

## How the Millennium Comes Violently

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“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

Sign at the Jonestown pavillion.

(George Santayana)

### Recent Events

As we are nearing the year 2000 religious imaginations are spinning millennial dreams. The impending new millennium is stimulating hopes that the limitations of the human condition will be transcended finally and completely. Scholars have termed this hope for *collective earthly or heavenly salvation* “millennialism” or “millenarianism,” because so often the terrestrial perfection has been expected to last one thousand years. Many millennialists believe the transition will take place catastrophically, and sometimes this expectation of conflict and its accompanying dualistic perspective have contributed to episodes of violence.

In the last decade of the twentieth century, a number of millennial groups involved in violence have burst into the news. In 1992, the family of Randy and Vicki Weaver, who had strong millennial beliefs and had taken refuge in the mountains at Ruby Ridge, Idaho, was caught up in a conflict with law enforcement agents, that killed Sam Weaver (age 14), Vicki Weaver, and U.S. Marshal William Degán.<sup>[1]</sup> In 1993, the Branch Davidians were subjected to not one, but two assaults by federal officers resulting in the deaths of four ATF agents and eighty-one Davidians. In October 1994, fifty-three members and former members of the Order of the Solar Temple (Ordre du Temple Solaire, OTS), were discovered dead in Quebec and Switzerland. Some were murdered and some committed suicide. At winter solstice just before Christmas 1995, sixteen more members of the Solar Temple died in a group murder/suicide near Grenoble, France.<sup>[2]</sup> On March 20, 1995, members of Aum Shinrikyo released sarin gas on Tokyo subway trains injuring over 5,000 people and killing twelve. Aum members previously had committed a variety of murders, and attempted to commit more murders after the Tokyo subway attack. The 1996 eighty-one day standoff between FBI agents and the Montana Freeman contained an armed group, who were part of a revolutionary movement in the United States, that aimed to overthrow the federal government. On March 22, 1997, when the Hale-Bopp comet was closest to the earth, five more members of the Solar Temple committed suicide in Quebec, and 39 members of Heaven’s Gate began their group suicide near San Diego. On May 6, 1997, two more Heaven’s Gate believers attempted to commit suicide, and one succeeded.

Members of all of these groups were motivated by their millennial beliefs as were members of the Peoples Temple, who in 1978 committed murder and “revolutionary suicide” in and near Jonestown,

Guyana. Millennial hopes are perennial and are not necessarily tied to unusual dates on the calendar. On November 18, 1978, Peoples Temple members opened fire on the party of United States Congressman Leo Ryan, who had just completed an unwelcome visit to Jonestown and was leaving with some defectors. Five people were killed including Congressman Ryan, and ten were wounded. Back in Jonestown, the community gathered to commit suicide by drinking Flavor Aid laced with tranquilizers and cyanide. Some people including children were injected with the deadly potion. Nine hundred and thirteen people died in Jonestown including two hundred and sixty children. A loyal member of Peoples Temple stationed in Georgetown, Guyana, slit the throats of her three children and then killed herself. Four months later, Mike Prokes, the church's public relations man, called a news conference in a Modesto, California, motel. Prokes said, "I can't disassociate myself from the people who died, nor do I want to. The people weren't brainwashed fanatics or cultists; the Temple was not a cult." Then he went to the bathroom and shot himself.<sup>[3]</sup>

Each one of these cases teaches us that well-meaning and ordinary people (lower class, middle class, and upper class, young and old, people of all races, nationalities, and educational levels) can become caught up in religious systems and social dynamics that can culminate in violence and death. Jim Jones' sign at the Jonestown pavillion quoting Santayana is pertinent. If we neglect to study these millennial movements, and therefore do not understand the dynamics that produce tragic violence, then these scenarios will continue to occur.

When we learn of an episode of violence involving a religious group, we distance those people from us by considering them to be brainwashed cultists, who have nothing in common with ordinary people like ourselves. We make them totally "other" from ourselves. But in fact, members of these religious groups *are* ordinary people, who are sincerely committed to their religious beliefs. We need to recall that millennial beliefs are at the core of a number of mainstream scriptures, especially the Bible, and these scriptures, therefore, serve as resources upon which religious people can draw.

After the deaths at Jonestown, the members of Peoples Temple were dehumanized, because we saw them in the news as corpses.<sup>[4]</sup> The news media did not characterize the residents of Jonestown as good people who were committed to an ideal of interracial harmony and human equality. Peoples Temple members were building a community based upon "apostolic socialism" in which financial resources were held in common to serve the needs of all community members. The members of the community worked for each others' well-being.

The Branch Davidians also were dehumanized in the news media. Because the FBI controlled the flow of information about the Davidians, the Davidians were not permitted to tell their side of the story. They were obstructed from explaining their religious beliefs to the American public. All we saw in the media were depictions of a deranged-looking David Koresh. The invisibility of the other Davidians made them into nonentities, and created a cultural situation in which it became acceptable to exterminate them; by this I mean that because the news did not depict the Davidians as human beings, the media coverage produced a cultural consensus that their deaths did not warrant public outcry against the excessive force used against them.<sup>[5]</sup> Seventy-four Davidians died in the fire on April 19, 1993. Of these, twenty-three were children including two infants who were born when their mothers expired.<sup>[6]</sup>

It is my hope that my comparative study of Jonestown, the Branch Davidians, Aum Shinrikyo, the Montana Freeman, and Heaven's Gate will illuminate lessons that will enable ordinary people—religious believers, potential converts, news reporters, law enforcement agents, and scholars—to deal constructively with the dynamics of millennial groups and avoid violence.

## Key Terms

In understanding violent millennial groups, I have found Robert D. Baird's definition of "religion" to be useful. Utilizing the phrase coined by theologian Paul Tillich, Baird defines religion as "ultimate concern," and he defines ultimate concern as "a concern which is *more important than anything else in the universe for the person [or the group] involved.*"<sup>[7]</sup> Many of us are pragmatic and will change our ultimate concerns if placed in life-threatening situations. However, groups such as Jonestown, the Branch Davidians, Aum Shinrikyo, the Montana Freeman, and Heaven's Gate show us that people can be willing to kill or die for their ultimate concerns.

The ultimate concern of the Jonestown residents was to preserve their communal solidarity, and thus be an example that would help establish a future society free of racism, sexism, classism, and ageism. Jones taught that a period of turmoil, race war, and nuclear destruction would precede the establishment of the perfect society, that he believed would be communist. The ultimate concern of the Branch Davidians was to be obedient to God's will as revealed in the Bible in order to be included in God's salvation kingdom. The Davidians believed that Koresh would be killed in armageddon and then he would return to establish God's kingdom. The ultimate concern for Aum Shinrikyo devotees was the creation of communities of enlightened individuals, who would survive armageddon<sup>[8]</sup> and establish the Buddhist millennial kingdom called Shambala. The ultimate concern of the Montana Freeman was to overthrow the illegitimate American government to establish true American republics obedient to Yahweh's laws revealed in the Bible. These are all millennial goals involving the expectation that salvation will be terrestrial. In millennial religions, however, the expectation of an earthly salvation also involves belief in heaven or an otherworld. This permits shifting to an expectation of a heavenly salvation if historical conditions disprove the earthly salvation.

Heaven's Gate reminds scholars that millennial groups are not always concerned with terrestrial salvation. Heaven's Gate members saw the terrestrial world, they designated the Human Kingdom, as sorely lacking in perfection. In order to achieve the Kingdom of Heaven, or what they termed The Level Above Human (Telah), each believer had to learn how to overcome human desires. Ultimately, they abandoned their human bodies, their terrestrial "vehicles," confident their souls were transferring into divinized "space alien" bodies in The Level Above Human. They believed that as inhabitants of Telah, they would travel the universe with their teachers, Ti and Do, in a "mothership." As Telah inhabitants, they would spend eternity in service by guiding the evolution of life on various planets regarded as "gardens" for the growth of souls. They exited earth in 1997 (they did not regard this as suicide), because catastrophic destruction was imminent due to an overgrowth of evil here in this "garden."

At this point, we need to note that increasingly in new religions, extraterrestrials are the superhuman agents that act in the roles previously filled by God, gods, angels, and devils. The religious outlook remains the same; there is the continued belief that there are normally unseen superhuman agents that affect us in our earthly existence for good or ill.

There are two primary types of millennialism, that I call catastrophic millennialism and progressive millennialism.<sup>[9]</sup>

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. This will be accomplished by God (or by superhuman agents such as space aliens), perhaps with the assistance of human beings. The millennial kingdom will be created only after the violent destruction of the old world.

Progressive millennialism involves an optimistic view of human nature, that became prevalent in the nineteenth century. Humans engaging in social work in harmony with the divine will can effect changes that noncatastrophically and progressively create the millennial kingdom.<sup>[10]</sup>

Believers in both catastrophic millennialism and progressive millennialism are certain that there is a divine (or superhuman) plan to establish the millennial kingdom. Both types of millennialism possess an urgent sense of the imminence of the millennial kingdom. Catastrophic millennialism and progressive millennialism differ in whether humanity contains enough positive potential to make the transition noncatastrophically, or whether humanity is so depraved that violent destruction of the old world is necessary before the millennial kingdom can be established.

Both catastrophic millennialism and progressive millennialism may or may not involve messianism.<sup>[11]</sup> I use the Hebrew word “messiah” to refer to an individual believed to be empowered by God (or a superhuman agent) to create the millennial kingdom.

### **The Dynamics of Violence**

Catastrophic millennialism is inherently a dualistic worldview. The world is seen as a battleground between good and evil, God and Satan, us and them. This radical dualism expects, and often produces, conflict. It identifies particular groups and individuals as enemies. It is the embattled worldview of people engaging in warfare. Many religious people hold this dualistic worldview and wage their warfare spiritually with prayers, faith, and worship as their weapons. But if the warfare becomes physical, people are killed, they kill others, people are martyred and die for a cause. Jonestown, the Branch Davidians, Aum Shinrikyo, and the Montana Freeman were all catastrophic millennial groups willing to fight the battle against enemies on the physical level. Heaven’s Gate members waged their warfare against their own human flesh in order to overcome their humanness. They expected to be persecuted and even martyred while here on earth. Finally they opted to kill their human bodies to abandon earthly existence for a heavenly salvation.

Catastrophic millennialism and progressive millennialism are not mutually exclusive. If a group experiences some prosperity, some success at building their millennial kingdom, the expectations of catastrophe may wane and progressive expectations come to the fore. But if the group experiences conflict with “cultural opponents,”<sup>[12]</sup> if it experiences persecution, then the group may be pushed to exaggerated expectations of catastrophe and a radical dualism that tends toward paranoia.

I suggest that if a catastrophic millennial group perceives itself as being persecuted by outside cultural opponents, *and* furthermore perceives that they are failing to achieve their millennial goal, this will be a group that is likely to commit violence in order to achieve their ultimate concern.<sup>[13]</sup> In attempting to deal with such a catastrophic millennial group, it is counterproductive to undertake actions that make the members feel persecuted, and the worst thing to do is to apply so much pressure that the members despair about achieving their ultimate goal. Persecution just confirms the millennial group’s dualism and perception of being locked in a conflict with powerful and demonic enemies. If the group is pushed to the point of despair about the success of their millennial goal, they will not abandon their ultimate concern, but instead they will be motivated to take desperate actions to preserve their ultimate concern.

If, due to cultural opposition, a catastrophic millennial community gives up on the possibility of including individuals in the outer world in salvation, and turns inward to ensure the salvation of its members alone, then violent actions are more likely to be committed. This was the point reached by the Jonestown residents, Aum Shinrikyo devotees, and Heaven’s Gate members. The violence may be outwardly directed against enemies, or it may be inwardly directed to control dissidents, or perhaps to commit suicide and remove the group from the hopelessly corrupt world. Jonestown and Aum Shinrikyo indicate it is likely that *both* inwardly-directed and outwardly-directed violence will be committed. Heaven’s Gate members are distinctive for being exceptionally peaceful. They did not seek retribution against enemies.

In studying catastrophic millennial groups involved in violence, we need to distinguish between groups that initiate violence and groups which are attacked because law enforcement agents regard them as dangerous. There are also millennial theologies that prompt believers to perpetuate violence against enemies perceived as demonic or sub-human.

### **Fragile Millennial Religions:**

#### **Groups That Initiate Violence Due to Internal Weaknesses and External Cultural Opposition.**

Jonestown, Aum Shinrikyo, and Heaven's Gate are examples of the pressures internal and external to a catastrophic millennial group that result in violence.<sup>[14]</sup> Jonestown, Aum Shinrikyo, and Heaven's Gate are examples of catastrophic millennial groups that commit violence, because they feel persecuted *and* perceive their millennial goal as failing.

Both Jim Jones and Shoko Asahara created stresses internal to the group that endangered the millennial goal. Both Jim Jones and Shoko Asahara were, by virtue of their own actions, in danger of failing to be the messiah. Jim Jones' descent into debilitating drug addiction after he moved to Jonestown intensified the pressure felt by the other leaders to keep Jonestown economically viable. Jonestown was in danger of failing as a communal experiment, and was suffering from Jones' erratic behavior when the unwanted visit by Congressman Leo Ryan, reporters, and concerned relatives—all perceived as enemies—pushed the community over the edge. Shoko Asahara styled himself as a Hindu *siddha* (a perfected one) or a Buddha, a fully enlightened person with infallible powers of prophecy. He created stresses internal to Aum Shinrikyo by stipulating that an impossible number of individuals had to convert and become renunciants (monastics). Once Asahara as an infallible *siddha* predicted armageddon, then armageddon *had* to occur.

The stresses internal to Jonestown and Aum Shinrikyo were exacerbated by the activities of outside opponents—concerned relatives, anticult activists, reporters, law enforcement agents, and government representatives—that caused members of both groups to feel persecuted. The response within both Jonestown and Aum Shinrikyo was to turn inward and give up on the outer society as being hopelessly corrupt and sinful. Jonestown residents opted to take revenge against their enemies, killing Congressman Ryan, and news reporters and defectors in his party, and then to preserve their communal solidarity by murdering their children and committing group suicide. Their revolutionary suicide in protest of corrupt capitalism was meant to prevent the further disruption of their community by defectors and outside opponents.<sup>[15]</sup> Aum Shinrikyo devotees committed a variety of murders to prevent defections and to silence outside opponents. They developed weapons of mass destruction, and then utilized these weapons to wage war against their enemies. The Tokyo subway gas attack had the short-term aim of preventing a massive police raid from being carried out against Aum communes. Fortunately, Japanese police were able to take the Aum leaders into custody before they initiated armageddon.

Both Jonestown residents and Aum Shinrikyo devotees possessed a radically dualistic worldview. The Jonestown leaders saw reality in terms of a conflict between communism and capitalism. Jones used the biblical metaphor of “Babylon” to refer to evil capitalistic society.<sup>[16]</sup> The Aum guru and leaders saw reality in terms of a conflict between spirituality and materialism. Residents of Jonestown and residents of the Aum communes felt persecuted and besieged by outside enemies. The integrity of their communes was threatened from within by potential and actual defectors.

Similar dynamics can be traced in the history of Heaven's Gate. The Heaven's Gate dualism was perceived as the conflict between earthly existence and heavenly existence, and the members believed that the earth's population was imminently to be “spaded under” by a global catastrophe. The group's sense of persecution and alienation from society originated, in part, with the social ostracism and

repeated loss of employment suffered by Marshall Herff Applewhite in the 1960s and 1970s due to his bisexuality. Applewhite (known in Heaven's Gate as "Do") and Bonnie Nettles ("Ti") met in 1972, and together they abandoned conventional life. Claiming to be two extraterrestrials, representatives from the Kingdom of Heaven, they began recruiting converts in the mid-1970s with the promise that a spaceship would soon land to take them all to heaven. The negative nationwide media attention they received in 1976 increased the group's sense of being persecuted by society, and they responded by becoming more reclusive. Applewhite and Nettles claimed to be "the Two" witnesses in the book of Revelation. They predicted they would be martyred, resurrected, and then they and their believers would be taken into heaven by a spacecraft. Their predictions of physical confirmation of salvation by being picked up by a spaceship were repeatedly disconfirmed, and doubters left the group. The promise that members were transforming their human bodies into eternal space alien bodies was disconfirmed by Nettles' death in 1985. In 1997, Applewhite suffered from severe coronary arteriosclerosis. He probably believed that the group would not remain intact and faithful to the millennial goal after his death. The group exit was carried out so that they could achieve their ultimate goal of being picked up by the mothership. The Hale-Bopp comet was their sign that the time had come. They believed that after abandoning their earthly bodies, they would receive eternal divinized bodies on the spacecraft.<sup>[17]</sup>

Unlike Jonestown and Aum Shinrikyo, there was absolutely no coercion to stay in the group that we know as Heaven's Gate. In fact, in the beginning, there was not a great deal of encouragement for people to stay with the group. Nettles and Applewhite taught that only a small number of people could overcome their humanness, and that only those who were willing to release all attachments to human life could become members. They dealt with doubters and those who could not adhere to the group's discipline by encouraging them to leave. They even gave people financial incentive to leave.

### **Assaulted Millennial Religions:**

#### **Groups That Are Attacked by Law Enforcement Agents Because They Are Perceived As Dangerous.**

Although the Branch Davidians saw themselves in conflict with sinful "Babylon," they differ from Jonestown, Aum Shinrikyo, and Heaven's Gate because they never doubted the achievement of their millennial goal. All actions taken by the ATF and FBI agents<sup>[18]</sup> had the effect of confirming David Koresh's prophecies about the violent events of the endtime and enhanced his authority as the messiah. The Branch Davidians were catastrophic millennialists and they felt persecuted, but their persecution strengthened their faith in David Koresh and his prophecies. They had no reason to doubt that God would accomplish the millennial kingdom. The events of the ATF assault and the 51-day siege confirmed that everything was going according to God's plan, and that David Koresh had the divinely inspired ability to interpret the Bible. I believe that this accounts for why the Davidians were able to withstand an incredible amount of persecution by law enforcement agents. Because their persecution made it appear more likely that the millennial goal would be achieved, the Davidians never gave up their efforts to convert individuals in the outer world. David Koresh attempted to get his message out during the siege, and when that was prevented, he and other Davidians attempted to convert the FBI negotiators.

The problem was that the FBI agents were unequipped to understand the Bible-based language spoken by Koresh and the Davidians. The transcripts of the negotiation tapes<sup>[19]</sup> show that the Davidians tried valiantly throughout the siege to communicate and negotiate with the FBI agents, and that convinces me that the Davidians did not want to die. They believed that God might will them to die at the hands of Babylon to initiate the catastrophic endtime, they were willing to die for their ultimate concern, but *the Branch Davidians did not want to die*. The Davidians attempted to communicate with FBI agents up until the very end.

During the siege, at least one Davidian (Livingstone Fagan) came out of Mount Carmel for the purpose of explaining the Davidians' faith. Other Davidians came out for personal reasons or they sent their children out. The persecution confirmed Koresh's prophecies, so the community was not endangered when people chose to come out. But many Davidians stayed inside Mount Carmel, because they were waiting for a revelation of God's will, and because each time Davidians came out, FBI agents punished them by escalating the psychological warfare.<sup>[20]</sup>

The Branch Davidian tragedy illustrates how law enforcement agents *should not* deal with armed catastrophic millennial groups.<sup>[21]</sup> To avoid violence, law enforcement agents have to take seriously the group's religious views, and avoid acting in ways that make them appear to be the agents of Satan. In the event of a siege, group members must be offered terms that permit them to remain true to their ultimate concern even while surrendering. This was not done with the Branch Davidians, to a great extent because of the advice being given to law enforcement agents by anticult activists.<sup>[22]</sup> Anticult activists possess their own dualistic worldview that perpetuates the prejudiced stereotype of the so-called "cult."

After being ignored by the FBI when they offered their services, two Bible scholars, Dr. James Tabor and Dr. J. Phillip Arnold, pursued a plan to persuade the Davidians to surrender. Tabor and Arnold were concerned because the Davidians believed they were in the "Fifth Seal" of Revelation (Rev. 6: 9-11). The Davidians interpreted this Bible passage as predicting that some of the members of the godly community would be killed by Babylon, and after a waiting period, the rest of the community would be martyred.<sup>[23]</sup> Tabor and Arnold directed a radio broadcast to the Davidians in which they discussed the biblical prophecies. The Davidians were elated that *finally* someone was communicating with them who understood their Bible-based language.<sup>[24]</sup> Arnold and Tabor suggested that other prophecies in Revelation indicated that David Koresh should come out in order to present his interpretation of the Seven Seals to the world even after being imprisoned. They argued that the waiting period described in the Fifth Seal would be longer than a few months. The Davidians should exit Mount Carmel, because God did not intend for them to be martyred there. Once out of Mount Carmel, David Koresh would be able to spread his message of God's salvation to the rest of the world.

On April 14, 1993, Koresh sent out a letter in which he reported that he had received permission from God to write a "little book"<sup>[25]</sup> containing his interpretation of the Seven Seals. Koresh's letter said that once the manuscript was in safekeeping with Tabor and Arnold, he and the Davidians would come out.<sup>[26]</sup> The negotiation tapes reveal that the Davidians were heard cheering at the prospect of coming out.<sup>[27]</sup> On April 16, Koresh reported to the FBI that he had completed writing his interpretation of the First Seal.<sup>[28]</sup> When Attorney General Janet Reno asked if there were reasons to continue waiting and negotiating with the Davidians, FBI agents did not tell her about Koresh's promise to surrender. A woman who escaped the fire on April 19 carried out a disk on which was saved David Koresh's interpretation of the First Seal of Revelation indicating that Koresh was sincere in his promise.<sup>[29]</sup> James Tabor and Phillip Arnold succeeded in offering to the Davidians a way they could remain true to their ultimate concern and come out. The successful efforts of Tabor and Arnold were nullified by the FBI gas and tank assault on April 19. During the assault, the Davidians probably concluded that the prophecies of Revelation were being fulfilled in their martyrdom at the hands of Babylon. Only nine Davidians escaped the fire.

### **Nativist Millennial Movements with Theologies of Violence**

In 1996, the eighty-one day soft siege of the Montana Freemen was handled correctly by the FBI. The standoff contained a group of armed people, who aimed to spark "the second American revolution" to overthrow the federal government they identified as "Babylon," and to establish true American republics obedient to Yahweh and his laws. The Montana Freemen were part of a type of catastrophic millennial movement that has been termed a "nativist movement."<sup>[30]</sup> Nativist movements occur

among people who feel colonized and oppressed by a foreign culture and its government. Nativist movements have an inherent potential for violence, because they aim to overthrow the persecuting government. The believers are convinced that they are participating in God's plan to violently destroy the illicit government and then establish the culture and government of their idealized earlier period. Their millennial kingdom is a return to a previous golden age. If permitted to peacefully build their millennial kingdom, nativist movements can become progressive millennial movements. If opposed and persecuted by civil authorities, and they usually are, members of the nativist movement see themselves as allied with God in a battle to overthrow evil. They believe that violent revolution is necessary and divinely ordained to establish the millennial kingdom.<sup>[31]</sup>

The Freemen indicate for us that there is no need to have a messiah or a guru in order to have a potentially violent religious movement. In 1996, the Freemen living in Justus Township were the most visible portion of an on-going revolution against the American federal government. Extremist individuals associated with militias, white supremacist groups, and the religion known as Christian Identity are committing acts of domestic terrorism, and federal and local law enforcement agents are working to contain this revolution.

Unlike Jonestown, the Branch Davidians, and Aum Shinrikyo, anticult activists were not opposing the Montana Freemen.<sup>[32]</sup> The national news coverage of the Freemen was mediocre, but they were not demonized. Instead we saw the Freemen and their children on television, and we saw that they were human beings. The news coverage in the *Billings Gazette* was exceptionally good. Relatives of the Freemen were interviewed, and the Freemen were depicted as being farmers, ranchers, and working people with concerns that other Americans had.

During the Freemen standoff, FBI agents consulted scholars knowledgeable about millennial and new religious movements, including Dr. Michael Barkun, Dr. Phillip Arnold, Dr. Jean Rosenfeld, and myself. The scholars advising the FBI agents urged them to keep the siege low-key, and to avoid making the Freemen feel persecuted. We urged the FBI agents to utilize third-party mediators, who could understand the Freemen's worldview and speak the Freemen's language, but who also had the cognitive distance from the Freemen worldview to analyze it. We urged the FBI agents not to pressure the Freemen and make them despair of achieving their millennial goal. Finally, we urged the FBI agents to offer terms to the Freemen that permitted them to simultaneously remain true to their ultimate concern and come out of Justus Township.

Toward the end of the Freemen standoff, Phillip Arnold spent four days with the FBI negotiators in Montana, which contributed to the breakthrough involving the exit of a couple along with the woman's two young daughters (ages 8 and 10). Finally FBI agents offered terms to the remaining Freemen that reassured the Freemen they could continue striving to achieve their millennial goal while in federal custody.<sup>[33]</sup> According to the Freemen perspective, they did not surrender, but they have taken their fight against Babylon into the federal courts.<sup>[34]</sup> The Freemen were not put into a position in which they felt their only options were to either kill or die for their ultimate concern.<sup>[35]</sup>

## Conclusion

The comparative study in this book of Jonestown, the Branch Davidians, Aum Shinrikyo, the Montana Freemen, and Heaven's Gate reveals the persistent folly of a radical dualistic worldview, and that such dichotomous thinking<sup>[36]</sup> is found not only in members of catastrophic millennial groups, but also among defectors from new religious movements, anticult activists, law enforcement agents, and news reporters. It is all too human to see things in conflictual terms—us vs. the enemy, the good guys vs. the bad guys. The persistence of a radical dualistic view is seen in defectors from catastrophic millennial groups, who simply reverse whom they define as the enemy. The religious group they have left and its leader are redefined as evil, and they work as passionately to destroy



that group as they previously worked to promote it.<sup>[37]</sup> Law enforcement agents and members of the military are trained to see situations in terms of the good guys in conflict with the bad guys. Numerous retired police officers and former military personnel populate the continuing Euro-American nativist movement that includes the Freemen, constitution and common law study groups, and militias. They have merely redefined the federal government and its agents as evil, and they work passionately to destroy the government's hegemony. Police officers and military personnel were active in helping Aum Shinrikyo to prepare to wage deadly armageddon against the population of Japan. In the four cases studied in which violence occurred, news reporters in search of sensationalized stories of conflict directly contributed to the tragic conclusions.

In order to deal constructively with members of unconventional religious groups, law enforcement agents, reporters, and scholars have to learn to regard the members as human beings possessing a sincere commitment to their ultimate concern. If people can regard each other as human beings, as persons like "us," and not as demonic and unhuman enemies, conflictual dualism on all sides will diminish. For law enforcement agents, this means it is necessary to meet with members of new religious groups, listen to them, and, whenever possible, enlist their cooperation in investigation of their activities. News reporters can contribute to peaceful dialogue rather than violent conflict by respectfully permitting members of unconventional religions to articulate their views and to be seen as human beings. Scholars need to actively promote increased public understanding of religion by making their expertise available to reporters, law enforcement agents, and community groups. However, as scholars attempt to humanize the members of NRMs for the general public, we should not be in the business of giving "clean bills of health" to particular religious groups. Aum Shinrikyo stands as a warning that NRMs sometimes can contain unexpected surprises.

## Endnotes

<sup>[1]</sup> Tom Morganthau, Michael Isikoff, and Bob Cohn, "The Echoes of Ruby Ridge," *Newsweek*, August 28, 1995: 25-28; Jess Walter, "'Every Knee Shall Bow': Exclusive Book Excerpt," *Newsweek*, August 28, 1995: 29-33; Jess Walter, *Every Knee Shall Bow: The Truth and Tragedy of Ruby Ridge and the Randy Weaver Family* (New York: Harper Paperbacks, 1995).

<sup>[2]</sup> When I began this study, I did not have enough information to include an analysis of the Solar Temple, but helpful essays have appeared. See John R. Hall and Philip Schuyler, "The Mystical Apocalypse of the Solar Temple," in *Millennium, Messiahs, and Mayhem*, edited by Thomas Robbins and Susan J. Palmer (New York: Routledge), 285-311; Jean-François Mayer, "Myths of the Solar Temple," translated by Elijah Siegler, The Institute for the Study of American Religion, presented to the ISAR/CESNUR Symposium on "Violence and the New Religions," Nashville, TN, March 10, 1996; Susan J. Palmer, "Purity and Danger in the Solar Temple," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 11/3 (October 1996): 303-18; Massimo Introvigne, "Ordeal by Fire: The Tragedy of the Solar Temple," *Religion* 25 (1995): 267-283. These articles provide evidence that the dynamics that produced the Solar Temple violence in 1994 are similar to the dynamics that caused violence involving Jonestown, Aum Shinrikyo, and Heaven's Gate. Internal weaknesses threatening the viability of the group and its ultimate concern combined with external opposition, which the members experienced as persecution, prompted the first set of Solar Temple murders/suicides. I assume that the Solar Temple deaths in 1995 and 1997 were copycat suicides emulating the means by which the first group of members achieved their ultimate goal, a transition to an otherworldly and improved existence.

Note that in the first paragraph of this chapter, I define millennialism as involving belief in a collective *earthly or heavenly* salvation.

<sup>[3]</sup> John R. Hall, *Gone From the Promised Land: Jonestown in American Cultural History* (New

Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1987), 291. Mike Prokes, and Tim and Mike Carter, were not present for the group suicide, because the women leaders had sent them off with a suitcase filled with the Peoples Temple financial assets to deliver to the Soviet embassy in Georgetown. See Hall, 280-1.

<sup>[4]</sup> I thank Rebecca Moore for sharing this observation with me.

<sup>[5]</sup> James T. Richardson, "Manufacturing Consent about Koresh: A Structural Analysis of the Role of Media in the Waco Tragedy," in *Armageddon in Waco: Critical Perspectives on the Branch Davidian Conflict*, ed. by Stuart A. Wright (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995): 153-76. Richardson does not use the word "exterminate" in his article. Richardson's article points out that the news coverage of the Davidians made them into victims "unworthy" of the compassion of the general public.

<sup>[6]</sup> James D. Tabor and Eugene V. Gallagher, *Why Waco? Cults and the Battle for Religious Freedom in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 3; Carol Moore, *The Davidian Massacre: Disturbing Questions about Waco Which Must Be Answered* (Franklin, TN, and Springfield, VA: Legacy Communications and Gun Owners Foundation, 1995), xiii-xiv; Dick J. Reavis, *The Ashes of Waco: An Investigation* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 277. The two pregnant women were Aisha Gyarfas (17) and Nicole Gent (23). Aisha Gyarfas died of a gunshot wound; Nicole Gent was killed by falling cement as she huddled with other women and the children in a room made of concrete blocks.

In the ATF raid on Mount Carmel on Sunday, February 28, 1993, four ATF agents were killed, twenty ATF agents were wounded, five Davidians were killed, and four Davidians were wounded including David Koresh. That afternoon about 4:55 p.m. Michael Schroeder was shot and killed by ATF agents as he attempted to walk to Mount Carmel to rejoin his family.

<sup>[7]</sup> Robert D. Baird, *Category Formation and the History of Religions* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), 18. Baird's emphasis, my addition in brackets.

<sup>[8]</sup> Armageddon in the Book of Revelation refers to a place where the final battle between good and evil will occur. Throughout this book I use "armageddon" in its popular sense of the final battle that will destroy the world as we know it.

<sup>[9]</sup> I offer these readily comprehensible terms as alternatives to the obscure and misleading terms used by historians, pre-millennialism and post-millennialism. See Catherine Wessinger, "Millennialism With and Without the Mayhem: Catastrophic and Progressive Expectations," in *Millennium, Messiahs, and Mayhem*, 47-59.

<sup>[10]</sup> This is the type of millennialism I studied in *Annie Besant and Progressive Millennialism* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988).

<sup>[11]</sup> This assertion is contrary to most scholarly assumptions about "post-millennialism." See the discussion in Wessinger, "Millennialism With and Without the Mayhem."

<sup>[12]</sup> John R. Hall, "Public Narratives and the Apocalyptic Sect: From Jonestown to Mt. Carmel" in *Armageddon in Waco*, 207.

<sup>[13]</sup> I derived this thesis from reading simultaneously the work of two scholars: Mary McCormick Maaga, "Triple Erasure: Women and Power in Peoples Temple," Ph.D. diss. Drew University, 1996; Ian Reader, *A Poisonous Cocktail? Aum Shinrikyo's Path to Violence* (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute

of Asian Studies Books, 1996). I rely to a great extent on these works by Maaga and Reader in my description and analysis of events involving Jonestown and Aum Shinrikyo below.

- <sup>[14]</sup> Millennial groups becoming involved in violence due to simultaneous endogenous and exogenous factors are also discussed in Thomas Robbins and Dick Anthony, "Sects and Violence: Factors Enhancing the Volatility of Marginal Religious Movements," in *Armageddon in Waco*, 236-59.
- <sup>[15]</sup> The Jonestown residents felt they had no other place to go. They did not view returning to American society with its capitalism and inequality as an option. They had explored relocating to Cuba or the U.S.S.R. with no result.
- <sup>[16]</sup> Hall, *Gone from the Promised Land*, 31, 145.
- <sup>[17]</sup> David Daniel, "The Beginning of the Journey," *Newsweek* (April 14, 1997): 36-37; Barry Bearak, "Eyes on the Glory: Pied Pipers of Heaven's Gate," *New York Times* (AOL) (April 28, 1997); Cheryl Clark, "Cultist Applewhite had a severe heart disease," *San Diego Union-Tribune* (April 12, 1997); "Trek toward destruction," *San Diego Union-Tribune* (April 13, 1997); Anne Krueger and Susan Gembrowski, "Strange odyssey of Heaven's Gate," *San Diego Union-Tribune* (April 13, 1997); Susan Gembrowski and Anne Krueger, "Doubts, discipline led many members to quit," *San Diego Union-Tribune* (April 14, 1997). The articles in the *San Diego Union-Tribune* were obtained at <http://www.uniontrib.com>.
- <sup>[18]</sup> These agencies are the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.
- <sup>[19]</sup> Eugene V. Gallagher is currently analyzing the negotiation transcripts for an article forthcoming in a book I am editing tentatively titled *Millennialism, Persecution, and Violence* (Syracuse University Press). Cary R. W. Voss, Communications, University of Kansas, and Jayne S. Docherty, the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, George Mason University, are analyzing the Waco negotiations. Their findings will be reported in their forthcoming dissertations. Cary Voss maintains a Koresh Research Homepage at <http://lark.cc.ukans.edu/%7Evoss/> [which no longer seems operational – ed., 13 August 2001].
- <sup>[20]</sup> See James Tabor, "The Events at Waco: An Interpretive Log," (University of California, 1995), at <http://www.neo.com/UCalPress/WhyWaco/> [this URL is no longer operational – ed., 13 August 2001].
- <sup>[21]</sup> See my review essay, "Understanding the Branch Davidian Tragedy," forthcoming in the first issue of *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*. Information on *Nova Religio* can be found at <http://www.novareligio.com>.
- <sup>[22]</sup> See John R. Hall, "Public Narratives and the Apocalyptic Sect," 205-35; Nancy T. Ammerman, "Waco, Federal Law Enforcement, and Scholars of Religion," 282-96; Stuart A. Wright, "Construction and Escalation of a Cult Threat," 75-94; all in *Armageddon in Waco*; see also Tabor and Gallagher.
- <sup>[23]</sup> The Fifth Seal described in Revelation 6:9-11 is given below. The following is quoted in J. Phillip Arnold, "The Davidian Dilemma—To Obey God or Man?" in *From the Ashes: Making Sense of Waco*, ed. by James R. Lewis (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1994), 25.

And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of *them that were slain* for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a

loud voice, saying, *How long*, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should *rest* yet for a little season, until their fellow servants also and their brethren, that should be *killed* as they were, should be fulfilled.

<sup>[24]</sup> Negotiation tape no. 129, March 15, 1993, of Steve Schneider reporting the enthusiastic responses of Davidians to hearing on the radio Dr. J. Phillip Arnold discussing the Bible. Schneider asked that Dr. Arnold be permitted to discuss the biblical prophecies with David Koresh to see if Arnold could offer alternative interpretations. Schneider stated that if Arnold could prove by the biblical texts that the Davidians should come out, they would exit Mount Carmel regardless of whether or not David Koresh agreed with Arnold's interpretations. Audiotape of discussion of James Tabor and J. Phillip Arnold on the Ron Engleman radio talk show station KGBS on April 1, 1993; audiotape of "The Last Recorded Words of David Koresh April 16-18, 1993" narrated by James Tabor.

On April 16, 1993, David Koresh enthusiastically discussed with a negotiator that when he had written his commentary on the Seven Seals he and the Davidians would come out. Koresh explained that he would give the manuscript to James Tabor and Phillip Arnold for safekeeping, because they had expressed a sincere interest in his biblical interpretations. Koresh wanted his teachings preserved and disseminated in writing, because he believed that once he was taken into custody, he would be presented to the public as a monstrosity.

For the full story, see chapter four.

<sup>[25]</sup> This is a reference to a messenger with a "little book" in Revelation 10. See Tabor and Gallagher, 16.

<sup>[26]</sup> Tabor and Gallagher, 15.

<sup>[27]</sup> House of Representatives, *Investigation into the Activities of Federal Law Enforcement Agencies toward the Branch Davidians: Thirteenth Report by the Committee on Government Reform and Oversight Prepared in Conjunction with the Committee on the Judiciary together with Additional and Dissenting Views*, Report 104-749 (Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1996), 65.

<sup>[28]</sup> Audiotape entitled "The Last Recorded Words of David Koresh April 16-18, 1993."

<sup>[29]</sup> For these events, see Tabor and Gallagher; James D. Tabor, "Religious Discourse and Failed Negotiations: The Dynamics of Biblical Apocalypticism in Waco," in *Armageddon in Waco*, 263-81; James D. Tabor, "The Waco Tragedy: An Autobiographical Account of One Attempt to Prevent Disaster," in *From the Ashes: Making Sense of Waco*, 13-21; J. Phillip Arnold, "The Davidian Dilemma—To Obey God or Man?" 23-31.

<sup>[30]</sup> Anthony F. C. Wallace, "Revitalization Movements," *American Anthropologist* 58/2 (April 1956): 264-81.

<sup>[31]</sup> These two possibilities for a nativist movement are elucidated in Jean E. Rosenfeld's study of Pai Marire, a Maori nativist movement in New Zealand. See Jean E. Rosenfeld, "Pai Marire: Peace and Violence in a New Zealand Millenarian Tradition," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 7/3 (Autumn 1995), special issue on "Millennialism and Violence" edited by Michael Barkun (London: Frank Cass), 83-108.

<sup>[32]</sup>The Heaven's Gate group avoided pressures from anticultists by remaining small and hidden. Members did not reveal their whereabouts to relatives, and in fact, they seldom contacted their relatives.

<sup>[33]</sup>The terms were reported in Clair Johnson, "Freemen deal includes 5: Negotiator spells out points in agreement," *Billings Gazette Online* (June 19, 1996)

<sup>[34]</sup>Neill H. Payne, "Shades of Waco: CAUSE Negotiates Peaceful End to Siege of Justus Township Standoff," *The Balance: A Newsletter of Civil Rights and Current Events* 7/2 (Summer 1996): 1-3.

<sup>[35]</sup>The standoff was concluded peacefully because the Freemen were offered terms that permitted them to remain true to their ultimate concern. The peaceful resolution did *not* occur because their electricity was cut off although that may have been a contributing factor. Unlike their dealings with the Branch Davidians, FBI agents increased the pressure on the Freemen cautiously.

<sup>[36]</sup>Linda E. Olds discusses the problematic features of dichotomous thinking in promoting patriarchy and sexism in *Fully Human: How Everyone Can Integrate the Benefits of Masculine and Feminine Sex Roles* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1981).

<sup>[37]</sup>For example, while a member of Peoples Temple, Tim Stoen idolized Jim Jones: "I guess I saw him as the Second Coming." After defecting and becoming the most active critic of Peoples Temple, Tim Stoen said, "Jim is the devil." Quoted in Rebecca Moore, *A Sympathetic History of Jonestown: The Moore Family Involvement in the Peoples Temple* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1985), 267

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York: Seven Bridges Press, 2000). This paper may be cited, but please cite this draft which was last revised January 13, 1998. This article differs somewhat from the  
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Events As we are nearing the year 2000 religious imaginations are spinning millennial dreams. The impending new millennium is stimulating hopes that t

How the Millennium Comes Violently: From Jonestown to Heaven's Gate. Seven Bridges Press, 2000. 22 Reiterman, Tom; Jacobs, John (1982), Raven: The Untold Story of Rev. Jim Jones and His People, Dutton. 23 Jones, Jim (1931 - 1978) American Cult Leader, World of Criminal Justice, Gale., retrieved October 10, 2012 24 Reiterman, Tom; Jacobs, John (1982), Raven: The Untold Story of Rev. Jim Jones and His People, Dutton. Subscribe to view the full document. scanned highways in a rented airplane. It is through these tactics that dictator ships and religious begin. 25 Wessinger, Catherine. How the Millennium Comes Violently: From Jonestown to Heaven's Gate. Seven Bridges Press, 2000. 26 Jonestown: The Life and Death of Peoples Temple. Wessinger provides the essential tools for understanding millennial beliefs and the complex internal mix that shapes a group s decision to embrace or reject violence. Wessinger s fair-minded, practical approach will change misconceptions and, ultimately, help prevent the violence. ...more. Get A Copy. Amazon. Stores ¼. Audible Barnes & Noble Walmart eBooks Apple Books Google Play Abebooks Book Depository Alibris Indigo Better World Books IndieBound. Be the first to ask a question about How the Millennium Comes Violently. Lists with This Book. Heaven's Gate. 8 books 1 voter. More lists with this book Community Reviews. Showing 1-30. This will be kingdom. HOW THE MILLENNIUM COMES VIOLENTLY 485 y salvation if historical accomplished by God (or by superhuman agents THE DYNAMICS OF VIOLENCE rthly salvation. When such as extraterrestrials), perhaps with the assis- 'cided that the world's tance of human beings. The millennial kingdom Catastrophic millennialism inherently possesses a efusing to transform to will be created only after the violent destruction of dualistic worldview. 13 The world is seen as a battle- 'ley shifted their expec- the old world. ground between good and evil, God and Satan, us tn to an oth