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“A Baptism by Fire”

The Branch Davidians and Apocalyptic Self-Destruction

Kenneth G. C. Newport

ABSTRACT: This article responds to criticisms of my book, *The Branch Davidians of Waco*, made by other contributors in this issue of *Nova Religio*. I begin by addressing directly the points raised by Stuart Wright and Catherine Wessinger and suggest that in both cases these scholars have failed to do justice to the evidence. In the second part of the paper I outline my own views relating to the Waco fire. Throughout I argue that the Branch Davidians set fire to Mount Carmel themselves and that they did so for a particular theological reason: they expected that through fire would come a rebirth to life in the new Davidian Kingdom.

Seldom does an event so burn its way into the psyche of those who have studied it as does that of the fire that took place in Waco, Texas, some sixteen years ago. At the time, the events which unfolded there between 28 February and 19 April 1993 held captive the world's media. But such interest quickly moves on and the case of the Branch Davidians has now largely slipped from public view. Some scholars of religion, however, have not been so fickle, but rather have focused upon that event with particular energy. Indeed, “what really happened” at Waco has become something an obsession for some and a fascination of many. This present issue of *Nova Religio* is itself evidence of such.

What “really happened” during that fiery apocalypse is of course shocking in the extreme: seventy-eight members of the Branch Davidian religious community died, and some in particularly horrid ways.¹ In

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seeking to investigate the cause of the Waco fire, then, a scholar steps upon territory that is in a very real sense holy ground. Real people died there and did so, I suggest, for religious reasons. Among the obvious questions are “Why?” and “Could it have been avoided?”

In setting up these obvious questions it will be noted that there is no “How.” And indeed prior to reading Stuart Wright’s article published here I had no intention of dealing with the issue of, to use Aristotelian terminology, the efficient cause of the conflagration; my concern is rather the final one. This is because the question of *how* the fire started has surely been settled. For reasons I have outlined in detail in my book, *The Branch Davidians of Waco*, the clear answer is that the Branch Davidians themselves set fire to the complex.² Such a conclusion is the only one that does justice to the surviving evidence and actually it is not even a close contest: the evidence points overwhelmingly to this conclusion. In this issue of *Nova Religio*, it is not just me who has taken this view. Catherine Wessinger also acknowledges that it was the Branch Davidians who set Mount Carmel ablaze. She and I have the same question: why did they do it?

Stuart Wright, however, has less clarity on this issue. Having read his contribution several times, I remain less than fully clear what it is that he is trying to argue with regard either to the efficient or the final cause of the fire. In fact, his article does not really address either question. What I principally learn, rather, is that (according to him) the FBI broke a number of rules, covered up the fact that they had done so, and inserted potentially lethal gas into Mount Carmel. I would dispute these claims. However, let us for the moment assume that Wright is correct on these issues. Does this help us with the two key questions: (1) how did the fire start, and (2) why? Clearly not.

RESPONSES TO STUART WRIGHT AND CATHERINE WESSINGER

Very early on in his article, Wright states that pyrotechnic devices could have started the fire.³ However, he makes no argument and presents no evidence in support of this view. This is unsurprising since there is actually no evidence to support it and indeed a phalanx of arguments against it. I have examined some of this evidence in *The Branch Davidians of Waco* and need not go into detail again here. Three key points are these: First, and most important, there is no hard evidence that any such rounds were found *inside* Mount Carmel. For all the talk of these pyrotechnic devices (also referred to here by Wessinger) no evidence has been produced supporting the view that any were actually fired into the complex or indeed at any point at which a fire subsequently started. Second, and linked, while it is clear that three pyrotechnic devices were used at Waco, the FBI’s account was that all three were directed at an

area some seventy-five yards or more from the main building and not into the building itself. Two dispersed their contents to no effect, while the other failed to go off at all. Third, as I have detailed in my book, while it is clear that three pyrotechnic rounds were used at Waco, the latest to be fired was at approximately 8:08 a.m., a good four hours before the fires started. It is inconceivable that these near four-hour old devices caused the fires just after noon.⁴ Of course, the FBI could be lying about all or any of this. However, to argue that case we would need something to go on: hard evidence, for example, or credible reports that at least one pyrotechnic was fired into the Mount Carmel complex itself and that it landed at some point in time and in a precise location at least reasonably consistent with the suggestion that it started the fire(s.) But such evidence is lacking. Of course, it could be lacking because the government destroyed it. If so, I confess that I have been duped. But in my defence I would argue that I have at least done my best with the available evidence even if I have missed the compelling argument that some others may have seen, dependent as it is upon the twin hypotheses of lying federal agents and missing evidence.

Despite the lack of evidence on this point, however, Wright states but leaves hanging the claim that "lost, mishandled, and/or concealed evidence" included "pyrotechnic devices that could have started the fire." This is more significant than it might at first seem for what has happened here is that Wright has introduced into the reader's mind the clear suspicion that pyrotechnic devices that could have started the fire were concealed by the government. But this is not true. The rounds could not have started the fire. So, at worst, what we have is the concealment of rounds that could *not* have started the fire. But even the issue of concealment is much less clear-cut than Wright (and Wessinger) allows. As the *Danforth Report* makes clear,⁵ and on this point it is highly critical of the government, the FBI provided information on the use of pyrotechnic rounds at an early stage, but that information was covered up by an attorney. That person was himself later charged with lying to the Grand Jury. So it is a cross between a falsehood and an oversimplification of the truth to say that pyrotechnic devices that could have started the fire were concealed by the government. The truth, rather, runs something like this: though the FBI reported the use of pyrotechnic tear gas rounds at Waco at an early stage, such information was covered up by one particular individual who was later prosecuted for obstruction of justice. Covering up of the use of such rounds, however, was not particularly significant since they could not in any case have started the fire. So, it is not simply that Wright has failed to make a case; it is more that he has slipped a very significant but groundless suspicion into the reader's mind. The suspicion can, however, be dispelled by the evidence.

The closest Wright gets to providing an account of how the Waco fire started is his suggestion that a lit Coleman lantern was knocked over by

a CEV. One must note, however, that Wright presents no actual hard evidence to support this claim, but rather a string of possibilities. These begin with unreferenced survivor reports that a lit Coleman lantern was located “in the vicinity” of an “area” of the building with which a CEV had made “violent contact” less than two minutes before the detection of a heat signature. An expert is then quoted to the effect that *if* the Coleman lamp had been knocked over this *could* explain the cause of the fire (even if, as seems likely given safety features, the flame itself had been extinguished). So what we have in Wright’s argument is a reported lamp (not the lamp itself) which was “in the vicinity of an area” where a CEV had made contact possibly being knocked over which might have ignited combustibles. Of course, this could be a correct account of what happened, but there is nothing tangible to support it, not even the lamp. However, let us assume again for the sake of the argument that Wright is correct. What happens then, it seems, is that the Coleman lamp starts a fire that is rapidly spread “by large amounts of highly combustible materials . . . including, but not limited to, gasoline, kerosene, lamp oil, [and] Coleman lantern fuel.” One has to ask what “gasoline, kerosene, lamp oil, [and] Coleman lantern fuel” were doing in the vicinity and in a form that could be ignited (i.e., as opposed to being in containers). Another obvious question is what the reported Coleman lamp was doing lit at midday. I suggest that Wright’s argument does not seriously challenge the mass of evidence assembled in the *Danforth Report*. This is not, of course, to accept that report uncritically. It is simply to point out that if one wishes to make a serious challenge to it we need more than the string of hypothetical events that Wright presents as a counter case. The *Danforth Report* is huge. It draws on expert testimony from literally across the globe as it is applied to hard physical evidence and first-hand accounts. The amount of evidence it provides in support of the view that the Branch Davidians set fire to Mount Carmel is overwhelming. We will need more than a reported lamp possibly being knocked over to refute it.

I do not intend to debate with Wright in any detail the issue of the use of CS gas since, of itself, it is not one related to the cause (rather than the potential spread) of the fire. I allow myself only two brief comments. First, I do think that the fact that none of the survivors who, according to Wright, described the “frenetic efforts of people inside Mount Carmel trying to find their way through the blinding black smoke, the rubble, wreckage and debris, not to mention the raging heat and burning CS by-products, phosgene, and cyanide” themselves showed any signs of distress caused by inhalation of CS gas to be significant. If the gas was of the intensity and kind that Wright suggests, why did these nine at least (and we can increase the number to ten with Wayne Martin, whom I discuss below) show no signs of distress?

Second, there is the issue of potential for escape. Wright argues that the Branch Davidians had little chance of escape for not one but two

reasons: (1) they were incapacitated by CS gas, and (2) they had potential exit routes blocked by CEVs collapsing parts of the structure. As I state in the book, and Wright quotes me, I do think that some of the Branch Davidians had little chance of escape once the fire started. However, others clearly did. Nine got out. One was Clive Doyle, who was unaffected by any gas and unhindered in his escape by blocked exits. It is not just Doyle's own physical state and escape that are important here, however. As evidence I have uploaded a video clip of Doyle's own testimony stating that as he was exiting the building he met Wayne Martin. Martin clearly had the same chance to exit as Doyle, but rather than doing so chose to be true his beliefs. He slid down the wall into a sitting position and "waited on God."⁶ Something was holding him back to be sure. It was not CS gas inhalation, blocked exists, or FBI bullets. So what was it? My argument is that it was his faith. To quote Doyle: He "waited on God."

It will be clear to the reader that there are a number of things in Wright's article that I find questionable. None, however, is as surprising as his refusal even to attempt to engage with the theology of the Branch Davidians. My view is that whatever else one might say about the group the fact that they were driven by theological belief is a given. Without an understanding of their theology, one fails to understand them. Wright, however, intends "to leave the theological argument advanced by Newport to others better trained in biblical exegesis and hermeneutics." In my view, there are two significant problems with this. First, he dismisses out of hand what was at the very heart of Branch Davidianism, namely biblically saturated apocalyptic belief. I argue that it is impossible to understand the Branch Davidians without getting to grips with their theology. One might as well try to understand Jesus without taking into account the fact that he believed in God. Anyone who has read any of the Branch Davidian literature or, more importantly, listened to the tape recordings of David Koresh, Steve Schneider, and others, will know just how central their belief system was to their way of thinking. They were obsessed with it. It ran through their veins. They lived it and breathed it and, in my view, died for it. It will not do simply to ignore it.

The second problem is that Wright apparently takes the position that "those better trained in biblical exegesis and hermeneutics" would be able more significantly to engage with my argument. He then goes on to state, however, that he has "deep reservations about imposing a literal reading upon what is essentially allegory and metaphor in the biblical texts, particularly with regard to end time prophecy"—an argument he would need to take up with Koresh not me. This is particularly problematic, because at best it suggests a narrow approach to biblical studies that is decades out of date. It is not what the text "really means" that matters here (presuming one could ever get at that). What matters is what the Branch Davidians made of the text. And what they made of it

was that they were the chosen people of God and that they had to enter the kingdom via a fiery portal. My book very much takes this as the starting point. I see the study of “eisegesis” (the art of reading into texts interpretations that fit in with and reflect the beliefs, experiences, history, culture and context of the reading community) as a valuable way into the thought world of such groups.⁷ Wright is clearly not engaging with my work on this level.

Wright is on slightly firmer ground when he points out that “prophecy never fails.” It is true that those who confidently predict the end of the world only rarely admit that they were wrong, and there are a number of ways in which such persons can escape the sometimes extremely tight prophetic corners into which they have painted themselves. But, as the cases of the Solar Temple, Heaven’s Gate, and arguably the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God remind us, it is not always the easiest of ways out that will be chosen. Ninety-nine out of a hundred such groups may well recalculate, reinterpret, postpone, spiritualize, or shift the location of the Apocalypse. But every now and then a group will seek to bring it on and to do so according to a detailed and well understood timetable that has been confidently pieced together over years and perhaps decades. In my view, the Branch Davidians were one such group.⁸

I turn now to Wessinger’s argument which I consider much better framed and focused than Wright’s. I have debated issues relating to Waco with Wessinger over several years and have learned a great deal from those discussions. Indeed, there is no doubt that were I to revise *The Branch Davidians of Waco* (which I am not planning to do, let me be quick to say) Wessinger’s work would significantly influence some of those revisions. In this context it is probably worth placing on record too, though only to highlight the extent to which genuine conversation can lead to better understanding, that the version of Wessinger’s paper published here is not the one to which I was originally asked to respond. Indeed it is quite different. What seems to have happened, therefore, is that following my initial response, Wessinger took the time, trouble, and opportunity to address a number of the points I made, to marshal further evidence as necessary and, in places, to delete some of her original material. My view is that what she has published here is demonstrably the better for those revisions (as my hypothetical revised edition of *The Branch Davidians of Waco* would surely be the better for my taking into account her comments and criticisms). I consider this to be illustrative of healthy debate conducted in the context of the cut and thrust of academic enquiry.

The view that the Branch Davidians set fire to Mount Carmel is central to Wessinger’s argument and, indeed, if they did not, then the substance of what she has contributed to this volume is itself reduced to ashes. “My thesis,” she writes, “that federal agents knowingly applied

pressure to provoke some Branch Davidians to set the fire rests upon circumstantial evidence drawn from available surveillance and negotiation audiotapes and the testimony of a Branch Davidian survivor of the fire, Graeme Craddock." Clearly, if the Davidians did not set fire to Mount Carmel then Wessinger's thesis that they were manipulated into doing so fails.

Wessinger is correct to conclude that the fire was set by the Branch Davidians. The kind of evidence she cites is that which others have taken very seriously. Such evidence includes her quotation of Craddock, who testified that "he saw a person he could not identify in the chapel pouring fuel," that "he heard Mark Wendell upstairs shout that the building was on fire," and that "Wendell shouted again, 'light the fire!'" To this we could add the mass of evidence that emerged from the fire scene. I have dealt with some of this in *The Branch Davidians of Waco* and again need not go into detail here. It includes clear, incontrovertible evidence that fire accelerants had been poured in a number of locations and that, tellingly, at least three separate fires started independently of each other in such locations. (One could of course counter argue that the fuel was spread inside Mount Carmel and the three fires set by agents other than Branch Davidians. However, there is not a shred of evidence to support any such view and consequently, short of invoking a *deus ex machina* in the form of a lying and evidence-destroying FBI, the plot of that counter story is wholly implausible.)

However, let us return to the main point of Wessinger's argument, which is that the FBI purposely manipulated Branch Davidians into starting the fire that destroyed their community. The seriousness of this allegation should not be missed. Wessinger is not saying that the FBI agents were misinformed, negligent, slow on the uptake, bumbling, or in any other characteristic unable to deal with the situation that they faced. In fact, her argument is that the very opposite is true. Some key and decision-making figures in the FBI, she contends, had got to grips with Branch Davidian theology and knew full well that if the community was placed under sufficient pressure they would self-destruct by fire. Using that knowledge the FBI then set about steering the Branch Davidians towards that course of action. Thus, what happened at Waco was not the result of FBI failure, but success. The FBI achieved their goal of getting the Branch Davidians to set fire to their home, destroy themselves, and incinerate their own children. What happened at Waco was, in effect, mass murder.

This is quite a charge. It attributes calculated murderous intent to real, potentially identifiable, flesh-and-blood individuals. If I were to make such a charge myself I would want some pretty cast-iron evidence before daring to speak so ill of my fellow human beings. Doubtless there are people in the world who would behave as Wessinger charges and in a cold, calculated way plan the systematic destruction of a

community of men, women, and children. But it is not a charge I for one would want to make lightly. Such reservation makes it all the more surprising, then, when I read in Wessinger's contribution that it is based upon "circumstantial evidence." What is more, having looked into at least some of that "circumstantial evidence" I am of the view that it is only marginally less flimsy than is Wright's possibly knocked-over Coleman lantern.

Close readers of Wessinger's text will probably have spotted a number of internal inconsistencies between her central hypothesis and some of the material she herself presents. I do not want to dwell upon those in detail now since space is limited and there are more important matters to address. However, as an example I suggest that the following two points are inconsistent, but that both are put forward by Wessinger in her article:

1. That the complete physical destruction of the Branch Davidians, the Mount Carmel complex and the evidence it held was a goal towards which decision-making FBI agents knowingly and purposely worked.
2. That when the fire started no less central a person than Dick Rogers, commander of the Hostage Rescue Team, "frantically" called for fire trucks while other agents placed themselves in danger by pulling one Branch Davidian away from the fire and searching for others in what must have been the perilous conditions of an underground tunnel.

But to return to the main flow of this response: what is the "circumstantial evidence" on the basis of which Wessinger feels confident enough to make charges of the magnitude she does? To repeat, and this point must be kept clearly in mind as we read Wessinger's work, we are not looking for evidence that the FBI simply mishandled the situation or engaged in tactics that were inappropriate, stupid, ill-informed, or perhaps even illegal. We are not even looking for evidence that a particular action or set of actions on the part of the FBI drove the Branch Davidians into acting in the way that they did. It is not incompetence, foolishness, or heavy-handedness that Wessinger alleges, but calculated, informed manipulation driven by wilful, murderous intent. If Wessinger's argument as stated here is to be accepted, then, what needs to be presented is precise evidence that, to quote her, "*decision-making* FBI agents knowingly applied extreme pressure to the Branch Davidians to prompt them to act on their theology of martyrdom." (I have added the emphasis since, as will emerge, this defining adjective turns out to be important and I ask the reader to keep it in mind.)

There is no space here to subject to detailed scrutiny every point of evidence that Wessinger presents in support of her case; readers will have to check it out for themselves. However, as an example of possible generic weakness let us for a moment consider Wessinger's reference to

the report of Alan Stone. Those who have read Wessinger's article in this issue will be aware that she relies fairly heavily on his testimony.

According to Wessinger, Stone "confirms that FBI behavioural scientists and negotiators were well aware of the implications of the Branch Davidians' apocalyptic theology of martyrdom, and they warned the on-site commanders and other FBI officials that lives would be lost if a second assault was carried out." I suggest that this is a misreporting, or at the very least an imbalanced, selective use of Stone's report to the point of being seriously misleading. This is so since it gives the clear and distinct impression that, according to Stone, the FBI in general—that is the "behavioural scientists and negotiators" and the "on-site commanders and other FBI officials" whom they warned—were all "well aware" of Branch Davidian apocalyptic theology and the likely consequences of a second assault. But that is not what Stone says. It is, rather, much more complex.

Importantly, for example, Stone concludes that "negotiators and tactical units were at times operating independently in an uncoordinated and counterproductive fashion"; the implication is that while some in the organization may have come to a view on the nature of the group with which they were dealing and the possible ways in which they might react to external pressure, there was a breakdown in communication with those on the ground. Indeed, Stone says as much right at the very outset of his report: "I have concluded," he writes, "that decision-making at Waco failed to give due regard to the FBI experts who had the proper understanding of how to deal with an unconventional group like the Branch Davidians." He states in another place that "it seems clear that at Waco, the FBI was suffering from information overload, if from anything." This surely all suggests that the FBI decision-makers on the ground were ignorant rather than informed. They were facing an information overload, which perhaps explains why due regard was not paid to advice from the behavioural unit, and were in any case "at times operating independently in an uncoordinated and counterproductive fashion."

But it gets even more significant. We must remember that according to Wessinger Stone's report provides evidence supportive of her contention that decision-making FBI agents were well aware that if they assaulted the Branch Davidian complex again it would drive the community to self-destruction. How, then, are we to understand Stone's comment that Koresh's responses to certain questions "provided no guidance to the more pertinent question: 'What will you do if we tighten the noose around the compound in a show of overwhelming power, and using CS gas, force you to come out?'" Or how are we to understand Stone's reference to the "many times negotiators asked Koresh and the others in the compound whether they planned suicide," and the fact that "Koresh's assurances that they would not kill themselves" are

documented? There are other problems as well. The “FBI negotiators” referred to by Wessinger in her summary turn out to be two Special Agents (Pete Smerick and Mark Young) rather than FBI negotiators in general, while even having read the document several times I can find no reference at all to anyone warning anyone else “that lives would be lost *if a second assault was carried out*” (emphasis added).

I could go on but such seems unnecessary. Already significant conclusions can be drawn and, to be clear, I am suggesting that those conclusions have not so much to do with what Stone says (though they are surely important) but rather with the way Wessinger is handling her material. Wessinger, I suggest, has quite improperly made reference to Stone’s report in a way that makes it sound as though it supports her case. It does not. In fact, it could be argued, though I will not take the time to do so now, that if anything Stone’s report militates against rather than supports Wessinger’s hypothesis that “certain FBI agents knowingly order[ed] actions in an assault, which they were aware would push some of the Branch Davidians to act to fulfil prophecies that the community’s members would die in a fire.” In short Wessinger’s handling of this second-hand evidence, and let us not forget that it is any case “circumstantial,” (and I fail absolutely to see how it can be termed “abundant”) strikes me as highly defective.

The next several paragraphs of the article go over predictable territory and make similar claims. I am in fundamental disagreement with most of what is there stated. Again it would be good to have the space to explain why, but such space is not available. I note only that in each case I could, and in my book do, present evidence that does not accord to the assertions that are made. For example, Wessinger’s claim that the Branch Davidians hoped that the demise of the community would not happen at that time may be supported by the one reference she gives, but it is far from the whole story. Early on Koresh was clearly of the view that the time for his return to the Father had come and that the community too was “getting out of here” (by which he meant being taken to heaven).⁹ Much later Schneider could talk of how he was “coming back” to wring the necks of the FBI, which means he must have been planning to go somewhere.¹⁰ The “strong instinct for physical survival” is not supported by the suicide plan of which Vickie Hollingsworth and Kathy Schroeder later spoke¹¹ or indeed by the fact that many Branch Davidians died of self-inflicted gunshot wounds or, in the case of one three-year old child, a stab wound to the chest.¹² Similarly, as noted above, Wayne Martin’s instinct for physical survival was not strong at all. And this cannot all be explained as being clustered right at the beginning or the end of the siege. Wessinger herself refers to Koresh’s statement on 16 March to the effect that “My work is finished. I don’t need to hang around here. I’ve already been shot, understand? I’ve been rejected . . . All I need to do is cover it, cock the pistol back, have my

thumb on the trigger and my mind on the Psalms." And, perhaps most forcefully, anyone who has seen the video recording made inside Mount Carmel during the siege and witnessed Yvette Fagan calmly reminding "the children" of the story of Daniel and his friends Shadrach, Mesach, Abednego while also stating, equally calmly, "I'm not going to die in vain" may have cause to doubt that, in Wessinger's words, "they [the Branch Davidians] hoped it [the baptism by fire] could be put off into the future."¹³

Wessinger then presents a brief account of the ATF raid beginning with "It has been accepted that ATF commanders' motivation to carry out the 'dynamic entry' assault on the residence on 28 February was a desire to generate good publicity to justify the ATF's continued existence and obtain funding in an upcoming congressional budget hearing." Actually, I for one do not accept that, but will leave that point aside for now.¹⁴ None of this in any case relates to the issue of the fire. There follows an account of Koresh's immediate concern to communicate his theology in the aftermath of the events of 28 February. In the course of this Wessinger refers to James Tabor in support of her statement that "The Fifth Seal in Revelation 6:9-11 . . . was studied by FBI agents after they took over the siege." Again we check Wessinger's source, and what we find is much less helpful of her case than she leads her reader to suspect and again cannot but leave us with a serious question with regard to how Wessinger is using her material. What Tabor in fact states is that:

[An] FBI agent told us how they had been frantically reading through the Book of Revelation in the Gideon Bibles in their hotel rooms. This image struck me as almost comical, but at the same time frightening. The agent also told us they found the Book of Revelation, and David Koresh's extended biblical monologues, wholly incomprehensible. He asked, "What is this about the seven seals?"¹⁵

I have two points to make here: first, Wessinger has, in my view, again given quite the wrong impression of what her source is saying by in effect citing him to support her view that that FBI understood Koresh's theology and the possible implications thereof. (I invite the reader to read again how Wessinger is using Tabor at this point and consider if my criticism is a fair one.) Second, Tabor (like Stone) actually supports the opposite case to the one that Wessinger has put forward: according to him this FBI agent "found the Book of Revelation, and David Koresh's extended biblical monologues, wholly incomprehensible." Why Wessinger thinks that this supports rather than undermines her general thesis that FBI agents "understood the Branch Davidians' apocalyptic theology of martyrdom and manipulated the Branch Davidians to achieve the demise of the community" is not clear to me at all.

As Wessinger notes, Koresh promised that if a tape recording of his teachings was played on KRLD radio he would come out. The fact that

the tape was played is potentially significant, for had the thought of engineering the self-destruction of the community entered FBI heads by this early stage they would presumably have refused to play the tape and started their campaign of pressure immediately. After all, Koresh had promised to come out and if Wessinger is right that was not what the FBI wanted. However, to be fair, Wessinger does not tell us when she thinks the plan to engineer a mass suicide was hatched, but presumably it was not until after this point.

The next paragraph in Wessinger's paper is, in my view, irrelevant to her argument except that it potentially introduces the thought, quite improperly it seems to me, that even at this early stage FBI negotiators were beginning to ignore positive signs. She correctly notes that later, in 1994, two surviving Branch Davidians testified that the plan for the promised exit (scheduled for 2 March) was in fact a suicide plan. Koresh would be carried out on a stretcher and some Branch Davidian men would start shooting at the FBI with the intention of drawing their fire and being killed. The women of the community would blow themselves up and those who would have the grenades to do so had been arranged. None of this was known on 2 March itself, of course. However, Wessinger then states that if such a suicide plan was in place, then the order not to exit but rather to wait was a "positive development"—which it surely was. The planned-for mass suicide had at least been postponed. How any of this is relevant to her argument is not clear. The FBI had no access to this alleged suicide plan until well after the events. At this stage, all they knew was that Koresh had promised to come out if the tape was played. The tape had been played. He had not come out. The FBI's view then, summarized by Wessinger, that the failure to come out as promised illustrated "how he was a manipulative con man who could not be trusted to keep his word" was not entirely unreasonable given the information available to them at the time. Since they did not know that the planned exit was actually a suicide plan they could possibly have read the order to "wait" as anything other than a breaking of a promise. There was no way that they could have seen it as a "positive development."

Wessinger's section entitled "Evidence that FBI Agents Understood Koresh's Theology during the Siege" is where the heart of her argument ought to find its support. If her contention that "at least certain FBI agents knowingly order[ed] actions in an assault, which they were aware would push some of the Branch Davidians to act to fulfil prophecies that the community's members would die in a fire," it is in this (relatively short) section that her evidence should be located. I cannot find it.

What I learn, instead, is that according to Wessinger the FBI had plenty of time to study the theological statements of David Koresh and of other Branch Davidians. They may have had the time to study such theological statements, but perhaps they did not do so. And if they did perhaps, like the agent to whom Tabor refers, the others too "found the

Book of Revelation, and David Koresh's extended biblical monologues, wholly incomprehensible." At worst this is incompetence, not murderous intent. Or it might have been, as one FBI negotiator told me, that a basic principle in such situations is that you do not debate delusions with those who hold to them. That may be the wrong approach, but it is not one born of homicidal manipulation. From Wessinger's article, we also learn that "FBI agents had the opportunity to consult Bible scholars who understood the implications of the Fifth Seal for the siege at Mount Carmel, but their advice was ignored." This seems to me rather to militate against Wessinger's own thesis. If the FBI ignored "Bible scholars who understood the implications of the Fifth Seal for the siege at Mount Carmel," then it again suggests that the FBI remained in ignorance of these "implications." Hence I cannot see how ignoring appropriately informed "Bible scholars" supports Wessinger's argument that the fully-informed FBI used their knowledge of the implications of Branch Davidian apocalyptic theology to manipulate the group into an act of self-destruction. In fact it supports the opposite case, namely that the FBI did *not* understand Branch Davidian apocalyptic theology. Perhaps the FBI should have listened to the scholars Wessinger has in mind. Perhaps the FBI were wrong on this point. Perhaps they were negligent, foolish, or simply being high-handed. Stone actually says more or less the same thing when speaking of how "those responsible for ultimate decision making at Waco" who had expert advice available "disregarded those experts and tried to assert control and demonstrate to Koresh that they were in charge." But we must remember that this is not what Wessinger needs to prove. What she needs to show is not that the decision makers disregarded or ignored those experts (be they the FBI's own or "Bible scholars who understood the implications of the Fifth Seal for the siege at Mount Carmel") but that they listened and learned and on the back of it hatched a truly wicked plan. We need to see the evidence that the FBI decision-makers on the ground (unlike the frantic reader of the hotel Gideon Bible) knew full well the implications of Branch Davidian apocalyptic theology and armed with that knowledge purposely drove them to self-destruction. The fact that they did not consult these "Bible scholars" weakens rather than supports any such case.

Stone is cited again, but, in my view, to no purpose. I have already commented in general on this point above. I also find Wessinger's statement regarding the exit of the fourteen adults and twenty-one children problematic due to oversimplification. As I have argued in the book there is a very clear pattern discernable here: in an effort to shore-up the remnant, Koresh sent out principally the elderly and the young (apart from this own children) or those who showed signs of weakness to the cause.¹⁶

We next learn that "the surveillance audiotapes reveal several conversations among the Branch Davidians that would have alerted FBI

agents that the Branch Davidians were prepared to die, possibly in a fire, if they were assaulted again.” I find no evidence to support such a contention. I agree that there are statements on the such audiotapes which, with hindsight, indicate that death by fire was on the agenda. Wessinger and I can agree on that. What she will need to show, however, and she has not done so in my view, is that in the thick of this siege “decision-making” FBI agents had picked up on those references and from them had figured out precisely (and it will need to be precisely if Wessinger’s thesis is to hold) that “the Branch Davidians were prepared to die, possibly in a fire, *if they were assaulted again*” (emphasis added). It is not a matter of, as Wessinger puts it, “speculat[ing] that perhaps FBI agents on the ground—despite the advice of the FBI’s behavioral scientists and their best negotiators—did not understand the implications of the Branch Davidians.” Such would be to put the burden of proof on entirely the wrong shoulders and to ask that a negative be proved. It is rather a matter of showing on the basis of hard evidence that despite the “information overload” of which Stone speaks, despite the fact that, as Wessinger points out, “‘Bible scholars who understood the implications of the Fifth Seal for the siege’ had been ignored,” despite the fact that the FBI agent to whom Tabor spoke “found the Book of Revelation, and David Koresh’s extended biblical monologues, wholly incomprehensible,” and despite the fact that, according to Stone at least, Koresh’s responses to certain questions “provided no guidance to the more pertinent question: ‘What will you do if we tighten the noose around the compound in a show of overwhelming power, and using CS gas, force you to come out?’” the FBI decision-makers had somehow overcome these obstacles to their ignorance and now knew full well both the content and implications of Koresh’s complex apocalyptic theology. That has not been shown and no evidence has been provided.

Wessinger also needs to tell us who these “best negotiators” were or at least provide some evidence that some negotiators understood Branch Davidian theology and the implications thereof. The closest Wessinger gets to this is to cite Bob Ricks, who, she says, “made a statement that indicated that FBI agents *did* understand the salient points of Branch Davidian theology.” She then quotes Ricks: “He has to be slain, and there has to be a sufficient number of martyrs—those of his followers also have to be slain.” I absolutely agree that this was a part of Branch Davidian teaching. But what might those words mean “he has to be slain?” Could anyone reasonably conclude from such wording that the Branch Davidians were prepared themselves to set fire to Mount Carmel in an act of millennial martyrdom *if they were assaulted again*? Being slain is not the same as dying by one’s own hand. Wessinger could presumably counterargue that this statement from Ricks was but the tip of the iceberg and that it is simply illustrative of the fact that the FBI decision-makers were studying Branch Davidian

theology. As I have made clear above, I do not think there is any evidence to support this view, but for the sake of argument let us presume so. What could we expect them to make of it? I have spent many, many hours, indeed doubtless many weeks and probably months when it is all counted up, listening to Branch Davidian tapes and reading transcripts of their theological teachings. It is not the easiest thing to get to the bottom of, even for one who has the benefit of four degrees in theology including both a masters and a doctorate from the University of Oxford specifically in Biblical studies. Even the professional sociologist of religion Stuart Wright, who I suspect has spent rather more time studying the Branch Davidians than did any FBI agent during the siege, thinks Branch Davidian theology is best left to those "better trained in biblical exegesis and hermeneutics" than he. I am not at all convinced that FBI agents would have been able to get to the bottom of Branch Davidian theology in the time available and under the circumstances in which they were working. Wessinger's, and my, study of Branch Davidian materials over several years may have yielded something of what they believed, but that is not to say that the FBI could reasonably be expected similarly to get to grips with it between 28 February and 19 April 1993.

So we carry on. We learn that the FBI neglected to follow up on a possible lead involving Phillip Arnold, but instead had decided not to pay any more attention to the Branch Davidians' "Bible babble." Again I cannot see that this strengthens Wessinger's case. I could explain why not, but only at the cost of being repetitive. I simply ask the reader to look again at Wessinger's article and ask the question, "What actual evidence has Wessinger presented to support the view that the FBI decision makers had at least a reasonable grasp of Branch Davidian theology and its implications, including that they would be prepared to die by fire *if they were assaulted again* and that at least some in the FBI used this knowledge to engineer an act of mass suicide/murder of innocent children?" I suggest that there is none. There is an appearance of some to sure, for example, the references to Stone and Tabor (and Rawlings below), but, as I have shown, Wessinger has not handled this secondary material particularly well and while she may have given the impression of there being a solid documentary foundation to her case in fact even the little excavation beneath the surface that we have had the space to undertake here suggests that it is in fact a house built upon sand.

Reading the rest of this section of Wessinger's article I cannot find any other evidence in support of her case. What she catalogues, and I have no dispute with it, though we disagree on the importance one can attach, is that there were indications on the negotiation tapes and the surveillance tapes that the Branch Davidians expected to die. I find no evidence at all that FBI agents utilized any such statements to come up with a plan purposely to drive the Branch Davidians to self-destruction.

Much of remainder of the article is largely unrelated to Wessinger's main contention and I will not address it. We hear again of CS gas and the truly terrible events of 19 April, but I see nothing here that is inconsistent with the FBI's stated claim that the reason they poured in the gas was to flush out the Branch Davidians in the belief that once the gas began to make life truly uncomfortable the mothers would grab the children and exit. FBI negotiator Byron Sage has stated publicly that they got this wrong. With hindsight they surely did. As I argue in *The Branch Davidians of Waco*, maternal instinct did kick in, but it directed the mothers to keep their children safe inside the "ark" rather than sending them out into the hands of the wicked Babylonians.¹⁷

The article finishes with a number of references to further apparent evidence that readers will have to explore for themselves. However, I would urge caution before accepting any of it as being supportive of Wessinger's case. The statements from Rawlings (as filtered through the *Dallas Morning News* reporter Lee Hancock), for example, amount to nothing of significance. We already know that FBI agents were listening to conversations from inside Mount Carmel during the siege and during the hours leading up to the fire. As noted above, Byron Sage himself is on record as stating that the plan was to exert pressure through the application of tear gas to the point that maternal instinct kicked in and the mothers picked up the children and exited. The FBI got that wrong and Sage has said so openly. If there were "many more" surveillance devices in addition to the ones for which the FBI have released audiotapes, what more might they have revealed in addition to what we already, with hindsight, know? Wessinger has already stated that there is enough information on the existing tapes to indicate that the Branch Davidians were prepared to die for their faith. I am in agreement with that. But of course there may not in fact be any more tapes anyway. All we have is Rawlings' statement to go on and how he would have known that there were is not made clear. Even the questions Wessinger asks of these at best putative tapes are so heavily loaded as to be rhetorically questionable: "Is it possible that the unreleased surveillance and negotiation audiotapes would reveal that FBI agents had ample information concerning the Branch Davidians' apocalyptic theology, and thus would reveal how agents manipulated the Branch Davidians into acting on their commitment to martyrdom?" she asks. The answer could quite easily be "No." What we have here is not an argument based upon evidence but a loaded question asked of a non-existent source.

Mistakes were made that cost lives and some of those lives were surely innocent. There were miscalculations and incorrect assumptions. But let us remember, Wessinger is not alleging that the FBI made mistakes; she is alleging that they knew full well what the result of the 19 April action would be and that they wilfully and intentionally pushed the Branch

Davidians into a corner "in order to achieve the demise of the community." Despite initial appearances I fail to find any firm evidence in her article to support such a contention.

THE FIRE

So far in this article I have been principally concerned to respond to the work of Wessinger and Wright.¹⁸ In the remainder of this paper I will outline my own views on the issue of the fire at Mount Carmel.

As I have stated several times already I take the view that it was the Branch Davidians themselves who started the burning. I do not intend to open up that debate again here but simply point the reader to my book where I outline it in considerable detail and, more importantly, reference the evidence. Among such evidence are the recordings of the Branch Davidians speaking in the minutes running up to the first sightings of the flames. As I note in the book, these recordings are not as clear as they might be, but one can, it seems, hear such statements as "I want a fire round the back" and "Keep that fire going." I have challenged Wright before to address this evidence and explain how I might be wrong. There are three possible lines of enquiry in this regard. (1) Have I mistranscribed the tapes? (2) Have I transcribed them correctly, but misunderstood what they mean? Or (3) has this evidence been manufactured after the event to point the finger at the Branch Davidians? It is this sort of evidence that cannot be ignored and in the absence of any such counterargument I remain convinced that the account of things I set out in my book is basically correct.

There are, of course, those who would see some of this evidence as being manufactured and/or the interpretation of the apparent facts driven by a desire to shift the blame for the fire away from government forces and onto the sectarians. My own view is that such a reconstruction is wrong. I would argue also that not only does it fly in the face of the evidence, but is in a sense disrespectful of the faith of the Branch Davidians. Theirs was a faith that was so strong that even the prospect of death itself was confidently faced. The Branch Davidians died trusting only that God would do what they believed God had said he would do, and that it was a part of the plan that they must die. To portray this community as being on the receiving end of a malicious, indeed murderous, onslaught on the part of the FBI is to afford them a victim status that it is doubtful they would have wished to have. Similarly, while the Branch Davidians have surely been used as a political football, it must again be unlikely that as they faced death on 19 April it was this "after-life" they were hoping for. To repeat, then, no further attempt in this article is made to enter into the debate on how the fire started. I have set out my views in the book and provided reference to the mass of evidence upon which my views are based. The reader is invited to examine

that evidence and make up his or her own mind. In summary either the Branch Davidians set fire to Mount Carmel or we are dealing with a cover-up of truly monumental proportions the scale of which would need to be not just breathtaking but lie beyond the bounds of credibility. Ockham's Razor has not dulled with the passing of centuries and there is a very simple explanation of the known facts: the Branch Davidians set fire to Mount Carmel. Any other explanation introduces complexity where none is needed.

The question addressed from this point on, then, is not "how" the fire started but "why?" Why was it that a community of perfectly rational individuals came to the conclusion that it was better to incinerate themselves than go out into the arms of the waiting FBI? The reality of that decision should not be underestimated. As noted above, Clive Doyle stated that it was Wayne Martin's view that rather than take the option of exiting the building the Branch Davidians should "wait on God." Even in the face of billowing smoke and the onset of the fire Martin chose to stay put. "Why?" one has to ask. Why did Martin (and others) not take the easy route and get out? What was holding him, if not Doyle, back? Some would say it was FBI guns or purposefully blocked exits, although there is not a shred of evidence to support such hypotheses. If exits were blocked by FBI actions they may not have been blocked purposely and in any case Doyle's escape and recollection of Martin preferring to "wait on God" rather than follow his fellow believer out of the building militates against it. Similarly, if the FBI were shooting at the Branch Davidians to keep them inside, how does one explain the fact that nine exited and did so without being shot?

Instead, I argue that what kept the Branch Davidians inside Mount Carmel as it burned was a force more powerful than (hypothetical) FBI bullets, namely a total and absolute conviction that what was happening was the playing out of biblical prophecy and that the Branch Davidians had to stay put and be faithful unto the end.

DAVIDIANS AND BRANCH DAVIDIANS

The Branch Davidians go back a long way. As movements develop, of course, leaders often take them in radical new directions, and Koresh certainly did that. The most obvious example is his "New Light" doctrine, which basically meant he could have sex with any woman (or, in some cases, very young girls) he wished, even if they were married to other men.¹⁹ The evidence is, however, that on many issues there was consistency. Here we are concerned with only one line of doctrinal continuity, namely (as the name of the "Davidians" and then the "Branch Davidians" indicates), the belief in the coming of the end-time Kingdom of David. In fact, it is really only one part of that general belief that is in focus now. The precise issue is the Branch Davidian expectation that

they would enter that Kingdom through a particular portal—a baptism by fire.

It could be argued that expecting something to happen is not the same as taking action to bring that thing about. Just because it can be easily and copiously documented that the Branch Davidians expected that they would go through fire en route to the new Kingdom does not in itself prove that they were responsible for the fire of 19 April. Such a position is entirely reasonable. There is no necessary connection between expectation and event. However, as has been noted above, the evidence that the Branch Davidians were themselves responsible for the fire is already firmly in place. That evidence is hard and not in any way influenced or affected by any Branch Davidian expectation, or lack of it, regarding the coming of an eschatological fire. However, in addition to the hard physical evidence, and in an attempt to explain the theoretical framework in which it can be seen (i.e., the “why” not the “how”), I will show that this was a community that fully expected to die, and to go through flames in the process. What needs to be explored is the extent to which documented Branch Davidian theological theory concerning end-time events and observed facts relating to the start of the fire are not only in accord but causally linked. My own view is that the probable (final) cause of the fire can be established as convincingly as its probable (efficient) cause. And it is a probable (final) cause that I think the dead Branch Davidians would themselves be rather more willing to accept than those that others have provided for them.

In a sense, the Branch Davidians were vindicated and proved right. The fire that came had long been expected and was designed not to destroy them but to prepare them for their place in the end-time Kingdom. It was a victory not a defeat. They had the courage to set fire to their home and thereby bring on the long-expected, life-giving flames. They were looking for a literal baptism by fire and that is what happened. The Branch Davidians probably went to their deaths more confident in the prophecies than fearful of external threat. They remained faithful even unto death (cf. Rev. 2:10). Where they are now cannot be proved or disproved. Non-believers may well have less than full confidence that those who died at Mount Carmel have been given white robes and that their souls currently rest under the altar awaiting the opening of the sixth seal (cf. Rev. 6:11). However, the thought-world of the Branch Davidians is not the thought-world of the academic, who can sojourn in it only with considerable effort. The argument here, then, is not that the Branch Davidians set fire to Mount Carmel out of sheer desperation in reaction to the external pressure placed upon them by the FBI, but that the community self-destructed in a calm and rational way, and did so in keeping with their established beliefs. There is an argument (though neither Wright nor Wessinger put it forth here) that the Branch Davidians would not have set fire to

Mount Carmel on 19 April had the FBI not initiated the events of that day. That may be so. This is not to say, however, that the Branch Davidians could have been talked out of Mount Carmel once the siege was in place. As I say in the book, given the stakes any tactic, including getting James Tabor and Phillip Arnold to talk to Koresh by telephone, might have been worth a go. However, I am fundamentally of the opinion that very soon after 28 February, and perhaps even before that, Koresh had determined to bring on the Apocalypse. The “what” was a given, even if the events of the siege and the tactics of the FBI affected the “when.”

VICTOR HOUTEFF AND THE BAPTISM BY FIRE

The Davidian Seventh-day Adventists (initially known as the “Shepherd’s Rod” [Micah 6:9]) began with the prophetic call of Victor Houteff, a Bulgarian immigrant to the United States who believed that it was his role to call out of the existing Seventh-day Adventist Church the 144,000 (Rev. 7:1; 14:1, 3) who were faithful to the point of “hearing the Rod and him who hath appointed it.” Fundamental to the Shepherd’s Rod movement was the belief that in the last days God would re-establish the Kingdom of David. The belief was not formulated immediately by Houteff, but by 1937 the basics were in place: there would be a literal Kingdom in a literal Israel which would be ruled over (initially at least) by an antitypical²⁰ King David. This end-time figure was not Christ. Indeed, it was the responsibility of this “King David” and those in the kingdom to issue the call to the “great multitude” (Rev. 7:9) and so gather the elect in preparation for Christ’s final return.

Victor Houteff’s own views on the coming of a fire through which the faithful would have to pass on their way to the kingdom are complex but reasonably clear.²¹ Houteff argued that there would be three points when fire would be used by God to bring about his purposes. Working backwards, the last of these is the fire that destroys the wicked at the end of the millennial period (Rev. 20:9-10).²² Next comes the fire into which the Beast and the False Prophet are cast as the millennial fire begins (Rev. 19:20). The first, however, and the one that is of direct relevance here, is the fire that comes at the establishment of the premillennial Davidian Kingdom.

In the context of this article it is important to understand the distinction that Houteff drew between the dawn of the millennial period and the establishment of the Davidian kingdom. In essence, Houteff argued that the Davidian kingdom, the establishment of which was a necessary precursor to the coming of Christ and the start of the millennium, would be set up once the Davidians had accomplished their task, which was to call out from the Seventh-day Adventist Church the literal 144,000 faithful believers who would “hear the Rod” (i.e., accept

Houteff's message.) These are the 144,000 of Rev. 7:4 who are to be "sealed." At this point, violence enters the equation, for once the 144,000 have been called out (Rev. 18:4), the rest of the Seventh-day Adventists are literally slain and the Davidians move to Israel to be ruled over by the end-time King David. That community will then issue the "loud cry" (Rev. 14:18) to the rest of humanity which will result in the coming in of the "great multitude" (Rev. 7:9; 19:6); and when that task is done, and only then, will Christ return and the millennial period begin.

The establishment of the kingdom, then, will come about through an extremely violent rite of passage, namely the slaughter of all Seventh-day Adventists who have not "heard the Rod." Potentially importantly for the later Branch Davidian understanding of the role of fire in the eschatological plans of God, Houteff argued that fire would be a factor at this point. It must be remembered that what is in view here is the point at which the Kingdom is established—a premillennial and very much this worldly event.

A key text for Houteff is Isaiah 66:15-20. Quoted in whole or in part many times in his voluminous writings, the most significant sections read:

For, behold, the Lord will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by his sword will the Lord plead with all flesh: and the slain of the Lord shall be many . . . For I know their works and their thoughts: it shall come, that I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come, and see my glory. And I will set a sign among them, and I will send those that escape of them unto the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, that draw the bow, to Tubal, and Javan, to the isles afar off, that have not heard my fame, neither have seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the Gentiles. . . .

Houteff thought that this passage relates to the time when the 144,000 would be gathered in readiness for the taking of the gospel to the world. This would also be the time of the slaughter described in Ezekiel 9. It is also at this time that the Lord will come "with fire" to rebuke "with flames" and "by fire" to plead with all flesh. The Seventh-day Adventists that "escape of them," i.e., the 144,000 that are sealed, are then used as missionaries to the rest of humanity.

According to Houteff, then, the events of Isaiah 66:15-20 will happen as the 144,000 are gathered. Fire will come to destroy the unfaithful. However, the fire will also do something else: it will purify the people who do escape it, and so be the means by which the 144,000 are made ready for the work ahead. This is an important point that ought not to be missed: Houteff expected that one day the faithful would be cleansed by fire ahead of entry into the new millennial kingdom.

Such a scheme comes across even more clearly in Houteff's comments on the words of John the Baptist in Matt. 3:11-12:

I indeed [says John] baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire. Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Houteff notes that Jesus, like John, baptized only with water and not with the Holy Ghost and/or fire, and argued that therefore this prediction of the coming of one who would baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire must refer to someone other than Jesus.²³ Houteff was very clear on this point. The Davidians were now preaching the antitypical message of the antitypical John the Baptist and there would be an antitypical baptism too: a baptism in the Holy Ghost and with fire. And since, according to Houteff, "the proper form of baptism is by immersion, then those who are baptized with the Holy Ghost must be covered with the Holy Ghost. Likewise, for a person to be baptized with fire he must go through the fire."²⁴

Another important source of information regarding Houteff's views on the necessity of a fiery baptism is a sermon he preached on the issue on 24 April 1943.²⁵ Houteff wrote:

John said that He who would come after him would baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire. That baptism is still future. And if it is still future from John's time, it must be performed sometime before we get into the Kingdom, sometime when the Lord's fan is in His hand. We see, then, that after John's baptism comes the baptism of the Holy Ghost and fire; therefore John's baptism must be a symbol of another baptism, that of the Holy Ghost and fire. To find out more about what this means, let us turn to Mal. 3:1-3—"Behold, I will send My messenger, and he shall prepare the way before Me: and the Lord, Whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. But who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth? for He is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: and He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and He shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness." Jesus used this scripture to identify John as being the messenger who was to prepare the way for His coming. In studying these verses we find that there is no difference in the event mentioned here in Malachi and the event mentioned by John himself other than that another symbolism was used in Malachi. We went through the baptism of water to show that we were sinners and have received forgiveness, but this baptism is a baptism of fire which is to purify us and cause us to emerge as silver and gold. Yes, we have been

baptized with water, but when the Lord comes to His temple to baptize us with the purifying fire, who will be able to stand? This experience must come to take away the chaff and to save the wheat and to cleanse those who are God's people.²⁶

This is pretty plain, and there is more like it in Houteff's work. I have set some of this out in *The Branch Davidians of Waco* and the conclusion is clear: Victor Houteff, founder of the Davidian Seventh-day Adventists, believed and taught that during the final events of this world's history and in the run-up to the establishment of the premillennial Davidian kingdom and the entry of the faithful thereinto, fire would come upon the community to cleanse them. This would fulfil the prophecy of John the Baptist. Assuming doctrinal continuity (and in fact I argue that such continuity does not need to be assumed, for the trajectory on this specific point is reasonably clear) this belief in the fiery baptism to new life perhaps gives the context of some words of a resident of Mount Carmel, probably Scott Sonobe, picked up on a surveillance tape ahead of the fire. He said, "There's nothing like a good fire to bring us to birth."²⁷

THE RODENS AND THE BAPTISM OF FIRE

Victor Houteff died in 1955, but his prophetic status was not disputed by those who came after him in the tradition. His teaching did not, therefore, die with him. The leadership of the movement was taken by Houteff's wife Florence who famously predicted that her husband would be resurrected and the move to Israel would begin on 22 April 1959. About a thousand members of the movement turned up at Mount Carmel to witness the event.²⁸ As scholars of "failed" prophecies know, the fact that no such resurrection took place and the Davidians remained in Texas rather than moved to Israel is not itself a recipe for community collapse. That said, the debacle (more importantly, Florence Houteff's later stated view that she simply got it wrong, rather than seeking to explain the apparent failure in some other way), together with a number of other issues that arose, eventually led her to disband the movement. However, there was another potential leader waiting in the wings in the person of Ben Roden, who already for several years had been putting forth his "Branch" message. He gained a following and hence the Branch Davidians came into existence, inheritors of the Davidian Seventh-day Adventist tradition and on most points faithful to it.²⁹

The extent to which the Davidians under Florence Houteff and the Branch Davidians under Ben Roden kept alive the expectation that the birth of the Kingdom would be with fire is difficult to judge. However, when Ben Roden died (22 October 1978) his place was taken by his wife, Lois. Lois was Koresh's teacher and, despite her age (she would have been in her late sixties at the time) his lover. In Lois Roden's theology,

the place of fire, particularly the “baptism by fire” spoken of by Houteff that would come to cleanse the people of God, reemerges as a theme. This is certain. The evidence is clear.

Lois’ remarks on the fire issue are important. In fact, in the immediate context of what happened on 19 April 1993 Lois was doubtless a more significant and direct influence than Houteff. It was she and not Houteff who was Koresh’s tutor. Neither ought it be forgotten that she tutored others at Mount Carmel, including Clive Doyle.

One audio tape in particular is central to this discussion.³⁰ Unlike some of the Lois Roden tapes (of which there are a good number), the sound quality of this one is reasonable and hence one is not left guessing at what is being said. The tape lasts for about forty-five minutes and is concerned with one theme: the baptism by fire. In broad outline Lois picks up Houteff’s remarks relating to Matthew 3:11, which we have already noted above. She agrees that this passage cannot relate to the ministry of Jesus since Jesus did not baptize with fire. Therefore, this must be a prophecy of some event yet to come. Rather predictably, given Houteff’s own views (and “Brother Houteff,” as he is called, is still seen as the founding prophet of the movement), Lois teaches that this baptism by fire will come at the time when God cleanses Jerusalem. We must note very carefully, however, that at this point on the tape a key and extremely significant development in Branch Davidian thinking can be detected. Lois can be clearly heard asking those in the room with her, “And where is Jerusalem now?” The answer given is, “Here, Mount Carmel.” The words are plain on the tape. Lois agrees that this is the case and then follows up with a statement that *this* [my emphasis] Jerusalem must be cleansed by fire and that this will be the “gateway” into the new Kingdom. Any who want to go into the new kingdom, then, will have first to undergo the cleansing by fire. And the cleansing, like the water baptism of John, will need to be by immersion not sprinkling.

Hence, it is certain that Lois Roden, Koresh’s and Doyle’s teacher, taught that a baptism by immersion in fire was a prerequisite for entry into the long-expected Kingdom of David. In my book, I point to some further evidence to underline this, but will not take space to do so again here given the unambiguous nature of that I have already cited.³¹

KORESH’S BRANCH DAVIDIANS AND THE BAPTISM BY FIRE

There is, then, clear continuity thus far on the question of the coming of a fire through which the Davidians/Branch Davidians would have one day to pass as the gateway into the end-time Davidian Kingdom. None of this proves that the Branch Davidians set fire to Mount Carmel, of course, but it suggests a coherent framework within which the fact they did set fire to it may be seen. From this point on, the expectation

seems to become even more central, especially in the preaching of Steven Schneider, Koresh's most able evangelist.

It is fortunate for this research that about nine hours of Schneider's teaching have been preserved on tape.³² These are recordings of meetings he held in Manchester, England, in 1990, and the quality of the recordings is generally very good. Schneider was also a key player during the negotiations and he appears on the surveillance tapes. We therefore have quite a bit of information on Schneider's teaching and can reconstruct his views with reasonable confidence.

In summary, Schneider fully accepted the vision of the new, literal, "Davidian" kingdom that was about to be established. This kingdom, which was to be ruled over by the antitypical King David, was indeed at hand and as a clear indication of this Schneider saw in the person of David Koresh a final end-time messenger who had come to make known the secrets of what was about to come upon the world. It was his job, so Schneider believed, to reflect, as the moon reflects the light of the sun but has no light of its own, the biblical-interpretative truth that has now come via Koresh. It is not unreasonable, therefore, to take what Schneider says as an indication of Koresh's own views.

Fundamentally, Schneider thought that it was the (short-term) destiny of the remnant to die. This is not a "spiritual death" and may well come about as a part of the initial cleansing of, as Schneider was prone to put it, "God's bit of real estate." This "bit of real estate" is, of course, Mount Carmel, a place, an Ark into which a community is being gathered ahead of the apocalyptic storm and a place where there is a particularly important "young man" (Koresh). And this is no ordinary "young man," but rather the figure who was predicted in Zechariah 2:4, which reads, "And [an angel] said unto him, 'Run, speak to this young man, saying, 'Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein.'" We already know that by the time of Lois Roden "Jerusalem" could in fact mean "Mount Carmel," so it is important that we read on in Zechariah to the next verse: "For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her."

Like Houteff and Lois Roden, Schneider was pretty clear in his own mind on the question of how this cleansing of "Jerusalem" (Mount Carmel) would come about: it would be by fire. References to an eschatological fire that will burn away the chaff and purify the wheat are found several times on the Manchester tapes (especially on tapes 1, 2, and 8). It is also apparent from these same tapes that Schneider anticipates that there will come a time when he himself will have the attributes of fire, since he tells his hearers that they will one day hug their enemies, at which point the enemies will spontaneously combust. But that is post-resurrection. Schneider is clear on this. First, they must die.

This is probably the context in which one ought to see Schneider's now famous "charcoal briquette" statement. It is 18 April 1993, the day

before the fire, and Koresh seems to have been conducting some semi-secret meetings with those of the community whom he most trusts. Schneider comes down from his meeting with Koresh and on the surveillance tape one can hear the following:³³

- Unidentified Female: What's going on? Anything good?
Steve Schneider: Oh my G[od] . . . It may be scary.
Unidentified Male: Oh yeah baby.
Steve Schneider: God—what you've been hearing . . . we've been talking about that everyday. Now were making efforts—I think—he didn't say yet. We're making efforts to go back [en masse?].
Unidentified Male: I said . . .
Steve Schneider: You always wanted to be a charcoal briquette.

And a few sentences later (speaking of the FBI) Schneider says

- Steve Schneider: Wait till I get my scrawny hands on you scrawny neck[s]. I'm coming back and when I do you aren't gonna know where you're gonna be able to hide.

Although transcribing these tapes is a far from an exact science, it is worth noting that the words “You always wanted to be a charcoal briquette” and “I'm coming back” are pretty clear. In the first case, the implications are obvious. In the second, the very least we can say is that if Schneider can talk of “coming back” he must have been thinking that he was going somewhere.

Actually, it is not too difficult to piece together where Schneider thought he and others at Waco thought they were going or how they were going to get there. Again, the Manchester tapes are very helpful. Schneider was of the opinion that the Branch Davidians would have to go through the events of the fifth and sixth seals described in the book of Revelation. Under the fifth seal they would be killed and their souls go under the altar (Rev. 6:9ff), while under the sixth the people of God would “come back” as the eschatological army of Revelation 19 (i.e., those who follow after the rider on the white horse, a figure equated with Koresh himself).

Let us make no mistake; this is an exceptionally violent vision of things and from the Manchester tapes it is clear that Schneider, at least, looked forward with some pleasure to the time when he personally would slay the wicked. Hence, at one point one can hear him speak, with evident glee in his voice, of the time when those who see the eschatological army of the Lord coming to destroy them will “crap their pants” in fear of what is about to befall them (this he links to the reference of the “stink coming up” mentioned in Joel 2:2).

Given the theological framework evident in Schneider's recorded statements (especially the Manchester tapes,) it is not at all surprising that he seems not to have made any attempt to escape the fire. Before the flames or smoke got to him, he appears to have taken his own life using the method Branch Davidian Kiri Jewell once spoke of on live TV: he put a gun in his mouth and fired.³⁴ He was hence spared the pain of the flames, but probably went to his death in the full knowledge that the fire had been lit and that his body would soon be cleansed by it in preparation for his glorious return. He said very clearly to his Manchester audience that he had been anticipating death "for a while," but looked forward to the resurrection that was soon to follow. Indeed, at one point Schneider admits that he finds the thought of death frightening, but then states that since he knows he is destined to come back from it riding a white horse, it is "ok" with him. Actually, this reference to the "white horse" provides another way into Schneider's thinking: he surely has in mind the words of Revelation 6:2 and/or 19:11, which refer to a white horse and the rider thereof. In Branch Davidian sources these texts are themselves linked to Revelation 9:15-18:

And the number of the army of the horsemen were two hundred thousand thousand: and I heard the number of them. And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and them that sat on them, having breastplates of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone: and the heads of the horses were as the heads of lions; and out of their mouths issued fire and smoke and brimstone. By these three was the third part of men killed, by the fire, and by the smoke, and by the brimstone, which issued out of their mouths.

This was Schneider's vision of the future, and on the Manchester tapes he refers to these events a number of times. Under Koresh's leadership and the instructions of God he and the rest of the eschatological army will act as holy executioners destroying both wickedness and the wicked.

Little has so far been said relating to Koresh's own understanding of the eschatological fire, although it has been argued above that what Schneider said can be taken with reasonable confidence to be a reflection of Koresh's own views. This is so since it is important, I think, to establish that it was not Koresh alone who theologically primed this community to act in the way that they evidently did on 19 April 1993. The fire was not an aberration, a panic response to external pressure, neither was it the working out of a single crazed mind. It was rather a long-expected part of the plans of God for the cleansing of the remnant ahead of their holy work. We have seen that clearly in the work of Houteff, Lois Roden, and Schneider.

There are, however, a number of places in the surviving materials where Koresh's own views on the necessity of the temporary death of the faithful come across. Numerous times he talks of the events of the fifth and sixth seal of the book of Revelation and the point between them,

which is the point at which the dead faithful go under the altar to await vindication (Rev. 6:9-11). A week before the culmination of the siege Koresh's views were made plain to at least some of the members of the community via what appears to have been a particularly direct sermon he preached on the issue. The sermon itself has not survived. Fortunately, however, the substance of it can be gleaned from a summary of the sermon that was picked up on the surveillance tapes. The speaker is Scott Sonobe.

And that's because everybody here when . . . whether by tanks, fire, bullets, or being taken out of here as living wave sheaf. You know he says those four things, and I'm going "Well. You know there always hope—hope upon hope." And he brought that up too. But you know the whole thing really revolved around travailing—to give birth. That's for everybody here. Having given birth to an experience that is on and about the truth. He said whether we like it or not. You're impregnated. You're going to bring forth a baby because it's too late to turn back. That's basically what he said. "Ask any of these girls what it feels like to have a kid." He goes, "OK girls. Tell em. Do you feel like you're gonna make it when you have a kid?" And they go, "No. It feels like you're gonna die." He goes, "Exactly. You're flesh is gonna go through that. You're gonna get to the point where you see no way out—you know you're gonna die, and then your gonna trust God. Even if it's the last second before the tank hits you. Even if it's a foot away and you go God! Even if it's for a second—the last second before it runs you over, or you burn, or you get shot or whatever. You're gonna bring forth buddy."³⁵

The reference to the "living wave sheaf" here is interesting. This notion of a "wave sheaf" offering relates to the belief that some faithful Branch Davidians might be taken directly to heaven rather than having to pass through death.³⁶ But the escape from death would be supernatural; there is nothing here to suggest that Koresh thought that any in the community might continue to live on this earth. Being taken out "as a living wave sheaf" is not the same as walking out the door into the hands of the FBI. Most, however, would be called to die for their faith. That death may come in a variety of forms including by fire, though importantly in the context of what actually happened on 19 April that is not the only way in which it might come. Death must be embraced and in that moment before death there came the absolute dependence upon God and the opportunity for life-giving faith. As death tightened its grip, the individual could depend only upon God, trusting that what God said he would do he would indeed do.

A more complete understanding of what Koresh expected to happen can be gained from other sources and these point to the fact that Koresh did not see simply exiting Mount Carmel as what God had planned. For example, already on the KRLD tape he speaks of "going home," stating

"I am going home . . . I'm going back to my Father." In *The Branch Davidians of Waco* I have argued that Koresh thought he was in some way "ontologically related" to Jesus. Thus, while some others have emphasized the entirely correct point that "Christ/Messiah" simply means "anointed one," Koresh did not think he was "a" Christ, but rather that in him dwelt the Christ spirit. (The implied Christology is somewhat akin to that known as "dynamic monarchianism" in the early Church.) Hence, he could talk about how he had to be "struck again" (the first striking presumably being that he received on the cross) as predicted by Moses in Numbers 20:11: "Christ should not have to die again," he said, but the implication is that he would. Further, Koresh said, "As I said to my disciples in Matthew 24 where the carcass would be" [there will the eagles be gathered together]. This is only on the night of the ATF raid and already death is in the air. Koresh was clear: "We're in the fifth seal right now." But the sixth seal was about to open and he would be back. This is consistent here with the more easily accessible views of Schneider. The faithful will depart to God and then return in some other form and the departure would be violent.

There is much in the negotiation tapes that points in this direction also, one clear example of which comes on NT 75 (7 March.) Koresh refers to the Branch Davidian community as "the apple of God's eye" and says that the FBI negotiators are trying to poke God in the eye by assaulting his remnant. But God's patience will not last for ever. Rather God will

shake [his] hand upon them and they shall be a spoil to their servants. Like in the Book of Nahum. The belligerent power comes in to scatter, you know, and God's people were there at the mercy of God because they in—like in Psalms 18, they're too strong for us. What happens is God intervenes and makes an example of the belligerent power, brings that nation to an end and all other nations realize that there is a living and true God.³⁷

Koresh then relates this to Psalm 18.

Now, so we know the Father's going to rise up off his throne, don't we? Like in Psalms 18. Now, we know this man on the red horse was Christ before he became flesh. We know that the subject is God's still going to rule in Jerusalem, but one of the signs is going to be, he's going to be a wall of fire around about Jerusalem. We need to know about it ahead of time.

Seeking to pull this together one can see where things are going. The community is preparing to "get out of here"; but that departure will be one that comes with violence and death. It is at this time that God will be a "wall of fire" around Jerusalem.³⁸

In my book I provide further evidence of Koresh's thinking on end-time events and the coming of an extremely violent rite of passage by means of which the Branch Davidians would exit this world, only to return to wreak vengeance upon their persecutors.³⁹ In Koresh's teaching as we can reconstruct it, the place of fire is not as obviously pronounced as it is in the teaching of Schneider (who was very clear on the matter), but it is certainly there. It is worth nothing also that surviving Branch Davidian Marjorie Thomas stated that she remembered that Koresh had once stated in a Bible study that fire would "transcend"⁴⁰ the Branch Davidians to heaven during the "battle" with Babylon, and that, further, Koresh considered the United States government to be Babylon.⁴¹ And it was Kathy Schroeder who said that shortly after the events of 28 February Koresh told the community that he had had a dream in which it was revealed that they would burn in a great fire, their skin would burn off, and they would "transcend" to heaven.⁴² Finally, there is the report of the sign that was hung out of the window of Mount Carmel on 16 April, surely sanctioned by Koresh, reading "the flames await: Isaiah 13." It was this text that came to Schneider's mind as he looked out of the window on 18 April and saw the FBI clearing away obstacles from the front of the building.⁴³

CONCLUSION

In this article I have stated my view that the Branch Davidians set fire to Mount Carmel. The only way to deny this conclusion is to challenge the mass of evidence found in the *Danforth Report* and that would indeed be a monumental undertaking. It is not simply a matter of the interpretation of evidence, it is the evidence itself. We have noted, for example, that on the surveillance tapes there seems to be statements by Branch Davidians themselves indicating that a fire is being started. This evidence has to be dealt with. The same is true of the post-fire reports which indicate that fire accelerants had been spread in numerous parts of the complex and that three fires seem to have been started more or less simultaneously. It is true of course that it is theoretically possible that some of this evidence has been manufactured. But if so we really are dealing with a cover-up the scale of which needs to be recognized. It would draw in scores, perhaps hundreds, of individuals from literally across the world and involve not just covering things up and telling lies, but actually manufacturing hard evidence in an effort to point the finger at the Branch Davidians.

It seems to me therefore that Stuart Wright has brushed aside the plainly obvious. Catherine Wessinger, on the other hand, has got the question right: why the Branch Davidians do it? Wessinger's hypothesis seems to me to fail due to the lack of any hard evidence. My own suggestion, argued for more extensively in *The Branch Davidians of Waco* but

outlined here, is that the Branch Davidians were theologically primed to set fire to their home. The notion of a violent end-time rite of passage through which the community must go in order to enter the new Davidian kingdom is one that can be traced back to Houteff himself. Of course, one does not know the extent to which the Branch Davidians under Koresh studied the works of Houteff, but "Brother Houteff" (as he is called by Koresh) was certainly still held in high regard by the community. Koresh may have been the "Seventh Angel" of the book of Revelation but before him had come six others, one of whom was Houteff. More importantly, however, we know that Lois Roden picked up on Houteff's teaching and that she was David Koresh's teacher. There is a basic continuity here. Houteff looked for a cleansing baptism by fire, so did Lois Roden, so did Schneider, and so did Koresh.

As I have stated already, I am not saying that this proves the Branch Davidians started the fire at Mount Carmel. Expectation is not the same as action. However, that the Branch Davidians did in fact light the fire(s) can be proved beyond any reasonable doubt by hard forensic evidence. My argument then is that the "baptism by fire" teaching probably provides the context in which those who struck the match were working. At the very least, I suggest that it explains why Martin (and others) did not get out when he had the chance to do so. But I think it explains a lot more.

One cannot know what went through the minds of David Koresh, Steve Schneider, Scott Sonobe, and others as the fires were lit. Probably they were expecting God and not them to strike the match. But time was almost out. The wicked Babylonians were at the door. Loyalty to God was what was now called for. It was time for "an ultimate act of faith."⁴⁴

I doubt that we have heard the last of this sorry episode, and that is a good thing, for it is vitally important that we learn "the lessons of Waco."⁴⁵

ENDNOTES

¹ This count includes the deaths of two unborn children, Baby Gyarfas and Baby Gent.

² Kenneth G. C. Newport, *The Branch Davidians of Waco: The History and Beliefs of an Apocalyptic Sect* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006,) 278–306 *et passim*.

³ The use of the term "pyrotechnic" can itself be misleading. Strictly speaking, the word is an adjective meaning "relating to fireworks," but even if we allow it a broader semantic range it will always carry some sense of "fire," given that it is built upon the Greek word for such. It must be understood however that the pyrotechnic devices that were used at Waco were not "incendiary" devices. The

latter are specifically designed to start a fire; the former are rounds that use heat to disperse tear gas. Pyrotechnic devices of the kind used at Waco are known to be a fire hazard. However, as is noted in the article, while three pyrotechnic rounds were used at Waco there is no evidence that they were the cause of the fire.

⁴ Newport, *Branch Davidians of Waco*, 291.

⁵ *Final Report to the Deputy Attorney General Concerning the 1993 Confrontation at the Mount Carmel Complex, Waco, Texas* (November 8, 2008). A redacted version of this is available at <www.waco93.com/Danforth-finalreport.pdf>; however, I have been able to access much of this report in an unedited form, though from it I learn little other than the names of the persons involved.

⁶ Available online at <www.hope.ac.uk/media/clive.mpg>.

⁷ See Kenneth G. C. Newport, *Apocalypse and Millennium: Studies in Biblical Eisegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁸ While there is no space to explore them in detail here, there are other things in Wright's article that I find problematic. For example, we again have the now well-worn reference to the "key piece of missing evidence," namely the "right front door of the Davidian complex" which "mysteriously disappeared." What I have argued in the book is that in fact even if we had that door it would tell us nothing. It is completely irrelevant. Wright states that the door would have allowed investigators to determine whether it was the ATF or the Davidians who shot first. This is simply incorrect. The surviving left hand door had bullet holes going in both directions so we already know that both the Davidians and the ATF shot through it. If we imagine then that we had the right hand door and all the bullet holes in it went, say, inwards, all we would know is that the ATF fired more shots than the Davidians and vice versa. But we would still not know who fired *first*. And let us not forget that the missing door is just that: missing. It is not as though it was later found hidden in an FBI agent's garage. In summary this is a good example of a lost item which could not actually have told us anything being transformed by the slight of Wright's rhetorical hand into "a key piece of missing evidence" that has "mysteriously disappeared." But there is, to repeat, a mass of evidence that is not missing. And it all points in one direction: that the Branch Davidians set fire to Mount Carmel.

⁹ Newport, *Branch Davidians of Waco*, 320.

¹⁰ Newport, *Branch Davidians of Waco*, 295.

¹¹ Newport, *Branch Davidians of Waco*, 266–67.

¹² Newport, *Branch Davidians of Waco*, 360, and autopsy report, a copy of which is in my possession.

¹³ A copy of this tape is in my personal possession. Wessinger actually presents no evidence in support of this assertion though she refers to this tape in another context.

¹⁴ See further Newport, *Branch Davidians of Waco*, 234–60.

¹⁵ James D. Tabor, "The Waco Tragedy: An Autobiographical Account of One Attempt to Avert Disaster," in *From the Ashes: Making Sense of Waco*, ed. James R. Lewis (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1994), 16.

¹⁶ Newport, *Branch Davidians of Waco*, 269, 272.

¹⁷ Newport, *Branch Davidians of Waco*, 292–93.

¹⁸ The remainder of this article is in part a summary of the much more extended treatment of the subject in Newport, *The Branch Davidians of Waco*.

¹⁹ Newport, *Branch Davidians of Waco*, 199–202.

²⁰ The term "antitypical" is used here with a the particular meaning that it has in some forms of biblical interpretation. According to this method many things in the Old Testament are seen as "types" that point forward to something which is to come—the "antitype." And so, for example, the Davidians believed that the kingdom of David in the Old Testament was a type or "foreshadowing" of a kingdom which was to come at the end of the age.

²¹ For some of the basic information in this section I have drawn upon James Trimm, "Fire in Branch Davidian Theology," an unpublished and undated paper, a copy of which is in my possession. For a more detailed and fully referenced account of Houteff's theology, see Newport, *Branch Davidians of Waco*, 76–94.

²² To be precise, for Houteff the final fire does not come at the end of the 1000 years but after 1100 years from the millennial period's onset. The reason for this need not detain us here.

²³ See Victor Houteff, 12 *Symbolic Code*, 6-7, 4–5.

²⁴ Houteff, 12 *Symbolic Code* 6-7, 9.

²⁵ Houteff, "Baptism with Water, Baptism with Fire and the Lord's Supper," 12 *Symbolic Code* 6-7, 3–19.

²⁶ Houteff, 12 *Symbolic Code* 6-7, 9–10.

²⁷ Newport, *Branch Davidians of Waco*, 295. The statement is part of a conversation picked up on the surveillance tapes. Where I utilized these tapes in the book I compared the transcriptions given in the *Danforth Report* with, where they exist, transcripts completed by Waco researcher Mark Swett. I also listened to the tapes themselves and, occasionally, made some changes to Swett's transcriptions and/or those in the *Danforth Report*.

²⁸ For the sake of clarity it is worth pointing out that at this time the Davidians were still inhabiting the "old" Mount Carmel site. Already by 1952 a decision had been taken to sell off some of that land to finance a major evangelistic campaign and this process continued over the next several years. In 1957 the "new" Mount Carmel was purchased and it was that site that was the place of the events of 1993.

²⁹ There were, of course, other Davidians who did not join "the Branch." Some of that non-*Branch* Davidian history is explored in Kenneth G. C. Newport, "The Davidian Seventh-day Adventists and Millennial Expectation, 1959–2004," in Kenneth G. C. Newport and Crawford Gribben, eds., *Expecting the End: Millennialism in Social and Historical Context* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2006) 131–46.

³⁰ The tape was recorded on 21 March 1978 at the Mount Carmel Centre. A copy is in my possession. Copies of many of Lois Roden's tape are located in the Texas Collection at Baylor University.

³¹ See further, Newport, *Branch Davidians of Waco*, 166–67.

³² Copies of these tapes are in my personal possession.

³³ For sources and context, see Newport, *Branch Davidians of Waco*, 294–95.

³⁴ Danforth, *Final Report*, Appendix J, 50. The Kiri Jewell reference is to an appearance she made in March 1993 on *The Phil Donahue Show*. I have worked from a transcript of that appearance. See Newport, *Branch Davidians of Waco*, 299 n. 78.

³⁵ FBI Surveillance Tape, 13 April 1993, SA 72-14.

³⁶ As with so much of this material there is a complex typological interpretation of a biblical text underlying this remark. It need not detain us here. See further, Newport, *Branch Davidians of Waco*, 146–48.

³⁷ Where I utilized such tapes in the book I was heavily dependent in the initial trawl for material on transcripts provided by the United States government. However, a near full set of these tapes is also in my personal possession and I have been able to check many of the transcriptions.

³⁸ Cf. Zechariah 2.

³⁹ Newport, *Branch Davidians of Waco*, 318–22.

⁴⁰ The word might have been “translate,” which is commonly used in Seventh-day Adventist circles when speaking of the departure of the faithful from this world to be with Christ in heaven during the millennial period.

⁴¹ Danforth, *Final Report*, 16.

⁴² Danforth, *Final Report*, 16.

⁴³ See further, Newport, *Branch Davidians of Waco*, 296.

⁴⁴ The reference here is to Mark Swett’s paper entitled “An Ultimate Act of Faith,” a copy of which is in my personal possession.

⁴⁵ See especially Jayne Seminare Docherty, *Learning the Lessons from Waco: When Parties Bring their Gods to the Table* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2001).