomable prophecies comprehensible:

[Zechariah 14:12] predicts that “their flesh will be consumed from their bones, their eyes burned out of their sockets, and their tongues consumed out of their mouths while they stand on their feet.” For hundreds of years students of Bible prophecy have wondered what kind plague could produce such instant ravaging of humans while still on their feet. Until the advent of the atomic bomb such a thing was not humanly possible. But now everything Zechariah predicted could come true instantly in a thermonuclear exchange! (Lindsey 1984:210–211)

Lindsey also provides descriptions of the effects of nuclear cataclysm in terms of the biblical seven trumpet judgments and the seven bowls of wrath, each of which involves a preordained scenario of suffering that will be unleashed on humanity and that will ravage the earth. The devastation and slaughter will be unparalleled: “Imagine, cities like London, Paris, Tokyo, New York, Los Angeles, Chicago—obliterated! John [in the Book of Revelation] says that the Eastern force alone will wipe out a third of the earth’s population (Revelation 9:15–18). He also predicts that entire islands and mountains would be blown off the map. It seems to indicate an all-out attack of ballistic missiles upon the
great metropolitan areas of the world” (1973:155). According to Lindsey the devastation will be so enormous that “coastlines and continents will be changed and all the mountains will be shifted in elevation . . . the cities of the world will have been reduced to rubble. The world will look just as you’d expect the ‘end of the world’ to look” (1984:214). As the result of this mass destruction, Christ will ultimately have to create a new world for humans to inhabit during the millennium, in which “the sky will be bluer, the grass will be greener, the flowers will smell sweeter, the air will be cleaner, and man will be happier than he ever dreamed possible!” (1984:255).

Lindsey’s subsequent books, films, radio broadcasts, and lectures expand on themes first presented in The Late Great Planet Earth, providing updates that interpret recent world events in terms of prophecy and that further illustrate God’s design for humanity. For instance, in The Rapture: Truth or Consequences (1983), Lindsey elaborates on the concept of the Rapture and the role of nuclear cataclysms in the last days, slightly modifying his previous interpretation of the meaning of the opening of the seven seals and the trumpet judgments. In Satan Is Alive and Well on Planet Earth (1972), he identifies the satanic influences and manifestations of evil that he believes have overtaken Western civilization and now permeate all aspects of American life. He describes the demonic “thought bombs” set off by individuals such as Darwin, Marx, Freud, Hegel, Kant, and Kierkegaard and provides an inventory of satanic phenomena and influences, ranging from psychic powers and speaking in tongues to rock music, television (the demonic “eye in our living room”), and the behavioral psychology of B. F. Skinner (in the section entitled “Skinner Dipping,” Lindsey asks, “Could it be that the long-dreaded figure of Bible prophecy, the Antichrist, will rise up to implement Dr. Skinner’s basic tenets into reality?” [1972:101]). In one lurid passage involving a two-page interview with a Los Angeles police commander, the topics of satanism, drug use, blood sacrifice, and sexual orgies are combined to paint a picture of youth culture running amuck: “Blood is put into cauldrons, mixed with LSD and used as a drink during their rites or ceremonies. . . . Not long ago there was a ‘Kiss-In’ on a Santa Monica beach. . . . they were just one big mass swaying to the throb of drums and weird music . . . some began to indulge in open sex . . . most of them wore charms around their necks” (1972:18–19). Lindsey’s portrayals of the evils that pervade contemporary society reflect the view that American culture is irredeemably corrupted, a belief that he shares with other dispensationalists and premillennialists in general.

Conspiratorial notions about widespread satanic influences in American society are substantiated in this and other books through Lindsey’s use of quo-
tations from “experts” and numerous firsthand accounts of his own interactions with satanists and evil personages. Lindsey’s somewhat haphazard technique of documentation consists of statements from members of the Club of Rome, Nobel Prize winners, “renowned futurists,” Albert Einstein, John F. Kennedy, professors from M.I.T., anonymous “authorities,” “researchers,” police officers, daily news reports, the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, and the National Enquirer, all of which are treated as equally credible. Although Lindsey’s scholarship may be questionable and somewhat indiscriminate, his books give the impression that he has a vast knowledge of contemporary events. His interpretations of current affairs in terms of biblical prophecy convey a sense of privileged information and an understanding of the present and the future. Lindsey’s assurances that biblical predictions are being continually fulfilled in God’s countdown to Armageddon undoubtedly motivate many readers to purchase his new publications in order to receive updates on prophecy and fully understand God’s plan.

Each of Lindsey’s publications reinforces the ideas presented in his previous books, with revisions and enumerations of various prophecies that have been subsequently fulfilled. In The 1980s: Countdown to Armageddon, which was on the New York Times best-seller list for more than twenty weeks, Lindsey recounts the various predictions presented in The Late Great Planet Earth that have come to pass: “During the 25 years I have been studying prophecy I have seen incredible things forecast 3,000 years ago happen right before my eyes. . . . The decade of the 1980’s could very well be the last decade of history as we know it” (1981:8). Lindsey retrospectively interprets the events of the 1970s in terms of his prophetic framework, declaring that he successfully predicted the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the overthrow of the shah of Iran, the superiority of Soviet military strength, the decline of U.S. military power, and the addition of new nations to the European Common Market to reach the biblically predicted number of ten.

In addition to verifying his previous predictions, in this book Lindsey reiterates his endtimes scenario but diverges somewhat from the traditionally apolitical tone of dispensationalism. In the last two chapters he advocates right-wing political causes and a substantial military buildup in order to thwart communist global dominance and curtail moral decay within the United States. Lindsey still maintains that God has determined history and that the decline of the United States and the destruction of the world is inevitable, but he asserts that military strength, a conservative political agenda, and increased capitalistic enterprise can temporarily delay the prophesied decline until the occurrence of Rapture, after which the deterioration of
the country will be of little consequence to raptured Christians. In this way, Lindsey has politicized the dispensationalist tradition, incorporating right-wing ideology into basic dispensationalist tenets, in a move similar to the politics of Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell.

As previously noted, numerous contemporary premillennialists express ideas similar to Lindsey’s (though they may not share his somewhat sensationalistic interpretive approach). Pat Robertson, for instance, also has stated that the European Common Market nations are the ten-nation confederacy mentioned in the Book of Revelation, that the rise of the Antichrist is imminent, that the Soviet Union will invade Israel, and that strange natural disasters will occur prior to Christ’s return, which he expected in the early 1980s (Hadden and Swann 1981:96). Best-selling authors Tim and Beverly LaHaye, who have been instrumental in the fundamentalist Christian campaign of identifying “secular humanism” as a force of evil, also declare, like Lindsey, that nuclear apocalypse is inevitable, that the faithful will be raptured prior to Armageddon, and that world peace organizations such as the United Nations and World Council of Churches are potentially satanic institutions foretold in the Book of Revelation (1972, 1975). Numerous books by Salem Kirban similarly identify current events and institutions as signs of God’s unalterable plan. In his Guide to Survival (1973), for instance, Kirban concludes, “The world is rapidly coming to an end. It is on an irreversible course” (1973:21). The picture-book version of his 666 (Kirban 1981) provides a colorfully illustrated account of the tribulation period, the rise of the Antichrist, and the infernal strategies that will be used to force people to bear the “Mark of the Beast,” identified as the number 666. Evangelist Billy Graham, who professes to have “presented the gospel face to face to more people than any other man in history” (B. Graham 1983:back jacket cover), and who has advocated social activism rather than premillennial passivity, nonetheless embraces prophecy beliefs about foreordained worldly catastrophe. In fact, it appears that Graham rose to fame in the 1950s initially because of his apocalyptic interpretations of current events. Two days after President Harry Truman announced the first Soviet atomic test on September 23, 1949, Graham, unknown at the time, highlighted the apocalyptic capabilities of atomic weapons and interpreted the rise of communism as a sign of impending doom (Boyer 1985:239). Hundreds of thousands of people flocked to Graham’s tent revival, which was extended from three weeks to two months.

Although previous premillennialists have made similar assertions and the themes and underlying eschatological structures of Lindsey’s books are not new, his interpretations of the Bible as prophetic text are innovative and acces-
sible. Like any talented storyteller or writer, Lindsey weaves a compelling and imaginative narrative from traditional story structures, motifs, and images. Lindsey’s books, inspired by Revelation and other biblical texts and bolstered by the prognostications of scientists and secular doomsayers, are creative interpretations of current events that directly address contemporary concerns about earthly destruction and worldly evil. Nuclear annihilation, environmental disaster, war, famine, disease, drug addiction, divorce, increased crime, violence, and a sense of overwhelming evil in the world are explained as a foreordained and meaningful part of God’s countdown to Armageddon.

In addition to the graphic interpretations and innovative updating of traditional dispensationalist eschatological narratives, the appeal of Lindsey’s books may also be attributed to his writing style, which is engaging, often humorous, and easily understandable. He says that his books are written in a way that is simple and free of jargon in an attempt to reach the “common person,” particularly skeptics and the irreligious: “As I wrote, I’d imagine that I was sitting across the table from a young person—a cynical, irreligious person—and I’d try to convince him that the Bible prophecies were true” (Kirsch 1977:31). Chapter titles such as “Sheik to Sheik” (the role of the Arab nations in prophecy); “Russia Is a Gog” (Russia identified as the prophesied Gog that will invade Israel); “The Ultimate Trip” (the Rapture); and “The Main Event” (the Second Coming of Christ) illustrate Lindsey’s use of catchy phrases to introduce his ideas (Lindsey 1973).

The content of Lindsey’s books, his writing style, and his innovative reworking of the dispensationalist tradition certainly account for much of his popularity, but the marketing of his books has greatly contributed to their widespread appeal as well. From the beginning of his writing career, Lindsey’s ideas have been skillfully promoted through the paperback publishing industry. He insists that his books be published in both hardcover and paperback simultaneously so as to reach a greater number of people; he says he is “writing for the youth culture—and the average young person doesn’t even look at hardbacks of any kind” (Kirsch 1977:31). Not only are his books affordable, they are available in general bookstores nationwide and often have sensational cover art that resembles other mass-marketed paperbacks. The cover of The Late Great Planet Earth, for instance, depicts the earth in flames, soaring through space leaving a trail of fire; the cover of The 1980s: Countdown to Armageddon has an illustration of an hourglass, with a green and blue planet earth inside the upper section, trickling down into a blackened pile of cinders in the bottom portion.

The widespread appeal of Lindsey’s ideas is also attributable to their promotion through his management firm, Hal Lindsey Ministries, as well as
through his radio news and call-in talk show heard in more than one hundred cities in the United States every Saturday morning. Lindsey also travels on a nationwide lecture circuit and apparently is one of the most sought after lecturers in the country (S. Graham 1989:247). Various videotapes and film versions of his books also promote his apocalyptic predictions. In the film rendition of *The Late Great Planet Earth* (produced in 1977 and featuring Lindsey, and narrated by an ominous-sounding Orson Welles), the events preceding Armageddon are presented in a documentary style, enhanced with gruesome special effects and including a surrealistic portrayal of the Revelation of St. John, with the Whore of Babylon slurping blood from a goblet, for instance, and dying sinners shown suffering the wrath of God in the last days.

Lindsey’s interpretations of the dispensationalist tradition have become codified, legitimized, and seemingly “institutionalized” as the result of their promotion through print and electronic technologies. In this manner, the mass media have allowed grassroots and individualistic explications of apocalyptic prophecy to rapidly gain credibility and an enormous following. Unlike those apocalypticists who base their authority on charisma or direct communication with supernatural forces, the source of authority for prophecy interpreters such as Lindsey is not dependent on trance states but obtained indirectly through textual exegesis. Traditional charismatic prophets convey direct messages from supernatural beings; Lindsey and other literalist prophecy enthusiasts are popular theologians and folk exegetes who derive their authority from an apparent knowledge of current events and world history and from their ability to decipher symbolic information about the future as revealed in the Bible. If anything, such speculations about the end of the world resemble divinatory practices rather than prophecy because they are based on interpreting symbolic messages rather than direct revelation involving the immediate communication of information from deities who speak through an inspired individual (see Overholt 1989:140–147; Aune 1983:339). Divination, prophecy, and oracles are similar in that they involve determining the will of supernatural entities and forces; the individuals involved are intermediaries between the supernatural and natural worlds. These practices are often implicitly fatalistic, implying that certain future, present, or past events have been ordained and that their causes may be determined by consulting supernatural forces. The predictive techniques employed in the books of dispensationalist prophecy interpreters resemble the practice of “technical divination”: their predictions are a form of scriptural divination, based on personal knowledge and training. This method of “scientific” or “rational” prophecy is presented as if it is based on scientific inference involving the analysis and decoding of
esoteric messages from God hidden in the Bible and correlating these with contemporary events.

Although prophecy interpreters such as Lindsey do not profess to be divinely inspired prophets, they do imply that they possess unique insights and special abilities in interpreting the Bible. For example, Lindsey states that he does not believe prophets are currently receiving direct revelations from God but that “we do have prophets today who are being given special insight into the prophetic word” (1973:78). Biblical prophecy has been “unsealed” in recent times, says Lindsey, and he portrays himself as one who has special skills in interpreting the prophetic meanings of biblical passages. Although Lindsey and other prophecy interpreters are not charismatic leaders in the traditional sense, they do imply that they possess “exceptional powers or qualities” of exegesis that enable them to unravel and decode God’s blueprint for the end of history.

Popular prophecy books such as Lindsey’s are written for lay readers who may not have formal religious training, and the authors assert that knowledge of God’s plan is accessible to everyone, not only the ecclesiastical elite. In fact, popular interpreters of biblical prophecy (like other apocalypticists in general), often situate themselves in opposition to official religious institutions, portraying theologians as corrupt, depicting dominant religious organizations as controlled by apostates, and informing readers that although they constitute the “true church,” they are in the minority. Even though millions of people have read such books, they are depicted as marginalized and frequently reminded that their beliefs exist outside or in opposition to the dominant theological trends in Christianity.

Folk Beliefs, Omens, and Apocalyptic Prophecies

The content, structure, and cause-effect relationships that characterize Lindsey’s predictions and those of other dispensationalists resemble traditional folk beliefs about doomsday portents in which perceived threats, social turmoil, anomalous occurrences, and unusual cosmic and natural phenomena are interpreted as signs that foretell of imminent worldly destruction. Wayland D. Hand’s monumental *Popular Beliefs and Superstitions from North Carolina*, for example, lists meteor showers, an eclipse of the sun, comets, strange lights in the sky, and the disappearance of pawpaws as doomsday signs (1961–1964:573). Stith Thompson’s *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (1955–1958) also contains various references to the End, such as birds dripping blood on
doomsday (B259.3); bleeding wood as a doomsday sign (A1091.2); the moon shining by day (A1053.1) and the sun shining at night as doomsday signs (A1052.2); talking stone at doomsday (A1091.3); and unusual migrations of birds at doomsday (A1091.4). In addition to natural and cosmic inversions and doomsday reversals occurring before the end of the world, reversible dates, such as those that can be read back to front or upside-down (e.g., 1881 or 1961) also have been assigned doomsday significance (Simpson 1978:562–564). The date of doomsday has been frequently attributed to round numbers, and thus the end of every century is a time of apocalyptic angst for many. The two-volume Popular Beliefs and Superstitions from the Ohio collection of Newbell Niles Puckett (Hand et al. 1981) includes cows lowing at night, bad thunderstorms, women wearing glass high heels, and the disappearance of the Eastern European folk custom of painting on Easter eggs as signs that foretell the end of the world (1981:1516). The collection Popular Beliefs and Superstitions from Utah (Hand and Talley 1984) contains belief statements about meteors and comets (11686, 11700), the eclipse of the sun (11710, 11722, 11724), blood on the moon (9999, 10001, 10002), and chickens laying more eggs than normal (9989) as signs of the last days. This collection also includes statements about certain social and political events that foretell doomsday. Fathers will turn against sons, mothers against daughters, and neighbors against neighbors; parents and children will hate one another; the United States and the USSR will unite to fight against China in the last days (9991, 9994, 9996). Bleached hair (9997), hooped earrings, and the confusion of gender distinctions (9998) are also signs that the end of the world is approaching.

Unlike “active” (or “magical”) beliefs, in which human action is prescribed in order to cause an effect, these doomsday portents foretell various events by themselves and do not involve human agency. In 1926, Puckett distinguished between active and predictive beliefs, which he labeled “control signs” and “prophetic signs”; the former allow for a degree of human control and the latter involve “those undomesticated causal relationships in which the human individual has no play . . . man has no control and submits helplessly to the decrees of nature” (1926:312). Scandinavian ethnologist Albert Eskeröd (1947) also differentiated between passive and active superstitions, characterizing the condition-result relationship typical of passive beliefs such as omens as ominant-ominat, and that of action beliefs as causant-causat. The first type of belief involves the reading of signs or omens (ominant) that predict occurrences or states of being (ominat) and does not involve volition or causality. The second type of belief is characterized by a cause-and-effect relationship between actions and the results of those actions (causant-causat). Omens and
passive beliefs (or what Alan Dundes calls “sign superstitions”) predict the future, and active beliefs make the future; the former allow one to foretell death, bad luck, or the weather, and the latter enable one to produce results by means of magical practices (Dundes 1961:31).

Similar to the noncausal ominant that foretells events and does not involve human action or volition, Lindsey’s predictions express the notion that particular occurrences are predetermined and that humans are helpless to avert these inevitable events. Although Lindsey’s prognostications are more elaborate than the isolated belief statements about doomsday assembled in folklore collections, his predictions are similar in structure and in the assertion that future events are foreordained. Dispensationalist prophecies indicate that the present reveals the future and that the future cannot by altered in any way by human action. Characterized by a belief in inevitability and human helplessness concerning certain occurrences, portents and prophecies reveal the fundamental human desire to predict future events and to attribute meaning to that which is regarded as unchangeable or unavoidable.

Unlike traditional portents and omens that usually consist of a single condition and result, Lindsey’s predictions include multiple and general conditions that allow for wide-ranging prophetic speculation. The somewhat vague nature of his predictions is indicated by many of his statements about the future, such as the following: “In the Bible, He [Jesus] told us that seven signals—war, revolution, plague, famine, earthquakes, religious deception, and strange occurrences in space—would alert us that the end of the old world and the birth of the new was near” (1981:19). All of these conditions can be said to be occurring now; on the other hand, one could argue that they have occurred throughout most of human history. Lindsey’s predictions are ambiguous enough to allow for many events to be interpreted as a fulfillment of signs that foretell specific results. For instance, his prediction of an attack on Israel from a northern nation might be understood by some readers in terms of the Iraqi launching of Scud missiles at Israel during the Persian Gulf War, even though Lindsey’s original prediction forecasts the massive destruction of Israel by a northern confederacy. During the 1980s, Lindsey’s prophecy of ten nations in the European Common Market was in fact fulfilled, until Spain and Portugal were added and the number increased to twelve.

Some of Lindsey’s predictions are sufficiently vague to enable a multiplicity of interpretations; others are logical assumptions about political and social events that may occur in the future (e.g., “Keep your eyes on the Middle East. If this is the time we believe it is, this part of the world will become a constant source of tension for all the world” [Lindsey 1973:173]). Lindsey asserts that his
numerous unfulfilled predictions will all be realized within this generation, such as the rise of a one-world religious organization, the appearance of the Antichrist, the rebuilding of the Jewish Temple, and the sudden disappearance of the Christian faithful in the Rapture. His failed predictions (e.g., that the “Jupiter Effect,” caused by the alignment of the planets in the solar system would initiate the world’s most disastrous earthquakes in 1982 [Lindsey 1981:29–30]) are simply disregarded or modified in subsequent books.

In the well-known sociological study When Prophecy Fails, Leon Festinger (1956) and his fellow fieldworkers focus on the beliefs and behaviors of a group of individuals in the 1950s who were convinced that the destruction of the world was imminent. The researchers concentrated on one particular prophecy by the seer Mrs. Keech, who predicted a widespread cataclysm, to occur on a specific date, involving a flood that would submerge and destroy the western portion of the North and South American continents. Devotees believed that prior to the day of destruction, they would be saved by UFOs (a notion similar to the dispensationalist belief in the Rapture prior to the tribulation period). In their attempt to understand how cognitive dissonance is resolved, Festinger and his colleagues were particularly interested in the explanations and rationalizations that occurred after the prediction failed. Lindsey’s predictions, unlike Mrs. Keech’s, which were specific enough to be disconfirmed, are generally so ambiguous and open to multiple interpretations that they rarely can be refuted. Lindsey’s predictions and those of other dispensationalists in some ways resemble the speculations of futurologists more than those of previous doomsday prophets, such as Mrs. Keech or William Miller, who not only provided precise information about the details of doomsday but anticipated its occurrence on a specific date. The abstract and symbolic nature of biblical apocalyptic writings allows dispensationalists like Lindsey to interpret retrospectively a diversity of events—from bar-coding and international terrorism to the establishment of the European Community and the Trilateral Commission—as fulfillments of prophecy.

**Divine Determination and a Sense of Coherence and Control**

Underlying the predictive beliefs expressed in Lindsey’s books is the notion that history resembles a narrative that has been deliberately designed and is ultimately meaningful. The story of human existence is presented by Lindsey and other dispensationalists as coherent from beginning to end, characterized by dramatic, preordained events and an ongoing battle between good and evil.
Lindsey’s account of the end of the world affirms that present and future disasters are not arbitrary and meaningless but explicable as part of a divine structure. His books directly address various dominating concerns and offer resolutions to the anxieties and uncertainties that these concerns evoke.

As the research of folklorists and anthropologists indicates, a primary human aim is to maintain a sense of control over the environment and consequently over one’s experiences and the outcomes of events. Anthropologists such as Bronislaw Malinowski, E. E. Evans-Pritchard, and A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, among others, have discussed the relationship of belief and behavior to anxiety, uncertainty, and dominating concerns. Evans-Pritchard (1937), for instance, states that among the Azande in Sudan causality is attributed to supernatural forces particularly in cases of uncertain, inexplicable, or tragic occurrences. He notes that belief in witchcraft provides the Azande with a sense of understanding about the causes of unusual events and in some instances affords individuals an opportunity to act or retaliate, thus gaining a sense of control over unfortunate circumstances. Malinowski’s (1954) well-known hypothesis that magical beliefs are expressed more frequently in situations of anxiety and uncertainty has been verified by numerous subsequent researchers (see Mullen 1969; Vogt 1952). Albert Eskeröd (1964), in an attempt to avoid the potentially negative connotations of Malinowski’s concept of anxiety, has proposed the notion of “dominating interests” (Interessendonnanzen) to characterize the emotional and discerning attitudes of individuals in situations of extreme importance, uncertainty, or concern which are subsequently endowed with supernatural significance (1964:89). These and other researchers have demonstrated that uncertain situations and dominating concerns may motivate people to attribute causality to supernatural forces, whether in the form of magic, witchcraft, fate, or God’s will. In such cases, the attributing of supernatural causality not only may reduce and explain uncertainty, but may enable people to gain a sense of control over inexplicable events and obtain a sense of meaning concerning such events. Lindsey’s books are inventories of contemporary anxieties, uncertainties, and dominating concerns. In chapter after chapter he discusses the threat of nuclear war, the destiny of the reader’s soul, and the meaning of recent historical events, political turmoil, widespread social ills, disasters, wars, famine, and disease. As assertions about the supernatural predetermination of worldly events, Lindsey’s apocalyptic predictions provide a means of making sense of otherwise incomprehensible, tragic, or distressing occurrences identified as divine signs that are a part of God’s plan. As such, they are deliberate sources of information about Christ’s return and humanity’s place on the apocalyptic clock as it winds
down to doomsday. Like other forms of apocalyptic belief that depict history as foreordained and human action as ineffectual in altering the outcome of events, Lindsey’s writings may be considered a tragic form of discourse offering explicit religious theodicies: assertions of order and meaning that provide symbolic solutions to questions of why there is evil, suffering, and death in the world (O’Leary 1994:14, 200–201). Apocalypticism, as a tragic and fatalistic mode of thought, offers privileged explanations that “unveil” the otherwise obscure meanings behind events and experiences, reassuring believers that current crises and social evils are part of a predetermined endtimes scenario orchestrated by God.

Lindsey admits that his predictions may sound like a “wild fairytale” to some readers but declares that for others the “realization of what’s in store for them in eternity is so thrilling that they can hardly wait to get there!” (1984:279). He asserts that knowing and contemplating God’s plan for the future as it is revealed through prophecy is necessary because “this life has many disappointments and heartaches, but knowing there is a new world coming for God’s people gives us patience and strength to joyfully bear the burdens of this life” (1984:279). Providing his readers with the promise of this new world and a systematic framework for interpreting the existing world, Lindsey clarifies life’s uncertainties in an authoritative tone, and his writings assert that God is not only controlling human history but personally involved in people’s lives. Lindsey also promises that believers will meet this personal and approachable God in the millennial kingdom to come: “God will be there in person, and we’ll see Him face-to-face” (1984:273); “It’s exciting to think about kneeling at God’s feet one minute and sitting beside His throne the next! There’s no chance of eternity being boring with that kind of challenge alternating with adoring service” (1984:278).

Many prophets in the past have maintained that worldly disasters were warnings of God’s wrath and the imminence of apocalypse if humans did not repent, but the calamities and prophecies highlighted by Lindsey are not interpreted as warning signs from God or catalysts for action. Instead, these are noncausal indications of God’s timetable, codified in the Bible thousands of years ago. In the dispensationalist view, the reform and repentance of all humanity cannot avert a doomsday that has been divinely determined. Although the supernatural motivation for allowing suffering and the spread of specific evils prior to Armageddon is unknowable or attributed to the inevitable evils of human nature and Satan’s influence, Lindsey’s writings affirm that all that occurs is ultimately meaningful within God’s larger design. The belief in divine determination and the inextricable connection between
God’s plan, human history, and one’s own life has been identified as one of the cornerstones of Christian fundamentalist thought:

The Bible also instructs fundamentalists that a rationale for life apart from God cannot exist. Nothing in life is an accident; rather, all is a part of God’s plan. Bad things happen as God’s chastisement of us or as God’s way of closing doors on mere human plans. God is always good, but His goodness is sometimes rather terrible. . . . Fundamentalists cannot think or speak of their history, their present, or their future apart from God as *deus ex machina* who makes all things happen. (Hadden and Swann 1981:89–90)

Within this framework of ultimate control in divine hands, suffering, death, and tragedies are not cruel or absurd occurrences in an insensitive universe but have a larger, symbolic meaning as part of a transcendent order.

Lindsey’s writings offer readers a sense of the significance of their own lives within the divine plan once they are saved by belief in Christ, as well as a sense of the importance of living at the end of history. Although worldly cataclysm is inevitable, specific actions to save oneself and one’s family and friends from the horrors of apocalypse and eternal damnation are prescribed. Fatalistic resignation about the irredeemability of this world does not result in total passivity. Lindsey states that “far from being pessimistic and dropping out of life, we should be rejoicing in the knowledge that Christ may return any moment for us. This should spur us to share the good news of salvation in Christ with as many as possible . . . we should plan our lives as though we will be here our full life expectancy, but live as though Christ may come today” (1973:176). Lindsey urges his readers to accept Christ into their lives, regularly read the Bible, and attempt to convert others so that they will be rescued in the Rapture.

In an essay on weather portents and magical beliefs, folklorist Michael Owen Jones (1967) discusses the behavioral responses that certain beliefs motivate, noting also his informants’ own interpretations of these beliefs. He proposes the concept of “implicit activating beliefs,” which are similar to Alan Dundes’s notion of sign superstition, but Jones demonstrates that the act of reading portentous signs may implicitly motivate action. Lindsey’s belief propositions resemble implicit activating beliefs in that they are signs indicating that certain events are inevitable, but that human action can counteract inevitability at a personal level if one acts in accordance with divine decrees. These prescriptions for action are spiritual—an act of faith or a conversion experience—and involve evangelization rather than explicit instructions for social or political action. At the conclusion of a chapter entitled “World War III” in *The Late Great Planet Earth*, after he describes worldwide destruction
and the Battle of Armageddon, Lindsey asks his readers: “As history races toward this moment, are you afraid or looking with hope for deliverance? The answer should reveal to you your spiritual condition. One way or another history continues in a certain acceleration toward the return of Christ. Are you ready?” (1973:157). Although the end of the world is fated, the destiny of one’s soul and the souls of others remains undetermined and is a matter of individual free will. As a master of apocalyptic rhetoric, Lindsey’s descriptions of a foreordained apocalypse and his prescriptions for individual salvation are clearly an effective form of evangelism, encouraging conversion by addressing contemporary fears about worldly disaster and social disintegration.

The belief in the Rapture, in particular, with its promise of planetary escape prior to nuclear cataclysms and other disasters, offers a compelling scenario by which fears of inevitable doom are transformed into expectations of salvation. The following account of Jerry Falwell’s belief in his being taken away in the Rapture typifies this faith in divine evacuation prior to Armageddon: “I heard Falwell sum up his reason why a nuclear Armageddon would not bother him. ‘You know why I’m not worried’ he said. ‘I ain’t gonna be here’” (Halsell 1986:39). Assuring the faithful that they will be exempt from bodily death and physical suffering in the event of a nuclear war and other disasters associated with the tribulation period, Rapture beliefs may serve as a defense mechanism or compensatory fantasy, reducing individual fears and responsibility concerning nuclear apocalypse and transforming anxiety about such predicted catastrophes into passive acceptance of these as foreordained events.

*Impersonal Fate and God’s Predetermined Timetable*

Several researchers have noted that fatalistic beliefs and narratives with fatalistic themes often express the notion that human beings may develop a relationship with fate, often altering it through supplication, trickery, or acts of kindness (Georges 1978; Ringgren 1967). When fate is regarded as completely impersonal, one generally cannot avert it or enter into a relationship with it; however, if fate is believed to be decreed by a god, interacting with it and averting an evil destiny or creating a good one through sacrifices, prayer, and obedience is possible (Ringgren 1967:8). Lindsey’s writings assert that individual fate may be altered through action, but that the fate of earth and the future of humanity as a whole are foreordained. Attempts to prevent worldly disasters through social action are considered to be hopeless and human
responsibility concerning the improvement of this world is discouraged and even interpreted as a direct denial of God’s plan for humanity. The worldview promoted by Lindsey frees one from personal uneasiness and responsibility concerning catastrophes occurring throughout the world because anything that takes place is part of a divine design. The denial of personal responsibility that often characterizes fatalistic beliefs is noted by historian of religion Kees Bolle, who states that “an attitude of defeat is in evidence in the belief that the future is inevitable and fixed as the past. One’s acts become acts of a higher power. . . . [Fatalism] consists of the renunciation of one’s own reason (hence also of one’s own responsibility), and the hypothesis of a rational coherence of events in another order” (1987:290).

This fatalistic renunciation of social action and responsibility is further exemplified by the widespread dispensationalist belief that international peace efforts are the work of satanic forces, with organizations such as the European Community and the United Nations, as well as various governmental and church institutions, considered to be part of a worldwide, evil conspiracy. Human efforts to improve the world are considered not only useless but possibly satanic, and believers are freed from moral obligations to save it from annihilation because the world’s problems and ultimate destruction are part of the divine plan. Catastrophes and tragedies thus may be interpreted as positive events that signal the End and portend the transformation of the world, with the promise of a divine order, in which righteousness and goodness will replace suffering and wickedness. The view of the world presented by Lindsey and other dispensationalists regards the present as irredeemably corrupt, a time of oppression, suffering, and the triumph of evil over good. Throughout his books, Lindsey juxtaposes images of this evil and unsalvageable world with portrayals of God’s millennial paradise established after worldly annihilation. The ubiquitous signs of doomsday are a cause for rejoicing, and the imminent destruction of the world serves as a motivation to save souls. As portents of the last days, famine, wars, plagues, environmental disasters, and nuclear war are regarded as markers on God’s predetermined timetable, or as Lindsey puts it, “God’s great time-clock of eternity” (1984:280), not as events that one may avert. Recasting ancient apocalyptic ideas about the foreordination of history in terms of contemporary issues and events, Lindsey’s books serve as a means of confronting, interpreting, and rendering meaningful nuclear annihilation, worldly disasters, social ills, and an assortment of dominant concerns by situating these events in a rigorous timetable of cosmic design.

The premillennial dispensationalist vision of the end of the world exemplified by the writings of Hal Lindsey remains the predominant form of pop-
ular apocalypticism in the United States. Although less frequently studied, the prophecy beliefs associated with apocalyptic visions of the Virgin Mary, familiar to millions of Roman Catholics worldwide, are another expression of popular apocalypticism in America today. As will be explored in the next chapter, apocalyptic Marian worldviews share the premillennial dispensationalist belief that the imminence of doomsday is revealed through prophecy and that the world is pervaded by evil, yet they differ in terms of the forms of prophecy used, the apocalyptic scenario imagined, and the underlying fatalism of such beliefs.