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# Radical Religious Groups and Government Policy: A Critical Evaluation

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Radical Religious Groups and Government Policy: A Critical Evaluation

by

Tori Chambers Lockler

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
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RADICAL RELIGIOUS GROUPS AND GOVERNMENT POLICY:  
A CRITICAL EVALUATION

Tori C. Lockler

ABSTRACT

Religion, many times, is one of the phenomena that is misunderstood and often rejected due to apprehension. There is an expected “norm” within our culture for religion and those that fall outside that “norm” are typically criticized for their beliefs. Within Christianity there are a number of extremist groups that follow millennial doctrines and believe they are living in the end times. These organizations tend to view the government as oppressive, disrespectful, immoral and corrupt. Because of this when an incident occurs with one of these millennial groups and the government steps in to control the situation, the way it responds is critical.

This is an examination of three incidents with American radical religious groups and the formal reactions to them by the United States government. The three incidents I will analyze are the incident with the Weaver family at Ruby Ridge, the incident with the Branch Davidians at Waco, Texas, and the incident with the Montana Freeman at Justus Township, and how the government handled each of these interactions. I will evaluate

Mark Juergensmeyer's theories and patterns of cosmic war and performance violence, and Catherine Wessinger's categories and guidelines for radical religious groups and how she claims the government and media should interact with them. The criteria I will use for evaluation will be how well their theories help us to understand the beliefs and actions of the group.

Too often the government is unable to interact constructively with these groups because they do not understand their beliefs, and thereby provoke further violence. What is needed is a shift in attitude, a realization that the language of the groups is not "Bible Babble". Juergensmeyer and Wessinger have a unique perspective because they have directly interacted with radical religious groups and can provide the government with an insider understanding of the worldview of such religious groups, what it means to them through their eyes. I provide a list of guidelines derived from these two scholars, for the government and media to follow that will aid in constructive interaction with millennial groups and aid in peaceful negotiations in the future.

## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

It seems to be in human nature to be aggressive towards that which we do not understand. Religion, many times, is one of the phenomena that is misunderstood and often rejected due to apprehension. This is especially true of New Religious Movements (NRM). Often the views of NRM's fall outside the "norm" of our culture's accepted religions. The rituals, doctrines, and beliefs of NRM's exhibit traits not recognized as "normal", and tend to raise apprehension and with that, many times, aggression. The groups are called "cults" and dehumanized by the media, and as a result the public believes the members of the groups are brainwashed by their respective crazy charismatic leaders who have made the members stray from "normal" religion.

People who are followers of millennialism fall victim to this classification. While most denominations of Christianity believe in eschatology, that the end of time and final judgment will occur someday, millennial groups tend to be apocalyptic, they tend to believe the end will occur very soon and are attempting to prepare for it. Some of the more radical groups stockpile weapons in preparation for an impending apocalyptic war, which many believe the government will originate. These organizations tend to view the government as oppressive, disrespectful, immoral and corrupt.

Because the groups believe the government is the enemy, when an incident occurs with one of these millennial groups and the government steps in to control the situation, the way it responds is critical. The government's tendency to strong-arm these groups into submission does not work. This only provokes further violence. This is the point where scholars of religion can be helpful. According to Darrell Fasching, religion

constitutes what is sacred in a person's or community's life. "To say that something is sacred is to say that it matters more than anything else to a person or a community. A people demonstrate what they truly hold sacred by what they are willing to die for or, more ominously, to kill for. Again and again, humans have demonstrated that it is their way of life, above all, that fills that category...What is common to all human religiosity is not belief in God or the gods, but the sacredness of a 'way of life' that conquers the fear of death, holds chaos at bay, and makes life possible" (Stories, Fasching, 22 ).

When their way of life is threatened, especially by those they consider to be the enemy, they are willing to die and potentially kill to protect it.

It is important to realize, when the government acts aggressively towards its citizens it tends to aggravate followers of these groups as well as others who hold anti-government sentiments. This causes further violence to occur once the initial event has been resolved. An example of this is the Oklahoma City bombing. Its perpetrator, Timothy McVeigh, cited retaliation at the government for the occurrences at Ruby Ridge and Waco, Texas as provoking him. This is yet another reason the government must handle situations with radical religious groups with caution.

How the government handles incidents with these groups may determine the outcome of the situations. One of the most useful resources available to the government for incidents like these are scholars who have studied religious violence and millennial groups, and have knowledge of their religious worldviews. Mark Juergensmeyer and Catherine Wessinger are two examples of such scholars. They are uniquely valuable because they have been directly involved with radical religious groups through interviews with members, providing them a distinct insider's knowledge of the worldviews of the

groups. Juergensmeyer has examined the beliefs of a number of organizations that commit acts considered to be terrorist actions by the government. Through his examination he has developed useful theories of performance violence and cosmic war to understand the connection between religion and violence, that of performance violence and cosmic war. Catherine Wessinger played a role in the Montana Freeman event and has constructed categories and definitions for millennial groups that provide distinctions between them. She has also provided advice for the government, media, potential converts and families of converts on how to interact with millennial groups.

Throughout this thesis I will examine three incidents with radical religious groups and the government. The three incidents I will analyze are the incident with the Weaver family at Ruby Ridge, the incident with the Branch Davidians at Waco, Texas, and the incident with the Montana Freeman at Justus Township, and how the government handled each of these interactions. The purpose of this thesis is to examine the relationship between religion and violence. More specifically, I review these three incidents with American religious groups and the formal reactions to them by the United States government. I will evaluate Mark Juergensmeyer's theories and patterns of cosmic war and performance violence, and Catherine Wessinger's categories within radical religious groups and how they apply to these incidents, as well as her guidelines to recognize potentially violent groups and how she claims the government and media should interact with them. Too often the government is unable to interact constructively with these groups because they do not understand their beliefs, and thereby provoke further violence. What is needed is a shift in attitude, a realization that the language of the groups is not "Bible Babble". The government needs an insider understanding of the



worldview of such religious groups, what it means to them through their eyes. My thesis is that of the theories I examine, Catherine Wessinger's observations about millennial movements and Mark Juergensmeyer's theories on cosmic war and performance violence could be constructively used to prevent violence in future interactions with these types of religions.

## **Apocalyptic Thought and Millennialism**

Religion is shaped by the narrative or myth that is the story that has created their worldview. In order to understand the apocalyptic narrative of millennial groups it is necessary to understand the historical roots, and the narrative Christianity shares with Judaism. The narrative of Judaism is a “myth of history”, the story of a God who leads His people through time and the events that have shaped Judaism into a resilient religion. One of the important events was Moses’ delivery of God’s people, and through that the covenant made with God at Mount Sinai. The Exodus story plays an integral founding role in the narrative of Judaism because it is about a group of people overcoming the oppression of slavery and gathering at Mount Sinai where God speaks to them claiming them as His people (Esposito, 121).

Approximately 250 years later God chose Saul as the first king to rule His people, however he proved lacking as a leader and David succeeded Saul. It was, “Under David and later his son Solomon, Israel became for a brief time the greatest nation in the Middle East” (Esposito, 122). Israel was split into two kingdoms, Israel in the North and Judah in the South after Solomon’s reign (ibid, 123).

In 721 the Assyrians conquered Israel, and then in 586 B.C.E. the Babylonians conquered Judah. The people were taken from their land and forced into slavery in Babylon. This was very traumatic for the people. But the prophets had warned the people of Israel of impending destruction if they broke the covenant with God. Each time destruction occurred it was interpreted as due to their breaking the covenant. The exile in Babylon lasted approximately fifty years before the people were released. It was the Persian king Cyrus who released the exiles and they returned to their home.

The two transformative events in Jewish history then were the exodus with Moses and the exile and return, “If the exodus was the founding event of Judaism, it was the exile that was its formative event...The exile and return provided a story pattern through which all past and future events, whether of triumph or of tragedy, could be meaningfully integrated into Jewish identity” (Esposito, 129).

In 164 B.C.E. came the Maccabean revolt, which led to, “...a status of semi-independence under the rulership of the priestly house of the Hasmoneans, which lasted into the first century CE” (Esposito, 126). The Temple was rebuilt while under Roman rule, but in 70 CE, “...the second temple fell at the hands of the Romans...” (ibid, 129). By this time the people of Israel had found meaning in the tragic events. While the destruction of both temples was incredibly traumatic for the people, they retained their faith, “...in each case Jews came to the conclusion that the loss of the temple was not a sign of God’s failure but a call to the people of Israel to be more fully observant of the covenant” (ibid, 129).

The apocalyptic tradition began with the Book of Daniel. It was written approximately 167 BCE and it uses the exile to Babylon as symbolism for the future. The defeat of Jerusalem by the Babylonians and the exile of the people to Babylon created an opposition of good and evil. L. Michael White, a Professor specializing in Classic and Christian Origins at the University of Texas at Austin stated, “If we imagine the experience of the exiles living in Babylon, the idea of Babylon itself comes to symbolize enslavement. Oppression. The notion of exile or alienation. In contrast to Jerusalem which is home...exile, enslavement, oppression – will always be at the center of a lot of the trauma of apocalyptic experience” (PBS, Apocalypse). This symbolism

provides the idea that at the end of the world new oppressors will have risen and Babylon is used as a symbol of that oppression.

After the fall of the Temple at the hands of the Romans two movements emerged, "...the Pharisaic movement, which became Rabbinic Judaism, and the Nazarene movement, which became gentile Christianity" (Esposito, 51). "The Nazarenes were an apocalyptic movement, believing that the end of time was at hand and that their special mission was to convert the Gentiles before the final judgment. In this they were inspired by the prophecies of Isaiah that at the end of time all nations would be gathered into Jerusalem (Isaiah 66: 18-20)" (Esposito, 51-52).

The worldview of Christianity exists on a continuum from eschatology to apocalypse. Eschatology is the belief that the end of the world will happen eventually, and people should be prepared by living according to scripture with the knowledge of Christ's impending return. Apocalyptic thought increases the immediacy of eschatology, the end of the world is occurring not in the distant future, but very soon. Christianity draws on the apocalyptic literature of the Book of Daniel as well as the New Testament such as Mark 13 and the Book of Revelation. In Mark 13 Jesus said, "And when you hears of wars and rumors of wars, do not be frightened; those things must take place; but that is not yet the end" (Mark 13: 7), in verse 35-36 it goes on to state, "Therefore, be on the alert – for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, at cockcrowing, or in the morning – lest he come suddenly and find you asleep" (Mark 13: 35-36). The Book of Revelation contains the visions of John of Patmos, to be given to the seven churches, describing the events leading up to and the battle of the apocalypse. It details an in depth account of the end times and the process

leading to the destruction of the earth, by fire, plagues, etc. Before the final destruction there is a period of 1,000 years, or a millennium, that Christ will rule the earth, after the 1,000 reign there will be a battle between the forces of good (Christ) and the forces of evil (Satan), and Christ will be victorious. After the victory the believers will enter the New Jerusalem.

There are two distinct beliefs within millennial thought, that of pre and post millennial.

The Reconstructionists possess a 'postmillennial' view of history. That is, they believe that Christ will return to earth only after the thousand years of religious rule that characterizes the Christian idea of the millennium, and therefore Christians have an obligation to provide the political and social conditions that will make Christ's return possible. 'Premillennialists,' on the other hand, hold the view that the thousand years of Christendom will come only after Christ returns, an event that will occur in a cataclysmic moment of world history. Therefore they tend to be much less active politically. (Juergensmeyer, 28).

These two views determine the beliefs of a specific group and their actions. As Juergensmeyer states, if the group is postmillennial they believe they have to change the world into the Kingdom of God, before Christ can return, and are likely to engage in militant political action. Whereas, a group with premillennial views expect that Christ will make the change and transform the world into the Kingdom of God.

James Tabor, a religion scholar, who attempted to aid the government during the Waco incident, states of the events surrounding the Apocalypse:

...the first of these will be the Rapture, when all true believers will be taken to meet Christ in the sky. Then will follow a seven year period, the great Tribulation, a period when a demonic figure, the Antichrist, will arise and will rule the world. He will introduce horrendous persecution and suffering. At the end of

that period comes the battle of Armageddon. Jesus Christ returns at Meggido in Israel, with his saints, the armies of the Antichrist have gathered at Meggido, a two hundred million man army is marching in from the East, crossing the Euphrates, and at this apocalyptic moment in human history, the forces of evil will be destroyed by Christ and his armies and at that point the Millennium, the thousand year reign of justice, peace, harmony, will be established on earth with Jesus Christ ruling Jerusalem in a rebuilt Temple. (PBS, Apocalypse).

Many ideas previously stated relate to the millennial beliefs of radical religious groups, such as the symbolism in the Book of Daniel, and provides a relationship between the rule of Babylonia and the oppression of the exile with future events that will lead to the apocalypse. This provides the believers of these groups a sense that when they feel oppressed by an outside force such as the government they view them as the Babylon of the apocalypse, the symbolic Babylon that has come to oppress the people and bring the end times.

The Branch Davidians also held the belief that the gathering of 144,000, which his group believed would bring the return of Christ, would occur in Jerusalem. The gathering of the 144,000 was derived from the Book of Revelation 7:4 which states, “And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred forty-four thousand, sealed out of every tribe of the people of Israel”. The location as Jerusalem is stated in Isaiah 66: 20, “‘Then they shall bring all your brethren from all the nations as a grain of offering to the Lord, on horses, in chariots, in litters, on mules, and on camels, to My holy mountain Jerusalem,’ says the Lord...” This view can be shifted by the groups if an event arises that causes question. For example, while David Koresh believed the battle would occur in Jerusalem, when the events began with the government, Koresh began to wonder if he had missed something and the final battle would happen on American soil. “Catastrophic

millennialists will respond to political events and natural disasters by incorporating them into their apocalyptic scenarios by interpreting them as signs that the end time has arrived and as confirmation of prophecies” (Wessinger, 272).

## **Radical Religious Groups and the Sacred**

New religious movements, many times, have not completely found their way. Because NRM's are still determining where they stand they may have shifting doctrines and changes in leaders. NRM's may also lead a lifestyle that is outside the accepted "norm" of our culture. This may include abnormal marriage practices such as polygamy, or young marriages, communal living, isolation from the outside world and apocalyptic expectations. As Susan Palmer, an academic researcher of new religious movements states, "NRM scholars may sound like overindulgent mommies making excuses for their spoiled brats when they protest that communal experiments, sexual innovations, and apocalyptic expectations are merely developmental phases, and that society should grit its teeth and give these budding religions a chance to grow up" (Palmer, 101). But when interacting with an NRM, the possibility that many of their actions are part of a developmental phase creates an awareness of their sense of fragility. The leader may not know exactly what is expected of him/her from God or the gods, and the members may not understand the leader fully, leading to fragile state within the group that can be easily projected onto an outside aggressor, or projected inward which was the case with Jonestown (discussed further later).

A distinction must be drawn between morality and legality, and the cultural "norm" and the "norm" for the groups. An example of this can be seen in Waco, Texas with the Branch Davidians. The leader of the group, David Koresh a.k.a. Vernon Howell, was accused of child abuse for young marriages (some as young as 14), as well as strict discipline. However, this must not be viewed morally, but legally, because the morality of the groups depend on their way of life and not that of cultural normality. In Texas,



according to the Texas Department of Health, children between the ages of 14-17 may only marry if they meet one of the following criteria: a. documented parental consent, b. previously married, c. an order from the Texas district court where the parent lives.

According to this law while our culture does not find marriage under a certain age moral, it is not illegal in the state, as long as the child has parental approval.

Other child abuse allegations dealt with the strict discipline of the children.

However, David Thibodeau, a survivor of the Waco fire, wrote a book called A Place Called Waco, with Leon Whiteson, and addressed the issue of the strict discipline with the children and claimed that while strict, it was also fair. While this is one member's opinion, Thibodeau states that he stands against spanking children and yet did not feel the children were treated unjustly (Thibodeau & Whiteson, 118-119). Thibodeau also quotes Koresh's attorney, Dick DeGuerin, stating, "At what point does society have a right to step in and say you have to raise your family our way? It's applying yuppie values to people who chose to live differently" (Thibodeau & Whiteson, 119). Catherine Wessinger also states, "It was the standard Davidian practice to spank misbehaving children with a wooden spoon named 'the helper' in a 'whipping room.' This practice was similar to child-discipline practiced in other conservative Protestant families in the United States" (Wessinger, 63). Dean Kelley, a Counselor for the National Council of Churches on Religious Liberty, wrote an article for The Journal of Religion and Public Life, and stated that while the discipline of the children at Mt. Carmel was strict, "...the children who were examined by Texas authorities were found to be healthy, well-adjusted, and non-traumatized. Those pictured on a videotape with Koresh made during the siege seemed fond of him and unapprehensive" (Kelley, Section II).

These religions believe they know the ultimate “truth”. Denominational religions do not claim exclusive rights to the truth. “The Congregationalists do not believe Methodists are going to hell because they aren’t Congregationalists. Instead they concede that Methodists have got much right and can be partners in such common enterprises as foreign mission, evangelistic crusades, and social-welfare efforts” (Bruce, 76). However, radical religious groups believe they have the exclusive truth and many times isolate themselves from the outside world in an attempt to avoid exposure to outside influences, especially when the group’s truth includes atypical views such as anti-government sentiments.

Throughout history religion and politics have always interacted. The United States was founded on a belief in freedom of religion. This cannot only include those religions considered acceptable, that freedom must also include those holding unusual doctrines. As we become increasingly pluralistic a certain degree of tolerance must follow. While illegal actions must have consequences, it is imperative also that the consequences fit the actions and not be exaggerated because it is a religious group. It is imperative for the government to understand the beliefs of the group so they do not unnecessarily provoke violence by threatening the ultimate concern of the group. For example, when interaction occurs with a millennial group that feels the government will bring on the apocalypse it is imperative to recognize that, and thereby not use unnecessary force so the group becomes defensive. When the group becomes defensive and the government responds to that with further force it may result in the loss of life. This has been seen through a number of incidents.

## **The Tragedy at Ruby Ridge**

The government's interaction with the Weaver family at Ruby Ridge, Idaho in 1992 provoked violence within many radical religious and anti-government groups. Randy Weaver was a Christian Identity follower, who believed the government was the Babylon of the Apocalypse. He had purchased land and a cabin in the woods in Idaho and isolated his family. Many of these groups follow the gun circuit, which includes the buying and selling of guns to support themselves. Randy Weaver had missed a court date where he was to appear "...on a charge that he had illegally sawed off two shotguns and attempted to sell them" (Wessinger, 164). Weaver's house was placed under surveillance by the FBI Hostage Rescue Team (HRT). The Weaver's were not informed the agents were there and they were not asked to surrender. "Nor were the Weaver's apprised that the FBI had changed its normal rules of engagement; the FBI snipers were instructed to shoot to kill any armed male adult they saw" (ibid, 165).

When the Weaver's dog discovered the men a shoot-out occurred, during which the marshals shot Sammy Weaver (14), in the back as he ran toward the house. Also during the incident, "An FBI agent fired shots at Randy Weaver and Kevin Harris when they came outside, and this resulted in the killing of Randy Weaver's wife, Vicki (42), as she stood behind the cabin's front door, holding their baby" (Wessinger, 165). Also killed during the siege was William F. Degan, Deputy U.S. Marshal. Following the initial siege there was a ten day standoff that ended when Randy Weaver and Kevin Harris surrendered to the FBI. Randy Weaver was acquitted of the charges of murder and conspiracy. "In 1995, the federal government, without admitting wrongdoing, paid the

Weavers' three daughters \$1 million each and gave Randy Weaver \$100,000 in settlement" (ibid, 165).

## **The Branch Davidians and the Governmental Apocalypse**

In 1993 the government came in contact with a millennial group in Waco, Texas, the Branch Davidians, a splinter group originally based on Seventh-Day Adventist doctrines. Per the article by Dean Kelley on the First Things Website, from The Journal of Religion and Public Life, the governmental interest in the Branch Davidians began in May of 1992, when a UPS driver was carrying a parcel to the Davidian home. During this trip the parcel broke open to, “reveal a shipment of (inert) hand grenades” (Kelley, Section III). This attracted the attention of the government to the Branch Davidians. There was an ongoing investigation into the actions of the Davidians, but the interest of the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms (BATF) lagged during the summer of 1992.

According to Catherine Wessinger, “By early 1993, the ATF had a very negative reputation for sexism, racism, and for intrusive raids on private homes. The continued existence of the ATF was in question. A Senate Appropriations Subcommittee meeting was scheduled for March 10, 1993, to consider the ATF budget. Some ATF officials may have thought that the agency would benefit from the good publicity generated by disarming a ‘dangerous cult’” (Wessinger, 61). Tabor and Gallagher’s text states, “Although BATF officials vehemently denied any connection, it is the case that the bureau was coming up for budget hearings on March 10, 1993, and allegations of sexual harassment made by female agents had been aired on the television program *60 Minutes* in January. Certainly a well-executed raid against a dangerous ‘cult’ of the type described in the *Waco Tribune-Herald* on February 27 would not hurt its image” (Tabor, 103). One of the factors that provided support to this theory, even though the BATF denied it, was that the media was on the scene before the BATF arrived, which actually

blew the cover. Instead of the BATF pulling back and choosing another time they surged forward, and in doing so the actions of the February 28 raid occurred.

One concerning factor regarding the raid on the Davidian home is the charges against the Davidians. “What the public never understood was that the entire legal issue between the BATF and Koresh had to do with paperwork, fees, and registration, not possession of the alleged weapons and materials themselves” (Tabor, 101). “Apparently Koresh had converted a certain number of weapons to a fully automatic capacity...However, even those weapons were not illegal; rather the violation was possession without proper registration” (ibid, 101). According to Dean Kelley’s article on the First Things Website, when firearms experts were consulted with the lists from the UPS shipments, “...no illegal weapons” were found on the list, but the statement was made that with certain tools the Davidians had the capability of turning those weapons into illegal status. One unnamed retired FBI agent is quoted as saying,

There was not even one fact in the probable cause affidavit...stating that a violation had or was taking place at Mt. Carmel. The rationale by the ATF was that if two or more legitimate objects exist in a location, then at some unknown time they might be used to produce an illegal object, and that would be reason to obtain a search warrant. For example, probably half the homes in America contain a long-barreled gun and hacksaw. The hacksaw, at some time or other, might be used to saw off enough of the barrel to make it illegal. Based on this rationale, the ATF could search half the homes in the United States. (Kelley, Section V)

The addition of further information to support the use of the raid tactic by the BATF went under scrutiny also. “He (Aguilera) includes stories of child abuse and reports of unconventional sexual practices within the community and also summarizes at some length efforts of the Texas Department of Human Services to investigate allegations

of sexual abuse of young girls among the Branch Davidians. Though he fails to mention the department did not find sufficient evidence to probe further, his introduction of the topic colors the rest of his statement; the taint of the child abuse allegations reinforces the suspicions of weapons violations” (Tabor, 102). Whether or not there was any history of sexual abuse within the Mt. Carmel community was never verified. There are accounts of Koresh marrying young girls, but there was not previously substantial evidence to bring child abuse charges on Koresh, and he was not given the opportunity to face any question of the allegations due to the raid. Wessinger states, “David Koresh had been investigated earlier by the Texas Department of Human Services for possible child abuse, and he had cooperated with this investigation by permitting three visits by social workers to Mount Carmel, by allowing the social workers to conduct private interviews with the children...the case had been closed on April 30, 1992, for lack of evidence” (Wessinger, 62).

The other interesting factor was the specialists called in to examine the case. Out of the specialists brought in to focus on the facts of the situation at Waco, there was only one religious specialist. While the FBI claims they did consult religious specialists, the information they took to conduct the raid was by anti-cult activist, Murray Miron who was a professor of psycholinguistics at Syracuse University (Tabor, 111). Miron made the claim that further negotiations with Koresh would lead the FBI nowhere. The FBI had taken to calling the talk of Koresh “Bible Babble” because they didn’t have the knowledge of scripture to be able to talk with him. Yet when Koresh made numerous requests to speak with Tabor and Arnold, scholars capable of speaking with him, he was refused. They allowed a radio broadcast of Tabor and Arnold into the home for Koresh

to listen to, but did not allow direct communication. The “Bible Babble” was frustrating to the FBI agents and that allowed partially for the intensified stress of the situation.

The government’s men in charge were the Hostage Rescue Team (HRT), which presupposed this was a hostage situation. This is why the discussions did not lead anywhere. The Davidians did not feel that anyone needed rescuing and Koresh would have much preferred to have a Biblical scholar so someone would understand his talks. “...from the viewpoint of the Branch Davidians, there were no barricades or hostages, and no one needed rescuing. They understood themselves to be a religious community or *family* that had been brutally attacked, without provocation, by agents of the United States government” (Tabor, 104). This was also not a typical hostage situation where the leader has made demands or threats (ibid, 104). The Department of Justice report seems to make the same claim in stating that the interviews done with the Davidians during the siege, by way of video camera, showed them to be, “...not a bunch of ‘lunatics,’ but rather of a group of people who, for whatever reason, believed so strongly in Koresh that the notion of leaving the squalid compound was unthinkable” (Tabor, 105).

One of the most disturbing factors in this incident was the psychological stress placed on the Davidians. At some point during the 51-day standoff in efforts to drive the Davidians from their home the FBI began to use sleep deprivation as a form of “stress-escalation” (ibid, 107). “Electricity was cut off on March 12. Loud music, Tibetan chants, tapes of family members, and obnoxious sounds such as rabbits being slaughtered were played continuously during the night.<sup>21</sup> Floodlights were focused on the building while helicopters constantly flew over at low altitudes” (ibid, 107). Yet even this did not drive the Davidians from their home. Only the fire that occurred on April 19, after gas



had been strategically inserted into the building, brought the stand off to an end. That ended with 80 of the Davidians dead, including approximately 20 children.

The April 19<sup>th</sup> fire has also produced questions without solid answers. Wessinger states, “An FBI agent said that he saw a Davidian set the fire” (Wessinger, 78), but she goes on to state, “Surviving Davidians denied this theory, and claimed that the fires were started when the tanks knocked over kerosene lanterns that were used because the electricity had been cut off...There were 30mph winds and both the CS gas and the solvent with which it was mixed, methylene chloride, were flammable” (ibid, 79).

The actions by the government during the siege at Waco, Texas demonstrated their lack of understanding of groups such as this. The group considered the government to be the adversary and felt a war with the government would bring on the end times and the return of Christ. Therefore, when the government reacted to the group with Bradley tanks, Hostage Rescue Teams, psychological warfare, and openly aggressive tactics, the group believed the end times had arrived and were prepared to fight for what they believed.

The original act that was cause for criminal investigation did not require the amount of force disseminated. A video was produced after the Davidian incident which provided a look at the events through infrared film which attempted to end the long asked question of who fired the first shot and throughout the siege who was firing on whom. An expert working with infrared film (FLIR) claimed the shots were originating from behind the tanks aimed at the Davidian home. This has been disputed by other experts.

Throughout the overall siege the government used unreasonable tactics and excessive force with a clear disregard for the concerns of the Davidians. The government

claimed an attempt to negotiate with the Davidians. However; while there was considerable time spent in negotiation tactics, there was no attempt to understand the worldview of the Davidians. Their attempt to negotiate was originally thwarted because Koresh stated he would instruct the followers to exit after a Bible session he taped was aired on public radio. After the taped session was aired Koresh declared God told him to wait. The government saw this as a diversion tactic and believed Koresh had no intention of surrendering. The government refused to acknowledge the Davidians extreme adherence to God's will. For instance, in a taped interview with a member of the HRT the following conversation occurred:

Koresh: - are some things in that Bible that have been held as mysteries about Christ

Lynch: Yes, sir.

Koresh: Now, in the prophecies it says –

Lynch: Let me – can I interrupt you for a minute?

Koresh: Sure.

Lynch: All right. We can talk theology, but right now –

Koresh: Look, this is life, this is life and death.

Lynch: Okay.

Koresh: - theology really is life and death.

Lynch: Yes, sir, I agree with that.

Koresh: You see, you have come and stepped on my perimeter.

Lynch: Okay.

Koresh: We will serve God first. Now, we will serve the God of truth. Now, we were willing, and we've been willing all this time to sit down with anybody. You've sent law enforcement out here before. (Tabor, 99).

This was Koresh's way of telling to the agents that they were willing to negotiate, but not on God's will. When Koresh felt that God had commanded him to wait that was precisely what he intended to do. The authority of the government is earth bound, but the authority of God is absolute. This is when the FBI became impatient and began

aggressive tactics to force the group to surrender, even if that meant abandoning their ultimate concern, that sacred space in their life that they were willing to die for. If the government had called in specialists in religion who were able to communicate effectively with Koresh the negotiations would have allowed for the surrender of the group without sacrificing their ultimate concern and would have saved the lives of both the governmental agents as well as the Davidians.

## **The Montana Freeman and a New Approach**

In 1996 another incident occurred with a radical millennial anti-government group, the Montana Freeman. The Montana Freeman typically retain the beliefs of Christian Identity, a religion based on white supremacy and British Israelism. Christian Identity believes that the Aryan race is the chosen race of God and that eventually the Jews (who they consider to have murdered Christ and are therefore the true enemy), and the beasts of burden (which they consider all people of color), will be destroyed by God and the Aryan race will reign. They also believe in what they call ZOG, or Zionist Occupation Government, which they believe is run by the Jews. They believe ZOG is running the government and therefore they consider the government to be the enemy. “Hence, these American nativists often refer to the federal government as ZOG (Zionist Occupation Government). Jews are seen by many in this nativist millennial movement as conspirators who control the media, Hollywood, the nation’s schools and universities, the economy, the Federal Reserve system, and the international banking industry, all with the aim of enslaving and ultimately eliminating the white race” (Wessinger, 173).

All of those involved in the Montana Freeman are not necessarily Anti-Semitic. The group also attracts Common Law movements and Christian Patriots whose beliefs range from anti-abortionists, pro-weapons activists, and distinct beliefs in citizens rights. “The Freeman emphasized the illegitimacy of centralized federal government and, conversely, the legitimacy of local governing structures, such as independent townships, Common Law courts, and the authority vested in sheriffs by these local institutions” (Wessinger, 159).

The government had to be cautious in their interaction with the Freemen for more than one reason. First of all, this was only six years after the tragic occurrence at Waco, Texas and there was still a large amount of scrutiny towards the government. Second, because the government is considered the enemy, any aggressive actions by the government would have been construed by the group as hostile and the group would have reacted likewise. It was imperative that the government be patient and negotiate cautiously.

The situation with the Freemen began with their declaring a paper war on the government. They began filing Common Law documents against the government. “The Freemen possessed guns and threatened violence against their enemies, but their primary weapons were “Common Law” documents; the Freemen placed liens against the property of the government officials, judges, sheriffs, attorneys, and then issued Comptroller Warrants (drafts) against the liens” (Wessinger, 158). They were acting non-violently and while crimes were committed there was no reason for the government to respond with force. There were at least two occasions when members of the group refused to pay their taxes and their land was seized by the government on paper, but no one physically forced them to leave the land. However, a number of followers of the group had moved to the 960 acre farm of the Clark family by 1996, and titled it “Justus Township”. They believed the land was under their local governmental control and refused to acknowledge the authority of the federal government.

The actual stand off began on March 25, 1996 after two members of the Freemen had been arrested. Attorney General Janet Reno stated, “...there would be ‘no armed confrontation, no siege and no armed perimeter’” (Wessinger, 166). The FBI handled the

situation with the Freemen much differently than the Davidian case. There was a sense of greater respect for the complexity of the situation due to the beliefs of the followers. As opposed to the raid on the Davidian home and the increasing pressure the BATF and subsequently the FBI placed on the Davidians, the Freemen were given a very loose border of agents. “FBI checkpoints were established out of sight of the Clark farm houses. Relatives were permitted to visit regularly. The Freemen and news reporters were able to meet at the perimeter and exchange information” (ibid, 166). The fact that the FBI kept the lines of communication open, and did not place an excessive amount of pressure on the Freemen, is one of the main reasons the stand off ended peacefully.

In addition to that, the FBI used resources available to them effectively. They contacted religious scholars, and made use of their recommendations, which allowed for the preservation of life. A number of times throughout the stand off the FBI began to feel that increasing the pressure on the group would force them to surrender. But the religion scholars claimed that if the pressure was increased it would only verify what the group believed, which was that the government is the enemy, and they would fight back. If the FBI remained calm and patient in the negotiations the result would be a positive resolution. An example of the advice offered by religion scholars came from Philip Arnold who offered three cautions in a fax to the FBI:

A. It is necessary to refrain from reductionist thinking, which reduces the Freemen beliefs (political and religious) to mere rhetoric and jail-avoidance tactics. For some of them, their beliefs are a life and death matter

B. It is necessary to realize that ‘religious’ and ‘ethical’ are not synonymous. Freemen may be very ‘immoral’ or ‘unsavory,’ but very religious. Religion appears to be the primary button which controls decision making for a number of these ‘unsavory’ people.

C. Any escalation of the use of force will definitely convince the religious Freemen that the enemies of God's true people are coming against them. This will increase religious fervor among them and result in their drawing closer together and hunkering down to withstand the perceived threat, like martyrs for their faith. (Wessinger, 188).

The FBI complied with the suggestions and after 81 days the Freemen surrendered.

There were several tactics used during negotiations with the Freemen to aid in their exit of Justus Township, some have been listed above such as the use of religious scholars and open communication with family and the press. Another group of negotiators successfully served as intermediaries in the case, which persuaded the Freemen to exit Justus Township, the CAUSE Foundation (ibid, 191). The CAUSE Foundation is affiliated with the right-wing and provided three attorneys for negotiations; they were familiar with both Common Law interpretations as well as the law of the federal government (ibid, 191). "They were able to serve successfully as third-party intermediaries because they understood and spoke both the language of the Freemen's Common Law and the legal language of the federal establishment" (ibid, 191). The Freemen claimed that they would exit if they had the approval of LeRoy Schweitzer. The three attorney's met with Schweitzer and he approved the exit based on the five terms negotiated (Wessinger 192). The terms were released by Kirk Lyons (one of the negotiating attorney's from CAUSE) and are as follows:

1. Representative Karl Ohs would take custody of the Freemen's evidence and publish a signed statement to that effect in the three Montana newspapers.
2. Each of the Freemen who wished an attorney's assistance would retain 51 percent control of his or her own case with co-counsel. Co-counsel would have to agree to be sworn in according to the Freemen's Common

Law system, and swear to fight for ‘unfettered and unobstructed subpoena power.’

3. The federal government would not oppose bond for Emmett and Ralph Clark if their health warranted release from prison.

4. Supporters and co-counsel would work to ensure that the incarcerated Freeman could meet together.

5. Arraignment would be with co-counsel after being sworn in. (Wessinger 193).

Once assured their terms would be met the Freeman exited Justus Township. The government, by heeding the advice of religion scholars who understood the worldview of the Freeman, by keeping open lines of communication, and by allowing negotiators capable of speaking both the language of the government and of the Freeman provided a way for the Freeman to surrender without feeling as though they had given up their cause.



## **The Importance of Governmental Conduct**

These three events portray the importance of governmental conduct when interacting with radical religious groups. The main difference in the three events detailed above was how the government interacted with the groups. During the Ruby Ridge incident the government confirmed Randy Weaver's beliefs that it had a lack of respect for its citizens. The government also, without requesting surrender, aggressively attacked the family causing the loss of life of not only two members of the Weaver family, but also one of their own marshals. The government should have taken an opportunity when Weaver was not at his home to arrest him, and if this was not an option and the government had to surround the property, then negotiations should have occurred. Weaver had not committed a violent act, and only began acting violently when he felt the government acted violently.

As Catherine Wessinger claims many times these groups *react* with violence. When the government acts aggressively towards radical religious groups or individuals, such as opening fire on the Weavers' family dog, the groups become agitated and fire back at the officers. The government was on privately owned property and was following a policy to shoot any male adult that was armed, without warning. Randy Weaver, already leery of the government, then encountered governmental agents on his property firing on his home. This would confirm his already negative views that the government would eventually bring on the end times. Therefore, the government's actions with the Weaver family were crucial, not only to preserve life, but to avoid future acts of violence by these radical groups seeking revenge.

The incident with the Branch Davidians was a turning point for the government because the outcome was so tragic. Ruby Ridge produced the loss of three lives; the Waco, Texas incident brought the loss of approximately 80 Davidians, of which approximately 20 were children, and the loss of lives of some of the governmental agents. The government ignored advice by religious scholars not to place pressure on the group but to proceed with peaceful negotiations in order not to threaten their worldview and confirm their beliefs that the government would bring on the Apocalypse. They basically began a war against the group, reinforcing the aforementioned beliefs.

After Randy Weaver was acquitted for the charges against him the government paid his family a fairly large sum of money. At the end of the Waco, Texas incident the government bulldozed the location. The main question that arose out of this was what was the government attempting to cover up? “On May 12, 1993, the FBI leveled the Mount Carmel rubble with bulldozers. Jeffrey Jamar, the FBI special agent in charge of the site explained, ‘They’re just filling holes so people won’t fall in the pits. That’s just part of taking care of the scene’” (Wessinger, 80). The consequence of government actions were so disastrous that it was clear a new approach was needed.

When the government came in contact with the Montana Freemen their approach had drastically changed. They allowed for open perimeters so the family members of the Freemen could stay in contact, they allowed access to the media and negotiators who could speak their language, and they did not increase the pressure on the Freemen to the point of threatening them. These tactics led to the Freemen surrender. They were able to retain their ultimate concerns while surrendering making them able to give up without feeling as though they had given up. While at first this may seem giving in to a radical

religious group, the fact remains that life was preserved and those guilty of criminal actions were placed in jail. Therefore, with peaceful negotiations both sides were able to retain what they held sacred.

## **Chapter Two**

### **The Theories of Mark Juergensmeyer**

Mark Juergensmeyer uses an empirical approach to examine radical religious groups. He has examined and interviewed followers from groups such as Michael Bray from a radical anti-abortionist movement, Mahmud Abouhalima from a radical Islamic group and Takeshi Nakamura from Aum Shinrikyo a radical Buddhist group, among others. In the interviews he would discuss with the members the extremist event that occurred, such as the abortion clinic bombings with Michael Bray. Juergensmeyer attempted to understand the worldview of these groups through their eyes. He was not seeking a justification for their actions, but to understand how the groups justified their actions to themselves. From the interviews and data he collected on these groups he developed a number of theories on violence and religion. The two theories relevant to this thesis are of performance violence and cosmic war.

## **Cosmic War and its Effects**

The theory of cosmic war directly relates to what the groups hold sacred. What they hold sacred is what they are willing to fight and kill for. Juergensmeyer uses two terms to describe the war these groups feel they are fighting, cosmic war and symbolic war. Juergensmeyer discusses the Protestant preachers who claim that Christians are in a war stating, "Protestant preachers everywhere have encouraged their flocks to wage war against the forces of evil, and their homilies are followed with hymns about 'Christian soldiers,' fighting 'the good fight,' and struggling 'manfully onward'" (Juergensmeyer, 157). He goes on to state that Arthur Wallis, a Protestant writer claims, "Christian living is war" (ibid, 157). In many cases this war is portrayed as a spiritual war with oneself against the evil and temptation of everyday life in a society they believe is consumed by secularism. One thing Christianity holds sacred is their belief in Heaven and the ability to live life in a way that will allow them to go to Heaven once they die. Because of this they try to avoid the temptations that could lead to sinful behavior. This is a symbolic war rather than a physical and literal war.

The concept of cosmic war is more literal. "I call such images 'cosmic' because they are larger than life" (Juergensmeyer, 148), cosmic war is apocalyptic in scope. The groups mentioned here, the Weaver family, the Branch Davidians and the Montana Freemen each believed they were fighting in such a cosmic war. A cosmic war is a war between good and evil that is related in the mind of the followers to the apocalyptic war waged between God and Satan. This is the ultimate war where only the good or God will prevail, and evil will be destroyed. The religious groups feel they have God on their side

and they are battling in the name of God. These groups feel as though when the time is right the war will be won in the name of God, which will prepare for his kingdom.

Juergensmeyer claims that the cosmic war is a struggle to the end.

War suggests an all-or-nothing struggle against an enemy whom one assumes to be determined to destroy. No compromise is deemed possible. The very existence of the opponent is a threat, and until the enemy is either crushed or contained, one's own existence cannot be secure. What is striking about a martial attitude is the certainty of one's position and the willingness to defend it, or impose it on others, to the end (149).

Those involved in the war truly believe they are on the side of God and are willing to fight until the end. When millennial groups believe the end of time has come there is little chance for compromise, which is why governmental actions can be so detrimental. If the government presses the group and reinforces their apocalyptic belief they lose the chance at negotiation. As long as there is patience and peacefulness around the negotiations the groups are less likely to believe the end has come and are more likely to compromise and eventually surrender. If the groups believe the end is here they also believe God will protect them. Because of the text of the Bible they believe no matter how small in number they will prevail. Even if the victory is not in the present, the groups believe God will triumph in the end, because of that they feel their cause will succeed even if they lose their lives in the process.

The ultimate concern of the group defines the enemy in their cosmic or apocalyptic war. For example, to a follower of Christian Identity, protection of the Aryan race is their ultimate concern; therefore the enemy in their war is all non-Aryans. Christian Identity followers believe the Jews are the murderers of Christ and the downfall

of society, they believe that the war is between the Aryan people with God on their side and all non-Aryans as the children of Satan. Richard Butler, leader of the Aryan Nations is quoted as saying, “We BELIEVE there is a battle being fought this day between the children of darkness (today known as Jews) and the children of Light (God), the Aryan race, the true Israel of the Bible” (Juergensmeyer, 147).

These Christian Identity followers believe that the Jewish people are attempting to take over the government, through ZOG, in order to take over the world. This makes the followers especially leery of the government. When laws are placed in effect that threaten the way of life of the group and threaten to take away their rights, such as gun control laws, it reinforces their beliefs. The Michigan Militia promotes the idea that, “...the U.S. government has already initiated a program to completely control the life of every American” (ibid, 152).

These radical groups do not necessarily contain racist elements. In fact, some of the groups believe in the gathering of the 144,000 that are both Jews and Christians standing together to bring the return of Christ. David Koresh believed, “He would be in Jerusalem with his followers, and in solidarity with the Jewish people, would stand up and oppose these outside powers of Europe and perhaps even the United States...” (PBS, Apocalypse).

## **The Branch Davidians and the War on Babylon**

The Branch Davidians began in the early 1900's as an off shoot of the Seventh Day Adventist faith. The Seventh-Day Adventist religion, evolved from the Millerite movement. William Miller began exegetical work on the Bible in 1816, "In 1818 William Miller...reached the conclusion that the Second Coming of Christ would occur 'about the year 1843'" (Tabor, 44). Miller predicted the coming of Christ to be "between March 21, 1843, and March 21, 1844, based upon the biblical Jewish year which began in the spring" (ibid, 45). The Millerite movement played an integral role not only in the foundation of the Seventh-Day Adventist church, but also the interpretive work of the Branch Davidians. Miller believed the text of the Bible should be interpreted based of two factors, "First, he insisted that 'scripture must be its own expositor' and one must not rely upon human creed and the 'traditions of men' in arriving at the truth...Second, Miller insisted that although the biblical prophets used figures of speech and symbolic language to convey their message, the historical fulfillment of their words was always literal and exact" (Tabor, 45). When Miller's prophecy of the return of Christ did not occur, the Great Disappointment followed. However, although his prediction failed, Ellen White and her husband James White became familiar with the Millerite movement through Joseph Bates. "These Seventh-Day Adventists, led by James and Ellen G. White and Joseph Bates, began to understand that their main mission and calling was to spread these three angelic messages, and they understood themselves to be actually fulfilling the task of the third angel, preparing the way for the return of Christ" (ibid, 48). Ellen White is considered by the Seventh-Day Adventists to be a prophet, spoken to by God.



Victor Houteff was strongly committed to the Seventh Day Adventist church. However, eventually he began to believe the church had become, "...lethargic, self-satisfied, and complacent, and were increasingly succumbing to 'worldly' influences" (Tabor, 34). Houteff drawing on the same literal interpretation of the Bible that Miller taught, Houteff believed the gathering of 144,000 from the Book of Revelation would literally occur and he believed he was to lead the group to Israel. "His intention was to actually lead the purified group of 144,000 to the ancient land of Israel, where he believed they would meet Christ at his return" (ibid, 35).

Houteff believed Ellen White was a prophet of God, as did David Koresh, however; they did not believe she was the final prophet. According to their interpretations, there are seven prophets listed in the Book of Revelation and Koresh believed throughout history six of those prophets had identified themselves. He thought he was the seventh that would bring the apocalypse. After spending six months in Jerusalem, Koresh, originally Vernon Howell, came back believing seven angels of God have revealed the mystery of the Bible to him. He changed his name to David Koresh when he returned from Jerusalem.

In August 1990, Vernon Howell legally changed his name to David Koresh, identifying himself with the 'Cyrus message' that he had received from God while in Israel in 1985...In the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament for Christians), the term *messiah* ('christ' in Greek) referred to someone who was anointed and thus designated to carry out a special mission for Yahweh...David Koresh related the references to Cyrus in Isaiah 40-54 to the conqueror of evil Babylon in Revelation...and he identified himself as the Christ or messiah who would die in Armageddon, be resurrected, and then conquer evil to establish God's kingdom. (Wessinger, 83-84).

The Branch Davidian doctrines are pre-millennial, in accordance with their parent religion the Seventh-Day Adventists; Koresh believed the return of Christ would precipitate the Apocalypse. He believed the U.S. government symbolized Babylon, the oppressive rule that forced God's city to fall, the Temple to be destroyed, and he was the seventh prophet that would precede the return of Christ and the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem. While he believed for some time the end would happen in Israel, when the Bradley tanks came he shifted his prophesy to accommodate and began to believe the end would occur on American soil. In Koresh's prophetic tale, the final prophet would be killed and then be resurrected. "Since society did reject and kill Koresh and his community, as they now understand it, the next event in God's plan is Koresh's resurrection from the dead and the opening of the Sixth Seal, which ushers in the final Day of Judgment. Janet Kendrick, a Branch Davidian stated, "There isn't anybody in the group who has lost faith in David...Koresh had taught them for years that he would be killed; the uncertainty lay in when and where" (Tabor, 79). When Koresh died during the siege his followers were waiting for him to rise from the dead. "Others were confirmed in their faith that David Koresh was the messianic Lamb who would be resurrected and return in glory. Some believed that David Koresh would return in power on December 13, 1996. Koresh Davidians derived this date by utilizing Daniel 12:7-12, which stated that the power of the holy people would be scattered for 1,355 days...Counting 1,335 days after Koresh's death on April 19, 1993, yielded the date of December 13, 1996" (Wessinger, 91).

## **The Montana Freemen, ZOG and the Holy War**

The Weaver family and the Montana Freemen were believers in Christian Identity. Christian Identity believes in what they call RAHOWA or a racial holy war. They believe in British Israelism. Michael Barkun states in his text Religion and the Racist Right, “British Israelism, in the most general terms, refers to the belief that the British are lineal descendants of the ‘ten lost tribes’ of Israel” (Barkun, 4). “In like manner, Puritans in the American colonies saw themselves as a ‘New Israel’ in the wilderness, confronting it for a providential purpose just as the original Israelites confronted the wilderness of Sinai after the Exodus.” (ibid 5). While the ideas of British Israelism began in the 1600’s it did not fully take root until the 1800’s with the writings of John Wilson. Wilson believed of the two kingdoms of Israel, that the British came from one, the northern kingdom of Israel and the Jews came from the second, the southern kingdom of Judah. (Barkun, 7). Before the creation of Adam there was the creation of the “beasts of the field”, they identify as people of color. These pre-Adamic people were created with no soul and therefore are considered beasts of burden. “Such persons of color are less endowed spiritually and intellectually, they maintain, than the Adamic white race, which was placed later on earth.”<sup>5</sup> (Walters, 12). Once Adam was created by God, and Eve from Adam’s rib, Eve bore two sons, Cain and Abel. Supporters of British Israelism believe Abel was the son of Adam and Eve but Cain resulted from a conjoining between Satan and Eve.

We believe that the Adam-man of Genesis was the placing of the White race upon this earth. Not all races descend from Adam. Adam is the father of the White race only... We believe that there are literal children of Satan in the world today. These children are the descendants of Cain, who was a result of Eve’s original

sin, her physical seduction by Satan... We believe the White, Anglo-Saxon, Germanic and kindred people to be God's true, literal Children of Israel. Only this race fulfills every detail of Biblical Prophecy and World History concerning Israel... We believe in an existing being known as the Devil or Satan and called the Serpent, who has literal 'seed' or posterity in the earth commonly called Jews today" (Walters, 20).

The death of Abel at the hand of his own brother, Cain, and therefore the rising of Cain coupled with the belief that Jews are the descendants of Cain provides effective support, in the minds of Christian Identity followers, that Jews bring misfortune on the human race.

Christian Identity believes in a Jewish conspiracy to take over the world. . "The myth begins in 1797 with the French cleric Abbé Barruel, who wrote a lengthy history on the rise of the revolutionary Jacobins, attempting to explain the causes of the French Revolution. Barruel argued that the Revolution was a result of a conspiracy hatched by the Order of Templars" (Christian conspirators) (Ridgeway, 46)

...Jews did not play any great part in the French Revolution...and hence did not figure into Barruel's initial worldwide conspiracy theory. They first became entangled in the myth of conspiracy in 1806, when Barruel received a letter from J.B. Simonini, a retired army officer living in Florence. Simonini applauded Barruel for revealing the 'hellish sects which are preparing the way for the Antichrist,' and called his attention to the 'Judaic sect,' which was 'the most formidable power, if one considers its great wealth and the protection it enjoys in almost all European countries.' (ibid, 47).

Ridgeway claims the Jewish conspiracy myth gained further support seventy five years later when, "...*Biarritz*, a novel by Sir John Retcliffe...contained a spooky chapter entitled 'In the Jewish Cemetery in Prague,' which described how once every hundred years, the reigning elders of the twelve tribes of Israel gathered around the grave of the

most senior rabbi and issued reports on the progress of the grand plot to enslave the gentiles and take over the world” (Ridgeway, 50). The aforementioned ZOG is slowly taking over the U.S. Government in order to gain complete control. When Christian Identity followers come in contact with the government, and the government acts aggressively, the groups become agitated and respond with hostility.

While the Freemen follow the Christian Identity beliefs, including the racial holy war, and their position of the government, most importantly they believed in following God’s laws above man’s laws. “In April 1995, Skurdal wrote in a document ‘This is a holy war.’ He saw it as a conflict involving ‘God’s laws vs. man-made laws’” (Wessinger, 165). Wessinger goes on to state, “They taught seminars on the economic system based on their interpretation of the Bible and their belief that God willed Americans to follow the laws given in the Old Testament. Like other Freemen, they saw their legal battle against the federal government as a holy war” (ibid, 169). If the government had refused peaceful negotiations it would have produced violence because the Freemen made clear their willingness to fight and die for what they believed in. Willingness to die does not necessarily indicate interest in dying. Many of these groups would rather negotiate peacefully, they do not want to die, but if they are pushed they are willing to die to protect what they hold sacred.

### **Three Elements of Cosmic War**

There are three major elements, according to Juergensmeyer that define a cosmic war. “1. The struggle is perceived as a defense of basic identity and dignity...2. Losing the struggle would be unthinkable...3. The struggle is blocked and cannot be won in real times or in real terms” (161-162). In the case of the Branch Davidians, their struggle is regarding their identity as a religion. When the government came in and refused to negotiate in Koresh’s language, instead considering it “Bible Babble”, it reinforced the idea that the government was the Babylon of the Apocalypse, the kingdom that destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem and took God’s people from their home. The Davidians were the new “city of God” that Koresh had created at Waco.

The Montana Freemen also considers the struggle to be about their identity, their identity as both Aryans and citizens. They feel the government is under the control of ZOG, which is attempting to take over and dominate the American people, taking away their rights as citizens. This, in their minds, will eventually lead to the destruction of the people of God, the Aryan race.

To both the Davidians and the Freemen, to lose the struggle is unthinkable. For the Davidians it means sacrificing their beliefs in the name of Babylon, and questioning God. They are not willing to compromise their position on God and their identity as the true followers of God. The government’s version of negotiation with Koresh was requesting he stop discussing his faith and give up, surrender. This would have been losing to the evil forces of Satan, which was also turning their back on God. While the man-made laws affect their time on earth, disobeying the laws of God had an eternal affect on their salvation.

The Freemen were also not willing to lose their struggle against what they considered to be the forces of evil, once again the government, who they believe are ruled by the children of Satan, which would thereby be turning their back on God and the war for God. However, because of the peaceful negotiations and willingness of the government to negotiate terms that allowed the Freemen to surrender, the Freemen were not made to feel as though they were giving up their beliefs and concerns, rather that they were living to carry on the war.

Of the third element Juergensmeyer states, "Perhaps most important, if the struggle is seen as hopeless in human terms, it is likely that it may be reconceived on a sacred plane, where the possibilities of victory are in God's hands" (162). This is the point the Davidians came to when Koresh refused to exit his home after claiming he would if his message was played on the air. He stated that God told them to wait, he placed his decisions in the hands of God and believed their victory would come of that. Because of their apocalyptic beliefs, the final raid on April 19<sup>th</sup> was viewed as God's way of taking the believers to Heaven so they could avoid the Tribulation that would occur on earth.

These incidents placed the government in a precarious position where they were the enemy in a cosmic war. The events at Ruby Ridge reinforced the beliefs of Christian Identity that the government was the enemy. They felt that the government was killing the citizens that knew the truth about ZOG and that the government coming onto the property of its citizens and killing them symbolized a step towards governmental control. The Branch Davidian tragedy reinforced those beliefs in the minds of the Christian Identity subscribers. When the incident with the Montana Freemen arose any aggressive

actions by the government would have caused a potentially explosive situation because the Freemen would have believed they were standing in the face of the enemy of their cosmic war, the evil Babylon. The first two events proved the outcome of aggressive interaction with groups retaining that belief. If the government had understood the group's beliefs on cosmic war before the events at Ruby Ridge and Waco, Texas, the possibility of constructively interacting with the group would have been possible, as seen with their interaction with the Freemen.



## Performance Violence and the After Effects

Juergensmeyer's theory of Performance Violence is also relevant to the aforementioned events as well as their after effects. Juergensmeyer states performance violence is, "...like religious ritual or street theater, they are dramas designed to have an impact on the several audiences that they affect" (Juergensmeyer, 124). These acts are committed in such a way as to draw attention to the action and to what the act may symbolize. He states the actions can also be performative in an attempt to make a change. "Terrorist acts, then, can be both *performance events*, in that they make a symbolic statement, and *performative acts*, insofar as they try to change things" (ibid, 124). There are three major factors in performance violence, the stage, or where the event occurs, the time, and the act, the violence itself. Juergensmeyer states, "In looking at religious terrorism as theater, the appropriate place to begin is the stage – the location where the acts are committed, or rather performed" (126). The stage is important because of what the location symbolizes as will be seen with the Oklahoma City Building. The time may also play a role in getting the message across to the public. "...the dramatic time – the date or season or hour of day that a terrorist act takes place...To capture the public's attention through an act of performance violence on a date deemed important to the group perpetrating the act, therefore, is to force the group's sense of what is temporally important on everyone else" (Juergensmeyer, 133). The final piece in performance violence is the act itself. According to Juergensmeyer the act must be deliberately violent in order to gain the attention the perpetrator is seeking. "What makes an act of terrorism is that it terrifies...Terrorism without its horrified witnesses would be as pointless as a play without an audience" (ibid, 139). The audience is reached through

abnormally disturbing violence. The bombing of the Oklahoma City Building is an example of this performance violence.

When the government acts aggressively with a group such as those mentioned above, there is always the chance of revenge by either a lone wolf or a group. The bombing of the Alfred P Murrah building in Oklahoma City is an example of this. Timothy McVeigh's act can be seen as performance violence. His stage was set as the Alfred P. Murrah building. "If one had to choose a single building that symbolized the presence of centralized federal governmental power in this region of mid-America, the Murrah building in Oklahoma City would be it" (ibid, 128). McVeigh chose the time of attack in order to create as large of a performance as he could.

If the building were attacked at night without the workers present, the explosion would not have been a serious blow to government operations, nor would the pain of the event be felt as acutely by society at large. If the building's employees had been machine-gunned down as they left their offices, with the building itself left unscathed, the symbolism of an attack on normal government operations would have been incomplete" (ibid, 128).

The time and day of the attack in this case were also extremely symbolic for McVeigh. April 19 was the day the Branch Davidian home burned to the ground, "It was Patriot's Day in New England, the day the American Revolution had begun in 1775; it was the day in 1943 that the Nazis moved on the Warsaw ghetto...It was also the day in 1995 when a Christian Identity activist, Richard Wayne Snell, was due to be executed in prison for murder charges" (ibid 133).

The event itself was significant because it was exaggerated violence aimed at innocent people. In this McVeigh felt he could reach his audience. Juergensmeyer states, "Perhaps the most enduring image from the tragic bombing of the Oklahoma City

federal building on April 19, 1995, was the photograph of the bloody, mangled body of an infant carried in the arms of a rescue worker who attempted – futilely, as it turned out – to save the small child’s life” (139). He goes on to state, “Perhaps no other picture could have portrayed as poignantly the pathos of innocence defiled or evoked so strongly the righteous anger of many over what appeared to be a hideous and senseless act” (Juergensmeyer, 139).

McVeigh was seen in 1993 at the Branch Davidian home during and after the siege passing out flyers discussing the government’s actions there. As stated previously, the Davidians were not believers in Christian Identity, but Identity groups identified with the Davidian’s fate.

The multiracial Davidians shared neither the religious beliefs of Christian Identity nor the political agenda of the radical right. Nonetheless, almost immediately after the end of the episode in April 1993, the radical right began to claim the Mount Carmel community as its own. In their eyes, the victims of the fire were martyrs to the same cause, their deaths indisputable evidence of the federal government’s ruthlessness. (Barkun, 263).

In accepting the Davidians and Ruby Ridge as part of the larger effort of the government to subdue its citizens, the actions of McVeigh can be seen as a performative act. An act intended to speak to the government and the public. The bombing of the Oklahoma City building, housing members of the BATF and FBI, seemed to be stating to the government that the citizens would not allow them to commit these acts unpunished. “...Tim told me that him and Terry had chosen a building in Oklahoma City, a federal building in Oklahoma City.’ Why in the world Oklahoma City? Why this building? McVeigh told him –mistakenly—that this building ‘was where the order for the attack on Waco came

from.’ ‘He also told me,’ Fortier said, ‘that he was wanting to blow up a building to cause a general uprising in America, and hopefully that would knock some people off the fence...’ (Serrano, 97). Stephen Jones, the attorney representing McVeigh stated, “One common thread that ties Waco and Oklahoma City together is the shared outrage of the federal government’s failure to acknowledge the full extent of their responsibility for Waco. Not until the Waco matter is satisfactorily resolved can a regenerative process begin to repair the damaged trust between millions of disaffected citizens and their government” (ibid, 253).

McVeigh was also making an effort to open the average citizen’s eyes to what he saw as the corruption within the government. “He now knew that with Waco, here it was at last, the final nightmare, no man in America is safe in his own home” (Serrano, 67). McVeigh became more entrenched in these anti-government feelings as the case of the Branch Davidians moved forward. “It had really happened! The government of the United States was killing its people; the slaughter had begun” (ibid 76). It was then McVeigh decided to bomb the Oklahoma City building.

This is yet another reason why constructive governmental actions in situations with radical religious groups are crucial. With provocative governmental reaction the possibility exists that revenge on the government will occur; only increasing the loss of life.

## Chapter Three

### Catherine Wessinger and Millennial Groups

Catherine Wessinger completed a comparative study of millennial groups in order to aid the public in interacting with them. Through her study she examined the beliefs of a number of the groups and dealt specifically with how they are treated and how they react to the treatment they receive. She began the study during the Branch Davidian siege. At the point of the siege she had hoped that the government would consult scholars who understood religion. After the tragedy she, along with a number of other religion scholars, did play integral roles in the interaction with the Montana Freeman. She was one of the religious studies scholars consulted by the FBI regarding the best way to handle situations with radical religious groups. She suggested the FBI not place pressure on the group and that they remain peaceful in their negotiations. In her text, How the Millennium Comes Violently, she touches on a number of issues that were learned from those events. She first discusses the use of negative terms in association with these groups such as the term cult. She notes that the word cult referred to a system of worship, which she claims would make the Roman Catholic Mass a cult (Wessinger, 3). She states, “The word cult dehumanizes the religion’s members and their children. It strongly implies that these people are deviants; they are seen as crazy, brainwashed, duped by their leader. When we label people as subhuman, we create a context in which it is considered virtuous to kill them” (ibid, 4).

Wessinger then provides two categories to describe millennialism and three sub-categories that provide distinct features of catastrophic millennial groups. The two types of millennialism are catastrophic and progressive millennialism. “Catastrophic

millennialism involves a pessimistic view of humanity and society. We are so corrupt and sinful that the world as we know it must be destroyed and then created anew” (Wessinger, 16). Catastrophic millennialists believe in a dualistic worldview that separates “us” and “them”. The Progressive millennialists believe in, “...an optimistic view of human nature that became prevalent in the nineteenth century” (Wessinger, 17). Wessinger provides three sub-categories of catastrophic millennialism:

In studying catastrophic millennial groups involved in violence, we need to distinguish between fragile groups that initiate violence to preserve their ultimate concern, and groups that are assaulted because law enforcement agents regard them as dangerous. There are also revolutionary millennial movements that possess theologies or ideologies that prompt believers to commit violent acts against enemies perceived as demonic or subhuman. (ibid, 18).

She defines fragile millennial groups as those whose, “...members commit violent acts because they feel persecuted and perceive their millennial goal (their ultimate concern) as failing” (ibid, 19). An example of a fragile millennial group is People’s Temple, or Jonestown. The followers of Jim Jones had moved to Guyana with Jones to establish a communal society, away from the United States government. However, “Jones’s descent into debilitating drug addiction after he moved to Jonestown intensified the pressure felt by other leaders to keep Jonestown economically viable. Jonestown was in danger of failing as a communal experiment...” (Wessinger, 19). The group began to feel their ultimate concern was being threatened because of the instability of their leader and the fear that their community would be destroyed, which for many of them meant returning home to the United States. This created a sense of fragility, which led to a willingness to protect their way of life, even if that meant dying. The followers of

People's Temple committed group suicide after U.S. Congressman Leo Ryan was shot along with four other people. After the shooting the residents of Jonestown committed suicide, 909 followers died.

An assaulted millennial group is one who is being treated with aggression. They, unlike the fragile millennialists, never doubt their ultimate goal will be reached. When they are acted on aggressively their faith in their beliefs are strengthened, not weakened. An example of an assaulted millennial group is the Davidians. They were assaulted by the government, yet instead of weakening their beliefs their strength increased. The revolutionary millennialists believe they have the ability to overthrow an oppressive government. These groups are willing to commit violent acts to achieve their goal. The Montana Freemen are an example of a revolutionary millennial group. "The believers are convinced that they are participating in the divine plan to violently destroy the illicit government and then establish the millennial kingdom" (Wessinger, 23).

### **Wessinger's Categorical Types of Millennial Groups**

In Wessinger's conclusion she makes thirteen "General Observations" about millennial groups that apply to the groups discussed in this thesis. Her first observation is, "The project of raising 'messianic children' can backfire" (270). She states that children of the leader may later call into question the authority of that leader, "If Koresh's children residing at Mount Carmel had lived, they might have challenged his authority later and rejected the roles he had designated for them" (Wessinger, 270).

Her second observation states, "While the psychological health or dysfunction of a religious leader is pertinent, it is a serious mistake to rely solely on psychological diagnosis of the leader when attempting to understand a religious group and the actions it might take" (Wessinger, 271). This statement can be directly applied to the situation with Koresh. It is crucial to understand the worldview of the group. It is reductionary to believe the psychological state of the leader is the most important factor. During the stand off with the Davidians the FBI brought a psychotherapist in to diagnose Koresh. However; the difficulty with the psychotherapist was a lack of knowledge about the Biblical language Koresh spoke. He followed the example of the FBI in calling it "Bible Babble" and did not take it seriously and therefore disregarded the group's ultimate concern. That does not account for the importance of the worldview of the group. *"Solely applying a psychological diagnostic label to a charismatic religious leader is not conducive to the broad interdisciplinary understanding that can assist in resolving crisis situations peacefully"* (Wessinger, 271).

Her third observation is, "Persecution may either strengthen a group by confirming prophecies, or weaken it by endangering the group's ultimate concern" (ibid,



271). This is also true in the above cases. David Koresh had made the prophecy that the Apocalypse would be brought on by the government. When the government came in force they confirmed his beliefs making the group grow stronger, and solidifying them as a group to stand behind their leader. As the governmental aggression continued this lessened the chance of surrender by the group because they believed the will of God was occurring and they should follow the will of their leader, who they believed was a prophet of God, telling the group to wait and not surrender. The Freeman's willingness to surrender came from the fact that their ultimate concern was not threatened by the surrender. They negotiated their terms and felt that by surrendering they were able to take continue fighting their case in court. They were not persecuted in the same way as the Davidians allowing them to surrender and still protect their ultimate concern.

Her fourth observation is, "Factors internal to the group, such as having an already endangered ultimate concern, possessing a radical dualistic worldview, and hiding criminal secrets, can make members of a catastrophic millennial group sensitive, so that even minimal cultural opposition will be viewed as persecution" (Wessinger, 271). This can be seen with both the Davidians and the Freeman. Both groups had a radical dualistic worldview, "the stark perspective of 'good versus evil,' 'us versus them'..." (ibid, 271). This worldview led both groups to feel as though they were being persecuted and placed them on guard and ready to fight back.

"A catastrophic millennial group that feels it is persecuted may bring the date for the end closer" (272) is Wessinger's fifth observation. As the siege moved forward on the home of the Davidians, Koresh began to change his prophecies claiming the end was closer than originally thought.

Her sixth observation is, “Millennial groups and their leaders make adjustments in their theologies and actions in response to events” (Wessinger, 272). There are two important factors covering this observation. First, if the groups are willing to make adjustments in their theologies it means there is hope for peaceful resolution through patience. This was seen with the Freemen. Their ultimate concern did not shift, but they did eventually come to the willingness to surrender to the government, even though they saw them as the enemy. The Branch Davidians actions also showed a compromise. While they believed the government was their adversary, they showed a willingness to negotiate throughout the events. The second side of that observation is that the more the group feels threatened the more likely they are to shift their beliefs away from negotiations. As the government placed increasing pressure on the Davidians they began to believe they would not make it out alive and that the government had fulfilled Koresh’s prophecy. It was happening earlier than the group expected, but that supports Wessinger’s above statement that the theology is shifted in response to actions.

Wessinger’s seventh observation, “Popular media express mythic themes and values that may resonate with the hopes and values of religious people and may be incorporated into their theologies” (273), is directed to Aum Shinrikyo and Heaven’s Gate influenced by such media as Japanese anime and Star Trek respectively.

Wessinger’s eighth observation is, “Social indoctrination processes are more effective when they are undertaken voluntarily, and coercive indoctrination procedures do not produce believers” (Wessinger, 273). This is true of both of the aforementioned groups. There was no force to join the Branch Davidians, the Montana Freemen, or the Christian Identity movement the Weaver family was associated with. During the

Davidian stand off the FBI brought in a Hostage Rescue Team, but the Davidians did not feel as though they needed rescuing, that was their home. They were not forced to stay, in fact there are a few accounts prior to the siege of followers who decided they no longer believed the doctrines and left the home. None of the groups mentioned here had a forced indoctrination into the group and were free to come and go as they chose. In this way the followers felt stronger ties to the group, they made a choice to stand with the other members, most until the end.

Many time radical religious groups are defined as having one charismatic leader who brainwashes his/her members, following are two definitions to clarify the term charismatic. According to Wessinger “Charisma, in the academic field of Religious Studies, refers to the quality of someone believed by a group to receive special revelation from an unseen source (such as God, angels, masters, extraterrestrials)” (8). In The Sociology of Max Weber, Julien Freund explains:

Charismatic authority is the exceptional type of political power, not because it rarely occurs but because it sets aside the usages of normal political life. Weber describes charisma (a term he borrowed from Rudolf Sohm) as the exceptional quality of a person who appears to possess supernatural, superhuman or at the least unaccustomed powers, so that he emerges as a providential, exemplary or extraordinary figure, and for this reason is able to gather disciples or followers around him. (Freund, 232).

However, according to Wessinger, a charismatic leader is not necessary for a group to be potentially violent.

Her ninth observation is, “There is no need to have a charismatic leader for a group to be potentially violent” (Wessinger, 273). This observation fits with the Montana Freeman. Within the Freeman there is not one specific charismatic leader. Yet the group

is strong in its beliefs and following, and if their worldview is threatened there is the potential for violence

“The charismatic leader of a group may not be as all-powerful as outsiders assume” (273) is her tenth observation. This observation is relevant to the Davidians. There was the belief by many that Koresh was “all-powerful” to the Davidians. Wessinger states, “...David Koresh’s authority was contingent on whether he could present to his followers plausible interpretations of the Bible that appeared to be divinely inspired” (Wessinger, 273). In one of the tapes of Koresh and an FBI negotiator dated April 16 and 18, 1993, Koresh states, “In 1985 I presented a truth, and everybody’s that’s here I had to debate, and I had to talk to, and I had to show from scriptures. I had to prove my point for many hours and days and months, and sometimes years with certain people here” (ibid, 107). While Koresh’s followers were not necessarily Biblical scholars, they had the freedom to not believe what Koresh taught, just as members of a congregation have the choice to select a new church. The negotiator later in the tape tells Koresh to send people out. “Henry: You don’t have to ask. All you have to do is say, ‘Look I want 50 volunteers,’ and they’ll come out... [Voices in background. Unintelligible] David: They’re saying that because of these things, they want to stay the more” (ibid, 112).

Her eleventh observation is, “A charismatic leader cannot become a totalitarian leader without the agency and complicity of willing followers” (Wessinger, 273). There were Davidians who chose to leave the religious group before the siege began and during the siege. Wessinger states, “Turnover in the membership of unconventional religious

groups indicates that people think for themselves in deciding to join a group, in participating in its activities, and in leaving” (274).

Wessinger’s twelfth observation is, “Repeated acts of violence take on a ritualistic nature, and continually enacted rituals of violence tend to escalate the level of violence that participants find acceptable. This is true of law enforcement agents as well as for members of unconventional religious groups” (274). She states that the acts of the federal agents outside the Davidian home were ritualized acts that led to the final assault (274).

The drivers of the tanks cursed the Davidians and made obscene gestures at them. Cutting off electricity and telephone wires, shining bright spotlights at the building during the night, blasting high decibel sounds at the residence were all rituals of violence that culminated in the assault against the Davidians by firing canisters of CS gas into the residence and the demolition of parts of the building by tanks. The fire that destroyed the residence, that took the lives of seventy-four Davidians including twenty-three children, occurred because of this final assault (Wessinger, 274).

Her final observation is, “Dualistic or dichotomous thinking is not confined to catastrophic millennialists, but it is found also among law enforcement agents, anticultists, and people generally” (ibid, 275). Dualistic thought is the separation of “us” and “them” or “good” and “evil”. This type of thinking is not limited to these groups who believe it is “us” against the government “them”. Law enforcement, the media and the general public made statements alluding to the same beliefs during the stand off with Waco, Texas. The statement that it was “us” the government, law enforcement, the media, the public, the “good”, against the Davidians, “them”, the “evil”. This reinforced the belief that the government was protecting their citizens and their actions were

virtuous against the Davidians. The Freemen are also dualistic in their beliefs in two ways. First they believe they are the “us” or the “good” and the government is the “them” or the “bad”. They also, in following the Christian Identity doctrines believe there is an ultimate impending race war between “us” the Aryan followers of God, and “them” all others that would eventually end with the destruction of all other races. “They also believe that Jews and people of color will be eradicated in the coming war between good and evil that will create God’s kingdom on earth” (Wessinger, 277).

## **Encouraging Characteristics of the Groups**

Wessinger also gives a list of four characteristics she finds reassuring when studying these groups and their reactions to outsiders. The first characteristic is, “The group is not being attacked by hostile opponents, such as reporters, government agents, law enforcement agents, concerned relatives, and former members” (Wessinger, 281). This is not the case in either of the aforementioned groups. This characteristic is reassuring when the group is not being treated aggressively by outsiders. The BATF and the FBI were acting aggressively toward the Davidians and therefore, they do not meet this criterion. The Freemen were on the offensive, but were not treated with hostility. The government negotiated with the group and they were not dehumanized by the media as a brainwashed cult.

The second characteristic she states is, “The group openly addresses queries about its beliefs and practices, and cooperates with investigations by social workers, law enforcement agents, news reporters, concerned family members and scholars” (Wessinger, 281). During the Davidian siege Koresh stated a number of times he wanted to cooperate with the government’s requests. He did make clear that he followed God’s laws above man-made laws, however; he was willing to talk with the government. When the investigation by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms began almost a year before the siege, the BATF agent in charge, Davy Aguilera, had the opportunity on July 30, 1992 to speak with Koresh by telephone and refused. “...he fails to mention that he refused to talk to Koresh by telephone on July 30, 1992, when gun dealer Henry MacMahon had him (Koresh) on the phone in Aguilera’s presence. Koresh told MacMahon to tell the BATF agents to ‘come on out,’ and he would answer any

questions” (Tabor, 103). Koresh stated a number of times during taped conversations with the FBI negotiators that he wanted to talk and negotiate. He attempted to make the FBI understand their worldview and that they were not intentionally trying to be uncooperative, but God’s law and will had the utmost priority. Koresh was also open to the Texas Department of Human Services interview the children during the allegations of child abuse. Wessinger states, “...he (Koresh) had cooperated with this investigation...” (62). The Davidians also welcomed anyone interested in hearing their message to join them. “...anyone who wanted to listen to Koresh teach the Bible was welcome. Groups would arrive from around the country and abroad, and stay as long as they could afford to be away from home” (Tabor, 28).

The third characteristic is, “The group reaches out to its community, and the members strives to be good citizens and neighbors by participating in the activities of society outside its boundaries” (Wessinger, 281). Wessinger states, “Prior to the siege, the Branch Davidians did have contact with the outside world by holding jobs and operating businesses, attending gun shows, proselytizing, and having other interactions with the surrounding community” (280). Sheriff Jack Harwell was the local sheriff in the county who was asked after the siege his opinion of Koresh. He claimed that while the Davidians were protective of their property and made that clear, they were kind, courteous and friendly to their neighbors. “When I talked to Vernon, he was always level-headed, seemed nice, he was always courteous. He’d invite us out to his place to fish in his lake out there...I think he invited some of the other deputies who work for me out there to fish with him...” (PBS, Waco).



The final characteristic is, “The group is active in proselytizing to extend salvation to others, but it is not preaching a revolutionary or hate-filled ideology” (Wessinger, 281). The Branch Davidians were active in proselytizing, especially to Seventh-Day Adventist. As stated above in the Tabor text, “...anyone who wanted to listen to Koresh teach the Bible was welcome” (28). Tabor also states, “His (Koresh) foremost mission...was to bring a message to the Seventh-Day Adventist church” (25).

### **Wessinger's Conclusions on Interaction with These Groups**

Catherine Wessinger lists a number of things that can be done when interacting with radical religious groups. One of those is to not label them as “cults”, as that runs the risk of dehumanizing them. She also states, “Religious groups suspected of criminal activities should be investigated – but according to normal law enforcement and news reporting procedures” (Wessinger, 269). She goes on to claim that when questions arise about the beliefs of a religious group religion scholars should be consulted, not anti-cult activists or the Hostage Rescue Team, in efforts to get non-biased information.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Conclusion**

Throughout this thesis I have examined the theories of Mark Juergensmeyer and Catherine Wessinger to evaluate how well their theories aid in understanding the beliefs of radical religious groups in an attempt to learn from these theories how to constructively interact with the groups. I have found the information provided by Wessinger to be the most helpful to the government and media. However, while I find her work to be inspirational, and the most beneficial and helpful, I believe her work is most useful once a situation is in the process of occurring, rather than being preventative. I think when encountering radical groups it is imperative to have the knowledge Wessinger provides. Her information such as not dehumanizing the groups by using terms such as “cult” that labels the group as “subhuman”, and the insider’s knowledge about the group’s ultimate concern provide recommendations such as not pressuring a millennial group.

While I believe Wessinger’s information is beneficial when encountering a radical religious group, I think Mark Juergensmeyer’s theories of cosmic war and performance violence provide the government with ways to interact with these groups and potentially prevent the violence from occurring. I believe with an insiders knowledge of the groups there is the potential of making use of Juergensmeyer’s theory of performance violence to prevent an incident of revenge from occurring by knowing certain dates and locations that are of special interest to radical groups.

I also believe Juergensmeyer’s theory of cosmic war provides the government with information that can aid in ending the violence in a similar way as Wessinger’s

observations, by explaining the worldview of the groups. Understanding the group's belief that they are in a cosmic war and who their adversary is provides the government with further knowledge of how to interact with the group. If the group feels they are in a literal cosmic war with the government, the government should avoid responding to the group with violence, which will only provoke further violence.

I believe the future of interaction with these groups depends on understanding their worldview and knowledge of scholars such as these in order to peacefully negotiate. A list of guidelines for the government and media to follow can be found between these two scholars, Wessinger and Juergensmeyer, in order to prevent the loss of life when interacting with these groups:

1. Consult scholars of religion who understand the worldview of the group, not deprogrammers and anti-cultists who show a disregard for the beliefs and worldview as wrong or crazy which leads the members of the group to feel threatened.
2. Do not dehumanize the group by using terms like cult, crazy, brainwashed, Bible Babble. Dehumanization allows the groups to be treated with violence and makes it "virtuous" to harm them or kill them. Treat the group with respect.
3. Have respect for the ultimate concern of the group and do not place pressure on them to forfeit their concern. Peaceful negotiations and patience that respect the concern and worldview of the group allow them to negotiate without sacrificing their beliefs.

4. If there is the belief the group has committed criminal activity the group should be investigated, but by reasonable procedures not exaggerated because they are a religious group.
5. The group should not be defined purely by a psychological profile of the leader. The leader and the group are dedicated to their beliefs, and an exclusive assessment of the psychological state of the leader disregards their worldview.
6. The government should identify whether they are dealing with a group who believes in a cosmic war between good and evil, any force by the government reinforces their belief that the government is evil and they are beginning a war against the forces of good. This is especially important when the group is millennial and waiting for the Apocalypse because the group will potentially attempt to bring on the end times through violence.
7. A potential for prevention is there by understanding dates and locations that are especially important to the groups such as April 19 and the Oklahoma City building was to Timothy McVeigh. An understanding of important dates will allow the government to be especially cautious on those dates, not only with security for high profile areas, but also if they are in a conflict with a religious group they can identify the date as being important and lessen the pressure leading up to and on that date.
8. Compromise with the group must respect their ultimate concern. As Juergensmeyer states when these groups feel they are in a cosmic war, losing is inconceivable. They must feel that through surrendering they have not lost their war.

9. The government must not make a martyr for the cause. When leaders or members of a group are killed during an incident with the “enemy” they are raised to martyrdom and it reinforces the group’s beliefs and feelings about the antagonistic nature of the government. It is necessary for the government to make all attempts to use peace in interacting with individuals as well as groups. An individual being elevated to martyr status results in others in the group feeling as though they should act in a way to be raised to the same status.
10. The government, as Juergensmeyer states, should “...embrace moral values, including those associated with religion” (238). Treating the groups with respect and patience does not allow the group to continue with the belief that the government is the enemy. It makes it difficult, “...to portray the government as a satanic enemy” (Juergensmeyer, 238).

I believe if the theories of religion scholars had been used in the Branch Davidian stand off the outcome would have been drastically different and the lives of the Davidians and the government agents would have been preserved. If the government had taken into account the religious beliefs of the Davidians and recognized that they believed in a cosmic war with the government as the enemy maybe negotiations would have continued. If they requested assistance from religious scholars to understand the language of Koresh instead of discounting it as “Bible Babble”, maybe the Davidians could have surrendered without sacrificing their ultimate concerns. And maybe if the incident at Waco, Texas and Ruby Ridge had been handled as the Freeman stand off was the performative event displayed through performance

violence of Timothy McVeigh would not have occurred preserving further lives that were lost.

I believe that the theories like those of Mark Juergensmeyer and Catherine Wessinger can be used constructively to interact with millennial and radical religious groups reducing violence and preserving life, while protecting their ultimate concerns and those of the government.

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## Websites Utilized

### Academic Sites

[www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft9505/articles/kelley.html](http://www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft9505/articles/kelley.html)

This is from an academic journal, *The Journal of Religion and Public Life*, *First Things* website which gives information on the history of the Branch Davidians and the occurrences at Waco, Texas.

[www.religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/nrms/bran.html](http://www.religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/nrms/bran.html)

This University of Virginia, Religious Studies academic site provides historical information about the Branch Davidians and the Seventh-Day Adventist church as the parent church.

### Group or Organization Propaganda

<http://www.adventist.org/>

This provides knowledge about the beliefs of the Seventh-Day Adventist church.

<http://www.churchofthesonsofjehovah.org>

This provides information about the beliefs of Christian Identity as well as providing some understanding of the cosmic battle they believe they are fighting.

<http://www.twelveyearnations.com>

This provides description of the beliefs of Christian Identity as well as providing some understanding of the cosmic battle they believe they are fighting.

### Media Drawing on Academic Specialists

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/apocalypse>

This website is a resource for information regarding the apocalypse, including the history of the Jews, the beliefs about the apocalypse and about how radical religious groups apply the apocalypse to current times.

[www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/waco](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/waco)

This provides a description of what occurred at Waco, Texas including the events, major players and general information.