The Myth of Religious Violence: Applying William Cavanaugh's Theory to Jonestown, the Siege of Mount Carmel, and the Aum Affair

Jason Piché

A Thesis
In
The Department
Of
Theological Studies

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Arts (Theological Studies) at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada
October, 2024

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By: Jason Piché

Entitled: The Myth of Religious Violence: Applying William Cavanaugh's Theory to Jonestown, the Siege of Mount Carmel, and the Aum Affair

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (Theological Studies – Thesis)

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Signed by the final Examining Committee:

Dr. Christine Jamieson Chair

Dr. Hyejung Yum Examiner

Dr. Lucian Turcescu Examiner

Dr. André Gagné Supervisor

Approved by Dr.André Gagné

Chair of Department

October 11th 2024 Dr. Pascale Sicotte

Dean of Faculty

Abstract

The Myth of Religious Violence: Applying William Cavanaugh's Theory to Jonestown, the Siege of Mount Carmel, and the Aum Affair

Jason Piché, M.A.

Concordia University, 2024

The 21st century has been witness to the proliferation of religious extremist groups and terrorist attacks committed by these groups. Much ink has therefore been spilled discussing the notion of religious violence, what it consists of, why it exists, and whether or not it should be understood as being particularly dangerous. In response to these inquiries, William T. Cavanaugh, a Catholic priest and theologian, has sought to deconstruct the notion of religious violence. Cavanaugh has argued that the term religious violence portrays acts of violence committed by religious groups as solely being the product of their religious beliefs, when such a thing is far from the truth, as no act of violence can take place in isolation. This thesis will prove Cavanaugh's central argument correct through an analysis of 3 case studies that are typically understood as being significant acts of religious violence, the Jonestown massacre of 1978, the conflict at Waco between the FBI/BATF and the Branch Davidians in 1993, and the release of Sarin gas onto the Tokyo subway system in 1995 by the group Aum Shinrikyo. By analyzing these 3 case studies through Cavanaugh's theoretical lens, this thesis will argue that the case studies in question should not be understood as incidents of religious violence, as to do so would be to ignore the fact that the violence undertaken was the product years of latent tension between secular authorities and the religious groups in question for reasons that had little to do with religious beliefs.

Key Words: Cavanaugh, Juergensmeyer, Waco, Aum Shinrikyo, Apocalyptic, Jonestown, Jim Jones, Socialism, Religious Violence, Isolation.

Acknowledgments

Firstly, I'd like to thank my thesis advisor Dr. André Gagné. His guidance has helped me maintain a steady pace throughout the writing process and ultimately is responsible for the fact that I have been able to complete my thesis in a two-year period. My journey in theological studies began by attending Dr. Gagné's lectures introducing the New Testament, and I am therefore indebted to him for introducing me to one of my most profound passions. My thanks also goes out to all the faculty members of the Department of Theological Studies and the excellent professors I've had the privilege to study under along the way. Without the knowledge they imparted to me, my thesis would likely have been considerably worse, and my curiosity regarding the development of Christianity and literature would have remained idle curiosity rather than a considerable academic pursuit. I'd of course like to thank my mother, father and sister for the support they've shown for me throughout my studies and life in general. Without their love and support, my academic journey likely would not have happened. Lastly, I'd like to thank Robert Jordan, George R.R Martin, Brandon Sanderson, and Frank Herbert whose eternal and incredible works of literature accompanied me throughout my academic journey and ultimately made me the person I am today.

Table of Contents

Introduction

The notion that the 21st century is a secular age has been propounded by important scholars, as has the secularization thesis (Taylor, 2018, 7). Arguing that the processes of modernization and globalization have reduced the role that religious institutions play in people's lives, these scholars argue that religiosity in modernized countries will decline as economic prosperity becomes more widespread (Rowe, 2012, 1). These arguments have come under scrutiny as religiosity has proven to be stubborn in the face of the processes of modernization. Events like the attacks on the World Trade Centers on September 11th, 2001, and the rise of terrorist organizations have led scholars to discuss the idea of a revenge of religion (Avalos, 2005, 83). Arguing against the secularization thesis, these scholars point to public and dramatic displays of religiosity as evidence that religions are far from breathing their last breath. They argue that traditional religions continue to flourish more than ever, and that new religious movements are a manifestation of this continued success.

Many of these new religious movements have attracted the attention of scholars for their seeming defiance of the secularization thesis. They have also attracted the attention of the public, but largely for the wrong reasons. Not only have their esoteric beliefs been scrutinized and mocked by the public, but they have also been criticized for their anti-social and isolated nature (Crockford, 2018, 95). Above all, these new religions have been criticized for the high-profile violent acts that have been committed by their members and covered at great length by the media. Though violence undertaken by religions is nothing new, television and modern methods of communication have made these incidents of violence more visible and dramatic, placing them in the public eye (Crockford, 2018, 95). These incidents of violence have marked the public psyche in substantial ways and have ultimately served to inform public opinion about new religious movements. The notion of religious violence has therefore transcended the halls of academia and begun to permeate into the public consciousness.

Often labeled as cults, new religious movements are largely perceived as being negative forces in society by the public at large (Crockford, 2018, 95). Not only are they seen as being strange and therefore deserving of being shunned and isolated, but they are also seen as being prone to undertaking violence (Powers, 2021, 163). This view is largely shared by well-known and erudite scholars like Mark Juergensmeyer and Hector Avalos, whose influential works on the subject titled *Terror in the Mind of God* and *Fighting Words* respectively have come to be seen as important works in the field of the study of religious violence.

Less influential has been the work of Roman Catholic theologian and professor William T. Cavanaugh, who has argued against the utility of the concept of religious violence, arguing that it fails to consider the complex reasons that religious or secular groups might engage in violence. This thesis will examine Cavanaugh's work through the consideration of case studies relevant to the topic.

Why discuss the notion of religious violence?

There are two primary reasons that religious violence and its validity as a theoretical tool merit discussion. The first of these is that violence undertaken by religions is a pervasive, visible, and seemingly universal problem that afflicts all regions of the world. Few people would argue that the world needs more violence, and it is generally accepted that despite the general decline

in violence over the preceding hundreds of years that violence is an unavoidable and universal aspect of human life (Pinker, 2012, xxii). Religions seem to be equally as universal as violence, and despite the musings of scholars propounding the secularization thesis, they do not appear to be disappearing anytime soon (Powers, 2021, 1). As a result, the examination of the relationship between both concepts is necessary if it is to be properly understood, something which this thesis hopes to contribute to.

Aside from the universality of both religions and violence, the notion of religious violence is important to discuss because the idea that religions are inherently violent has become a piece of academic dogma (Cavanaugh, 2014, 486). Though the postmodern age has seen the deconstruction and questioning of many aspects of academic life whether they be theoretical or scientific (Smith, 1990, 661), the high profile events of the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Centers and the rise of terrorist groups like ISIS have attracted global attention and made it seem as though violence undertaken by religions is widespread and endemic to human civilization (Avalos, 2005, 83). As a result, the idea that religions have an innate tendency to be violent has become conventional wisdom (Cavanaugh, 2014, 486). Since academia cannot exist in isolation and must tackle the issues that the surrounding society finds to be the most important, the study of religious violence has become an important aspect of religious and theological studies. This thesis hopes to contribute to the ongoing discussion about these universal aspects of human life.

Why discuss the Aum, Waco, and Jonestown affairs in particular?

The reasons for discussing the Jonestown suicides, the siege of Mount Carmel, and the Aum Affair in relation to one another are numerous. The first of the reasons is that these incidents are all temporally adjacent, each being modern incidents of religious violence conducted in the last 50 years (1978, 1993, and 1995 respectively). This temporal similarity provides a basis for comparison and simplifies the examination of common elements.

All 3 case studies have also become widely known incidents of violence that fundamentally altered each society's understanding of the relationship between the state, religion, and violence. The Jonestown massacre of 1978 gave rise to the term cult and the notion that new religious movements are a potential threat (Klippenstein, 2018, 41). The siege of Mount Carmel in 1993 by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (BATF) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) fundamentally the dynamic between the state and religions and put into question the notion that freedom of religion was a given right in the United States (Dorman, 2012, 153). The Aum Affair, which saw sarin gas being released on the Tokyo subway, stands as one of the most significant events in modern Japanese history, as not only was it the first use of chemical weapons since the Second World War, but it had the potential to kill tens of thousands of Japanese citizens (Lifton, 2013, 3). The Aum Affair also altered the relationship between religions and the Japanese government, a relationship that had been characterized by passivity and acceptance since the Second World War (Wilkinson, 2009, 2). To put it simply, each case study being analyzed in this thesis has become part of the cultural *zeitgeist* of each respective country where the incidents took place, and they therefore merit discussion on these bases alone.

Each of the religious groups in question can also be viewed as new religious movements and can therefore be compared on that basis. Although the Peoples Temple and the Branch Davidians professed loyalty to the Christian Church and Aum Shinrikyo was nominally a Buddhist group, all these groups were characterized by major disagreements with their mother

religions and eclectic theologies that put into question their status as belonging to any established religions. These movements also share other characteristics of new religious movements, such as an isolated existence and prominent leaders (Bromley, 2011, 15). The status of these three groups as being new religious movements provides a helpful basis for comparison.

The last and perhaps most important basis for comparing these 3 case studies is that each is understood as being a prototypical example of religious violence. The suicides and murders at Jonestown have come to be understood as perhaps the pan-ultimate example of religious violence, and it is generally accepted that no new religious movement is likely to be viewed without suspicion following the events that took place in the Guyanese jungle almost 50 years ago (Klippenstein, 2018, 41). The siege of Waco is also popularly understood as being motivated by the religious fixations of the Branch Davidians and the messianic aspirations of their leader David Koresh, a notion that was popularized by President Bill Clinton's characterization of the affair as "religious fanatics murdered themselves," (Tabor and Gallagher, 1995, 159). The Aum Affair is understood much in the same light, with scholars like the aforementioned Mark Juergensmeyer saying that the attack was the product of "its leaders' religious prophecies about an imminent apocalyptic war." (Juergensmeyer, 2017, 134) The popular and academic understanding of these 3 cases studies as being incidents of religious violence therefore allows for them to be compared and ultimately deconstructed.

Stating the Thesis

Though these incidents of violence are widely understood as being the product of each group's religious beliefs, this thesis will take a markedly different view, seeking to put into question the utility of the notion of religious violence. Through the examination of the Jonestown massacre of 1978, the siege of Mount Carmel in 1993, and the Aum Affair of 1995, *this thesis will argue that the notion of religious violence is an inaccurate and unhelpful concept when applied to violence undertaken by religious groups, and that the three case studies being examined should therefore not be referred to as incidents of religious violence*. As will be discussed throughout this thesis, all 3 incidents of violence do indeed involve religious beliefs, but they also show signs of being the product of a variety of political and sociological factors that transcend the notion of religious violence, therefore putting into question the legitimacy of religious violence.

The Jonestown suicides and murders defy the notion of religious violence, as all evidence points to the murders and suicides being motivated by political considerations rather than religious ones. Though Jim Jones and his congregation were part of a religious organization, an examination of the history of the organization shows that it became much more concerned with spreading its socialist message than perpetuating religious beliefs. Towards the end of his life, Jim Jones, the leader of the group, condemned God and religion, and said that socialism was the only way forward (Moore, 2011, 95). Though the Peoples Temple would steadfastly hold to its socialist beliefs, it believed it was being persecuted for said beliefs, leading it to move from Indianapolis to the Redwood Valley in California, and from the Redwood Valley to the jungles of Guyana where it would build the settlement of Jonestown. The Peoples Temple was composed of mostly African Americans who had lived through the Jim Crow era. For these members, the notion that the Peoples Temple would be persecuted was not far-fetched, as they had witnessed racist and discriminatory violence their whole life (Levi, 1982, 31). Jones would foster paranoia in his followers to guarantee their loyalty to the Peoples Temple and himself. The activism of the

Peoples Temple and the benefits it provided its members would also foster the loyalty of Jones' congregation, allowing them to ignore the more problematic elements of the group's activities. Jones normalized the notion of revolutionary suicide to his followers, telling them that to die at their own hands would be more noble than allowing their enemies to persecute and eventually kill them (Moore, 2011, 95). On the 18th of November 1978, Jones instructed his followers to commit an act of revolutionary suicide in the face of persecution from US government forces, and they did so. The suicide and murder of 918 members of the Peoples Temple in Jonestown, Guyana therefore had little with the religious beliefs of the Peoples Temple, and more to do with the desire to stay true to political beliefs that were dear to its members, and to avoid the persecution which Jones had led his followers to expect for many years.

The siege of Mount Carmel, the compound of the Branch Davidians, between February 28th and April 19th, 1993, by the BATF and FBI was the product of many factors, most of which had little to do with religious beliefs. As the BATF was made aware of the illegal possession and modification of firearms taking place at the Branch Davidian compound, they also learned of David Koresh's rumored sexual abuse of children, something which in conjunction with the BATF's desire to score a public relations victory fueled a desire to see Koresh publicly humiliated (Guinn, 2024, 156). The BATF's aggressive approach was characterized by an amateurish lack of preparation, with those taking part in the operation later admitting that they knew nothing of Branch Davidians religious beliefs (Guinn, 2024, 143). The FBI approached the siege of Mount Carmel with the same aggressive attitude as the BATF, something which undermined the progress made by negotiators engaging in good faith efforts that produced concrete results throughout the conflict. Though the decision by the Branch Davidians to defend themselves against the initial BATF raid was certainly motivated by their religious beliefs, the initiation and prolongation of the conflict was the product of entirely secular factors, such as the BATF's refusal to arrest Koresh peacefully because of the desire to score a public relations victory, and the BATF's and FBI's general incompetence in matters of communication, something which prolonged the conflict needlessly, and ultimately resulted in the tragic death of 76 Branch Davidians. To say that the siege of Mount Carmel was an incident of religious violence is therefore to severely misunderstand the nature of the conflict and ultimately oversimplify its very complex elements.

The sarin gas attack on the 20th of March 1995 conducted by Aum Shinrikyo, colloquially called the Aum Affair, was the product of Aum's negative interactions with the broader social body that led it to developing a hostile and paranoid attitude to Japanese society at large. During Aum's early years as a religion, it was largely passive, peaceful, and optimistic about its evangelizing prospects (Lewis, 2013, 147). As time passed and Aum's interactions with dissenters, the Japanese political system, and law enforcement became hostile, its theology became apocalyptic, and it began using violence to suppress dissent and remove perceived threats to the group. This culminated in the Aum Affair of March 20th, 1995, when Aum attempted to distract the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department from its ongoing investigations into Aum and attempted to eliminate as many members of the TMPD as possible. The Aum Affair should therefore not be considered an incident of religious violence, as Aum's theology and the reasons for its violent acts show all signs of being the product of hostile Aum's interactions with the broader social body rather than being product of its religious beliefs. Though more drastic and visible than its other uses of violence throughout the organization's. history, the attack of March 20th, 1995 should be seen as an extension of Aum's repeated use of

targeted violence intended to eliminate threats to the organization, not an attack motivated by the group's apocalyptic beliefs as so many have proposed.

A Word on Methodology

This thesis will make use of two methods in the examination of the proposed case studies, these being the comparative method and the genealogical method. Using the comparative method, this thesis will examine the 3 case studies in question, pointing out relevant similarities and differences to argue against the utility of the use of the term religious violence in academic parlance.

The comparative method became popular in the 19th century through its use in the development of lexicons of ancient languages like Greek and Latin (Griffiths, 2017, 479). Through the development of these lexicons, it became clear to scholars that not only could languages be compared in order to gain insights about how languages developed, but social phenomena could be compared and contrasted in order to better understand their origins and development. The comparative method therefore became a pillar of the social sciences over time, with two specific comparative approaches being developed, these being the narrative approach and the systematic approach (Griffiths, 2017, 482). While a narrative approach would imply analyzing the comparison in question in order to see whether a common genealogical or historical factor can explain the commonalities or lack thereof, the systematic approach seeks to understand whether the comparison in question is a product of institutional and environemntal factors (Griffiths, 2017, 482). The basic division in the comparative method later became known as the nature vs nurture debate (Griffiths, 2017, 485). This thesis will make use of both approaches, seeking to understand whether it is in the nature of religions to be violent as some scholars propose, or whether insitutional and environmental factors can be the explanation for why religious actors might commit violent acts. Though both approaches will be used, this thesis will argue that the systematic approach better explains the phenomena of religious violence, as religions are as prone to institutional and societal influences as any other social body.

The genealogical method, as a method applied to historical research, was first popularized by Michel Foucault and came to be used by William Cavanaugh to discuss the historical reasons for why the notion of religious violence is not valid (Fuller, 2007, 1). The method examines historical events through a certain lens in order to attempt to understand why important historical turning points occur. More specifically, the genealogical method that Foucault popularized was intended to show the inherently problematic nature of the conclusions that historians reached (Garland, 2014, 372). Foucault argued that the explanations offered by historians for various phenomena were usually the product of the power dynamics inherent to the social order that the historians found themselves in (Garland, 2014, 372). Foucault therefore made the analysis of power dynamics in both the past and the present central to his historical analysis (Garland, 2014, 372). Cavanaugh follows in Foucault's footsteps by analyzing the shifting power dynamics in the lengthy history of global religions and their relationship with secular institutions to critique the notion that religious violence is more problematic than violence commited by secular actors. Though this thesis will not make explicit use of the genealogical method, it will vicariously do so through the work of William Cavanaugh. Its purpose therefore merits mention.

Chapter 1 - The Myth of Religious Violence: Origins, Proponents, Problems

Before discussing the case studies in question, this section will be dedicated to outlining the definitional and theoretical boundaries regarding religious violence. Beginning with a specification of the definition of religious violence and an outline of the basic division regarding religious violence, the work of the three most prominent scholars on the topic of religious violence will be discussed to provide the reader with the background required to analyze the case studies discussed in this thesis.

1.1 - What is violence? What is religious violence?

Violence comes in different forms, whether it be directed at oneself or others. For the purposes of this thesis, the definition provided by William Cavanaugh will be used, which goes as follows:

> "Injurious or lethal harm, almost always discussed in the context of physical violence such as war and terrorism." (Cavanaugh, 2009, 7)

Cavanaugh's definition suits the purposes of this thesis not only because it is through his theoretical framework that the case studies in question will be examined, but also because it highlights the fact that violence is not always a product of individuals but is also the product of groups. Although it is individuals who commit acts of violence, they often do so on behalf of groups and institutions that legitimize or sanction their violence.

Cavanaugh provides no specific definition for religious violence, perhaps because the definition of religion is notoriously ambiguous. For simplicity's sake, this thesis will simply add to Cavanaugh's definition of violence and argue that religious violence is injurious or lethal harm *committed on behalf of a religious body*, almost always discussed in the context of physical violence such as war and terrorism (Cavanaugh, 2009, 7).

Though this definition is simple, implying that religious violence is separate from ordinary violence carries some important implications (Cavanaugh, 2009, 9). The first of these implications is that the violence undertaken by a religion is for specifically *religious* purposes and is therefore distinct from other forms of violence. As will be examined in the rest of this chapter through a discussion of the work of Avalos and Juergensmeyer, religious violence is understood as being motivated by factors outside the material world (Avalos, 2005, 18). In this respect, religious violence must be justified in an emic way, that is to say, only those within the religious body can justify the violence and ultimately view it as being rational, since it conforms to a system of logic endemic to the religious body in question.

A second implicit implication of religious violence as a concept is that religion as an idea has a definition that is accepted across cultures and time periods. As will be discussed when dissecting the work of William Cavanaugh, the notion that religion has been a distinct and identifiable force throughout human history is to misunderstand the relationship of religions with surrounding entities like political and military bodies (Cavanaugh, 2009, 9). Upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that religion existed in conjunction with the state and its derivatives for most of human history, until the separation of the political and the religious became useful for those in power (Cavanaugh, 2009, 9).

Religious violence as a concept is therefore more complex than it appears on its face and carries with it assumptions that transcend the definitions of the words religion and violence when used as a syntagm. These assumptions will be discussed throughout the rest of this thesis as the question of the legitimacy of religious violence is wrestled with.

1.2 -The Basic Division Regarding Religious Violence

Before delving into the scholarship of the academics listed in the preceding paragraphs, it is worth discussing the basic division among scholars regarding the notion of religious violence, which scholar of religions Paul Powers calls the *maximalist* and *minimalist* positions regarding religious violence (Powers, 2021, 22).

The *maximalist position* concerning religious violence generally claims that religions are inherently violent, and that much of the world's violence originates from religious ideas and actors (Powers, 2022, 22). Those like public intellectual Christopher Hitchens who claimed that "Religion poisons everything. As well as a menace to civilization, it has become a threat to human civilization," (Powers, 2021, 24) certainly fall on the far end of the maximalist position, while those like Avalos and Juergensmeyer whose opinions and arguments are more nuanced trend more toward the center of the minimalist-maximalist divide.

The *minimalist position* makes the claim that religions are not inherently predisposed toward violence and that the notion of religious violence should therefore be discarded as an academic concept. In academia, this position is spearheaded by William Cavanaugh, whose work will be discussed in detail in section 4 of this thesis. Those who find themselves in the minimalist camp argue that religions cannot be viewed as existing outside of the structures which bind other institutions. They therefore argue that religions and their interactions with broader society should be understood as influencing its actions (Powers, 2021, 31). The minimalist position can be summarized as arguing. that religions do not exist in isolation, and that they therefore do not take actions in isolation, whether they be violent or otherwise.

1.3 - Mark Juergensmeyer and Religious Violence

Mark Juergensmeyer is perhaps the most widely read author who can be placed in the maximalist camp. A professor emeritus at the University of California, Santa Barbara, Juergensmeyer is well known for his contributions to scholarship regarding religious violence, having edited Oxford University's *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence* and written a bestseller titled *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*. Throughout his work, Juergensmeyer makes the argument that religions have an inherently violent tendency that results in religious violence.

Juergensmeyer believes that involvement of religion brings added elements that increase the potential for violence to occur (Juergensmeyer, 2018, 94). These elements are the symbolic nature of religious violence, the righteousness of religions, cosmic warfare, and an endless patience regarding an eventual victory in any given conflict (Cavanaugh, 2009, 31).

The *first* of these elements, the symbolic nature of religious violence, derives from Juergensmeyer's belief that religious violence is uniquely performative when compared with standard acts of violence (Juergensmeyer *et al*, 2013, 331). Juergensmeyer posits that all acts of violence have two targeted audiences, the general public and a smaller audience for which the message is more potent (Juergensmeyer *et al*, 2013, 331). He further argues that religious

violence has the goal of creating an experience for which the target audience can vicariously participate in, making it uniquely symbolic (Juergensmeyer *et al*, 2013, 331).

The *second* element of Juergensmeyer's argument is the righteousness of religions. By this, Juergensmeyer means that religions are confident of the inherent morality of their actions (because of their religious beliefs and systems of morality) and are therefore willing to take actions that secular actors might not have the confidence to undertake (Juergensmeyer, 2017, 202). In the eyes of Juergensmeyer, this makes religions prone to more drastic acts of violence than secular actors and organizations.

The *third* element of Juergensmeyer's theoretical musings is the cosmicism that he argues characterizes religious violence. By this, Juergensmeyer means that religions view themselves as participants in a cosmic battle between good and evil. Since they see themselves as participants in this grandiose conflict, they are more easily able to justify their actions as being inherently good since it will contribute to the defeat of the forces of evil in the long run (Juergensmeyer, 2017, 184).

The *fourth* and final dimension of Juergensmeyer's argument regarding the links between religion and violence goes hand in hand with the cosmicism that Juergensmeyer believes characterizes the ideology of religions. He argues that a product of this cosmicism is the endless patience that religions have regarding their inevitable victory in any given conflict (Juergensmeyer, 2017, 202). Since religions believe that their beliefs and actions are inherently just, according to Juergensmeyer it is part of religious logic to believe that victory is inevitable. Religions therefore take violent action believing that their actions are justified and will be a contribution to an inevitable victory over the forces of evil in the long term, even if there are setbacks in the short term.

Underlying all Juergensmeyer's thoughts regarding the relationship between religion and violence is the notion that the religious is irrational, and that religious bodies are therefore more prone to being violent. Though Juergensmeyer would certainly balk at this characterization of his position, his arguments are largely based on the fact that the supernatural basis of religious beliefs lead them to appeal to forces that are beyond the comprehension of those not belonging to the religion in question. Since religions do not make decisions based on the basis of material and social factors but instead appeal to cosmic and supernatural factors, their actions end up being more drastic and frequent in the eyes of Juergensmeyer. Implicit in his argument is that religions do not make decisions because of rational factors like other social bodies do, but that religions take violent actions that justify themselves through a religion's own supernatural and cosmic logic.

In essence, Juergensmeyer argues that when undertaking violence, religions take decisions in isolation without considering the socio-cultural and political climate within which they exist. Religions do not need to consider the consequences of their actions because they can always be justified in light of the cosmic struggle which they find themselves being a part of (Juergensmeyer, 2017, 11). The notion that religions somehow decide to undertake violence in isolation and as strictly a part of their constructed worldview will be proven incorrect through a discussion of the three case studies in question in sections two, three, and four.

1.4 - Hector Avalos and Religious Violence

Alongside Juergensmeyer, Hector Avalos is perhaps the most prominent scholar on the maximalist spectrum of the notion of religious violence, though he sadly passed away in 2021.

His book *Fighting Words* published in 2005 articulated his argument which, although different from Juergensmeyer, is still rooted in the notion that the supernatural and cosmic appeals made by religious ideology lead them to take actions that other social bodies would not take.

Avalos' thesis regarding religious violence is made up of two parts. Avalos' *first* argument is that violence, religious or otherwise, is the product of scarce resources (Avalos, 2005, 18). Much like Plato and Lucretius who believed that violence was undertaken to take control of material resources (Avalos, 2005, 40), Avalos argues that the desire to take control of scarce resources motivates most acts of violence.

The *second* element of Avalos' argument is that religions, through their beliefs and ideology, create scarce resources where there are none and propel their followers to use violence in the name of controlling these invented scarce resources (Avalos. 2005, 18). Avalos believes that these scarce resources are wholly invented by religions, saying the following: "religious conflict relies solely on resources whose scarcity is wholly manufactured by, or reliant on, unverified premises." (Avalos, 2005, 18) In this respect, Avalos's argument is very similar to Juergensmeyer's argument, as both believe that the motivations (scarce resources for the former and the cosmic war between good and evil for the latter) for violent acts committed by religions are based on systems of logic and justification that are purely emic, that is to say, justified by the ideology and beliefs native to the religion in question.

Though Avalos' argument contains many more details, they are irrelevant to this thesis. Both he and Juergensmeyer, through differing theoretical constructions, arrive at the same conclusion, this conclusion being that religions decide to take violent action based on their own systems of logic, and therefore act largely in isolation and without consideration for factors that secular actors consider. Both therefore argue that religions are more prone to violent actions than their secular counterparts. This thesis, through the lens of William Cavanaugh's work, will argue against the notion that religions are more predisposed to violence than their secular counterparts, arguing that religions must interact with secular social bodies that influence the way they act, and that therefore the notion of religious violence is unhelpful, because it portrays violence done by religious groups as being strictly motivated by religious beliefs, when nothing could be further from the truth.

1.5 - William T Cavanaugh and the Myth of Religious Violence

William Cavanaugh and his theoretical framework called the myth of religious violence (articulated in a book sharing the same name) serves as the lens through which the three case studies in question will be analyzed. Though his argument is complex and involves a genealogical analysis of history to determine the origins of the concept of religion and when it became associated with violence, it is an argument that contains two basic elements that will be outlined below.

The *first* element of Cavanaugh's argument is the uncertain and ambiguous definition of religion. Though the word is used frequently, Cavanaugh argues that there is no uniform definition for the concept of religion (Cavanaugh, 2009, 16). If one is to propose that religious violence is a problem for society as Juergensmeyer and Avalos have argued, it is first necessary to define exactly what religion is. Implicit in arguments that religious violence is problematic is a notion that religion is a transhistorical and universal aspect of human life, something which Cavanaugh argues against (Cavanaugh, 2009, 59). Though it is often said that religion is a universal aspect of human life, this rarely considers the fact that what are considered religions

globally have stark differences in practices and beliefs and ultimately rarely consider themselves religions. Peter Ochs, a theologian sympathetic to Cavanaugh's view, has pointed out that the term religion is often imposed on communities with holistic understandings of life, ethics, family, and lifestyle that rarely view themselves as belonging to any religion in particular (Raudino, 2022, 52). This is evidenced by the work of Wilfred Smith who showed that there was no religion called Hinduism in India prior to 1829 and the dominion of the British Empire (Cavanaugh, 2009, 88). Hinduism became a marker of Indian culture and belief systems that was used by the British to categorize beliefs that they did not understand and ultimately otherize these beliefs, as diverse as they were (Cavanaugh, 2009, 88). Cavanaugh therefore posits that the definition of religion is ambiguous at best.

The *second* element of Cavanaugh's argument builds on the first by arguing that what religion is constituted of and whether it is seen as a force for good or ill is a product of the power dynamics at play in any given society. Cavanaugh points out that prior to the 17th century CE, religion and politics were seen as inseparable (Cavanaugh, 2009, 123). He argues that religious and political life came to be separated as a manifestation of the rise of the nation-state which sought to justify its violent actions and make them seem logical when compared with what were portrayed as the irrational violent actions of religions (Cavanaugh, 2009, 124). In Cavanaugh's own words, "In the West, revulsion toward killing and dying in the name of one's religion is one of the principal means by which we became convinced that killing and dying in the name of one's nation state is laudable and proper" (Cavanaugh 2009, 4). The marginalization of ecclesiastical communities in pre-modern Europe and the portrayal of violence committed by religious actors as being somehow more divisive and problematic than violent acts committed by the state allowed for the loyalty of citizens to be wholly directed towards the nation state (Cavanaugh, 2009, 10). Such loyalty could be used by the nation state to direct the violence of its subjects towards whatever ends it felt appropriate. The marginalization of religion also allowed for the nation state to reappropriate the financial and social resources previously belonging to religious bodies in the name of more rational uses, the rationality of these uses being determined by the state itself.

Though Cavanaugh's argument is complex, it can be boiled down to the notion that religions cannot exist in isolation and therefore cannot act in isolation. Religious bodies exist alongside other institutions in society, and their beliefs and actions are inevitably influenced by the institutions they exist alongside. This means that acts of violence undertaken by religious bodies cannot be seen as being purely the product of religious beliefs, since these beliefs in themselves are often the product of a religion's interactions with other institutions and social bodies. The three case studies analyzed in chapter two, three, and four will prove Cavanaugh's central argument correct, as no matter how much the Peoples Temple, the Branch Davidians, and Aum Shinrikyo attempted to isolate themselves, their negative interactions with other social bodies led to their developing intense persecution complexes and ultimately lashing out in violence. Calling each incident of violence religious violence fails to appreciate the complex motivations behind the use of violence and ultimately portrays violence undertaken by religions as inherently problematic or irrational, a notion that this thesis will argue strongly against.

Chapter 2 - The Jonestown Massacre and the Myth of Religious Violence

Having discussed the theoretical views regarding religious violence, the three case studies through which these views are analyzed will be discussed in chapters 2, 3, and 4, beginning with the Jonestown massacre of November 18th, 1978. Of all incidents typically identified as religious violence, the death and suicide of 918 members of the Peoples Temple in the jungle of Guyana is perhaps the most infamous, excluding the September 11th, 2001, attacks undertaken by Al Qaeda, the former accounting the largest loss of American life in a single incident prior to the occurrence of the latter (Beltran, 2013, 2). A month following the Jonestown murders and suicides, 98% of the American public said they had heard of the events at Jonestown, a level of recognition matched only by the Pearl Harbor attacks that launched American involvement in the Second World War (Barker, 1986, 330).

The name Jonestown quickly became synonymous with cult violence and the dangers religion could pose for society as people struggled with how a nominally Christian group could be involved in such violence (Klippenstein, 2018, 41). Lacking the historical context of the Peoples Temple and an understanding of its internal dynamics, it quickly became conventional wisdom that the Peoples Temple and the events of November 18th, 1978, were a product of Jim Jones' desire for absolute power and control over his subjects (Ulman and Abse, 1983, 657). Brainwashed, and at the mercy of their megalomaniacal leader due to their isolation in the Guyanese jungle, Peoples Temple members were compelled to commit suicide and did so willingly out of love for their dear leader, who they saw as a God. Media coverage and the anti-cult movement perpetuated this narrative, and the notion that new religious movements had the potential to degenerate into violence and were therefore dangerous for society became widespread (Levi, 1982, 105).

That the events at Jonestown could be identified as an act of religious violence is hardly ever questioned among the public. Scholars analyzing the events at Jonestown have come to appreciate that the murders and suicides of November 18th, 1978, were not simply the product of apocalyptic religious beliefs or of Jim Jones' megalomania. Instead, scholars like Rebecca Moore have examined the events of November 18th, 1978, in light of the strong socialist and revolutionary beliefs held by the leadership of the group and the persecution complex the group developed over its lengthy history, ultimately arguing that the murders and suicides in Jonestown were the result of the groups negative interactions with broader society and its revolutionary socialist beliefs (Moore, 2013, 95). This thesis will make a similar argument to that made by Moore, arguing that the Jonestown suicides and murders should not be viewed as acts of religious violence, but should instead be seen as the result of the group's long developed persecution complex and the group's belief that committing an act of revolutionary suicide was the only way the group could remain true to its principles. In this respect, there is little that was religious about the violence committed by the Peoples Temple on the 18th of November 1978.

2.1 - The Peoples Temple: Spearheading Christian Socialism (1952-1965)

The massacre at Jonestown looms heavily over the organization's entire history. As previously mentioned, the narrative that Jim Jones, the organizations leader, was domineering, manipulative, and ultimately able to brainwash the members of the Peoples Temple into doing whatever it is that he wished for them to do is the consensus view of the Peoples Temple and its leader (Richardson, 1980, 240). Though there is some truth to this narrative in the sense that Jim

Jones had a certain presence and was respected and followed by the adherents of the Peoples Temple with a certain fervor, the notion that Peoples Temple members were somehow brainwashed by Jones fails to grasp the nuances of the organization's history. As noted by James T. Richardson, a professor at the University of Nevada, "the frightening thing about most of Jones' followers is that they were amazingly normal" (Richardson, 1980, 240). The loyalty of Peoples Temple members to Jones was, as will be discussed, because of the material results he produced for them in a time and place in which they felt discarded and unwanted (Guinn, 2017, 136), not because of his brainwashing capabilities.

Jim Jones was born on May 13th, 1931, in a small county in Indiana (Guinn, 2017, 14). Raised by a single mother, he was noted by those around him for his capacity to make others listen to his ideas, though he showed no signs of being insane, manipulative, or megalomaniacal in any way. Perhaps the only sign of what his future would hold was his idolizing of Adolf Hitler. According to those around him, he was profoundly impressed by Hitler's choice of suicide over humiliation at the hands of his enemies, and he was ultimately impressed by Hitler's capacity to sway people to his way of thinking (Guinn, 2017, 34).

Jones was involved with various churches throughout his childhood because of a neighbor who Jones admired, but he showed no desire to eventually lead his own church. This changed in 1952 when he began to be attracted by the ideas of the Methodists following the Second World War (Guinn, 2017, 56). The Methodist church had begun emphasizing the more socially oriented aspects of its message, including the need to alleviate poverty, promote racial integration, and engage in prison reform (Guinn, 2017, 56). Because of his newfound interest in Methodism, Jones applied to become a student pastor in the summer of 1952 and was accepted (Guinn, 2017, 57). Growing up in an impoverished environment where racism was still firmly rooted in daily life, the Methodist anti-racist message was not readily accepted by Indianans. Methodist social activism appealed most to the African American community, who experienced racism daily and would be the beneficiaries of Methodism's advocacy.

Shortly after becoming a student pastor in the Methodist church, Jones would start a church of his own in Indianapolis, where he built a modest following by handing out pamphlets and other literature. Most of those who began to attend Jones' church were African American, and the Peoples Temple would remain a largely African American congregation until its end in the dense jungle of Guyana. As previously mentioned, the Methodist message appealed most to those who regularly experienced racism and who had little social mobility because of this racism. African Americans often found solace in the Christian Church as an institution that while still largely segregated, could provide relief from the harsh reality of a racist society (Levi, 1982, 31).

Jim Jones would attract followers to Peoples Temple services by going beyond rhetoric to attempt to make the lives of his congregants more bearable despite the obstacles placed in their way. Jones and his wife Marceline would work tirelessly to help their congregants with whatever personal and financial issues they were plagued by, from providing loans, counseling, and addiction recovery services, to helping with menial tasks like repairs to a vehicle (Guinn, 2017, 106). Alongside this welfare-oriented activism, the Peoples Temple became involved in the politics of Indianapolis by advocating for the implementation of certain policies and rallying against the election of racist city councilors. Though the activism of the Peoples Temple was objectively positive in nature, the group attracted the ire of racist political players who wished to retain certain segregated aspects of life in Indiana. This led to the group developing an antagonistic relationship with many important political players in Indianapolis, something that would foster the congregation's belief that it was being persecuted (Guinn, 2017, 90). The

Peoples Temple also espoused a message that was, in the eyes of many, too close to socialism, and Jones was criticized by his Methodist superiors for not speaking enough about Jesus and speaking too much about social issues (Guinn, 2017, 107).

By all accounts, the Peoples Temple and its leader worked tirelessly to help its congregants escape the clutches of the racist society that they lived in, but they encountered difficulties in trying to make their ideals into reality, facing opposition from many sides. Nevertheless, Jones was successful in fostering a close and loyal following of approximately 250 congregants by 1960 (Guinn, 2017, 108). In return for Jones' important efforts in making the lives of his congregants better, they were expected to be doggedly loyal and committed to the Peoples Temple. This loyalty included volunteer hours, attending every Sunday service without fail, and participating in extracurricular activities on a consistent basis (Guinn, 2017, 108). The Peoples Temple therefore had a reciprocal relationship with its congregants. Congregants were provided with tangible material and social benefits, while they were expected to be loyal to the Peoples Temple, Jim Jones, and the social order which the group aimed to create.

Perhaps the greatest influence on Jones' ministry and rhetoric was Father Divine, an African American revival preacher who acquired a niche but substantial following. Founder of the Peace Mission Movement, Father Divine's grandiose preaching style and emphasis on a positive spirituality would be positively received in African American communities across the United States in the middle of the 20th century (Watts, 191, 476). As someone who sought to escape the clutches of the Methodist overseers that criticized the Peoples Temple activism, Father Divine's unique style of preaching and non-denominational approach appealed to Jones, and he would meet regularly with Father Divine to learn his rhetorical techniques and better understand his appeal. From Father Divine Jones learned the importance of presenting himself as a well-dressed and respectable holy man and came to appreciate the importance of having a congregation that was fervently loyal to him personally rather than loyal to the organization (Beltran, 2013, 6).

Jones' encounters with Father Divine throughout the 1950' and early 1960's coincided with an increasing professionalization of the Peoples Temple. Not only did it separate itself from Methodism , but it became a more outward facing and ultimately ambitious organization. Indianapolis proved to be too small for Jones' ambitions. In 1965, Jones convinced 90 of his congregants that a move to California would allow for the Peoples Temple to more effectively institute progressive policy changes, as well as escape a nuclear apocalypse that Jones prophesied would hit the eastern United States in 1967 (Guinn, 2017, 128). Though still a modest congregation, the Peoples Temple was characterized by an ambitious idealism that it sought to make a reality. A largely African American organization, the move to California to escape the more racially ambiguous environment of Indiana made sense for the most dedicated of members. Little did they know that their modest congregation would become an important player in the politics of the nation's largest state.

2.2 - The Peoples Temple: Failing to Find a Home (1965-1977)

The move to Redwood Valley, California proceeded rather smoothly for the most devoted of Peoples Temple members. While a small band of followers remained in Indiana and were theoretically still a part of the group, the group that made their home in Redwood Valley were a step above others because of their proximity to Jones, and they received almost all of Jones' attention.

The Redwood Valley proved to be surprisingly fertile ground for recruitment despite it being more conservative than liberal bastions like Los Angeles and San Francisco. The Peoples Temple harmonious and mixed-race congregation impressed those who rarely saw such a thing, and its emphasis on community service brought in those who needed help with difficulties like drug addiction, leading them to eventually become members of the Peoples Temple (Guinn, 2017, 158).

The activities of the Peoples Temple would earn the group a positive reputation, and many more members. By 1973, after years of strenuous missionary work that involved packing Peoples Temple members on traveling buses to evangelize across California, the Peoples Temple had 2570 members and was modestly wealthy because of the contributions of its members (Guinn, 2017, 187). During the period between 1965 and 1973 Jones also recruited some of his most loyal and important followers who would go on to become deputies in the organization. One such member was Tim Stoen, a young lawyer who was well acquainted with the legal system (Guinn, 2017, 180). Through the recruitment of younger, more affluent members like Stoen, Jones was able to put his ambitions into practice by using the organizational skills of his underlings to the organization's benefit. During its sojourn in the Redwood Valley, the Peoples Temple had come to resemble the many counter-cultural movements that characterized the 1960s and 1970s rather than a religious organization (Beltran, 2013, 2).

The broadening of the Peoples Temple horizons allowed for Jones to move the Peoples Temple beyond its Christian origins and focus more on the political and social issues which Jones believed deserved the most attention, these being the United States' dissent into fascism, the danger that a racially segregated society posed for minorities, and the urgent need for socialism (Klippenstein, 2018, 47). Jones' sermons, which had come to include very little about Christianity, became almost entirely focused on the political issues he wished to discuss. Jones glorified the accomplishments of the Soviet Union and portrayed it as the fulfillment of true socialism (Guinn, 2017, 193). He also spoke regularly of the potential danger of black people and other minorities being placed in concentration camps by the United States government (Klippenstein, 2018, 47). Though this may seem outrageous and inflammatory to a modern reader, it must be admitted that Jones' message was not only appealing to many but also held elements of truth. Not only had the United States built its own internment camps during the Second World War to intern its own citizens of Japanese descent, but Jones' mostly African American and elderly congregation had lived in a segregated social order, regularly experiencing lynchings, maiming's, and the killing of fellow African American citizens for no reason other than the fact that they had black skin (Moore, 2011, 104). For much of Jones' congregation, the prospect of internment in concentration camps seemed less like a farcical idea and more like the logical conclusion of the United States' inherently racist social order. Though this racist social order was without a doubt changing because of the civil rights movement, Jones was able, through rhetoric and the selection of certain headlines and news stories (some of them fabricated), to make the danger of internment seem close at hand (Klippenstein 2018, 48). In this way, Jones cultivated a persecution complex that he would be able to draw upon to maintain loyalty to himself and the Peoples Temple.

The years between 1965 and 1973 represented a form of golden age for the Peoples Temple as its recruitment efforts found great success. This success attracted the attention of some of California's most influential political actors. With its several thousand members who could be easily and fervently mobilized through the use of the groups traveling buses, the Peoples Temple represented not only a relatively large block of voters, but also a strong machine

to be employed in voter outreach efforts. Jones would earn the favor of politicians and legislators by promising the support of the Peoples Temple in voter outreach efforts in exchange for support for the Peoples Temple, which involved attending its services and putting in a good word when it was needed. One beneficiary of the Peoples Temples' potential to mobilize its members was George Moscone, who won an extremely close race for Mayor of San Francisco in 1975 with the help of Peoples Temple mobilization efforts (Guinn, 2017, 317). Moscone returned the favor in kind by attending Peoples Temple services and giving Jones influential links with some of the nation's important political players like Rosalynd Carter, the future First Lady of the United States (Guinn, 2017, 334). Once a small and insignificant Church in Indianapolis, the Peoples Temple had grown into an efficient and influential organization that, while still nominally Christian, had transcended its Christian origins and become a form of religio-political movement with significant influence.

Though the Peoples Temple was experiencing success, 1973 would represent a turning point for the organization that would culminate in the events of the 18th of November 1978. This turn toward paranoia began with what is termed the gang of eight incident which occurred on the 4th of September 1973 and involved eight young members leaving the Peoples Temple and denouncing Jones for sexual impropriety and accusing him of only allowing white people into his Planning Committee, the governing body of the Peoples Temple (Poster, 2019, 310). Though this led to few consequences for the Peoples Temple, Jones was infuriated by what he saw as a betrayal and was determined to never let such a thing happen again. Many within the Peoples Temple knew of Jones' degenerate sexual tendencies which involved serially cheating on his wife and propositioning women within the Peoples Temple. Though some of Jones' behaviors were without a doubt strange, members dismissed such behaviors as being the product of his incredibly stressful work schedule and ultimately believed that Jones' behaviors could be tolerated in the name of the tangible results he produced for the group and its members (Guinn, 2017, 161).When these issues were dealt within the group, there was no threat to the Peoples Temple. But the gang of eight incident signaled the potential for the group's internal troubles to spill out into the public eye. As a result, Jones began to look elsewhere for a home for the Peoples Temple, one that was so isolated that none of the Peoples Temples opponents, imagined or otherwise, could find them.

Several other troubles would plague the Peoples Temple in the few years following the gang of eight's mutiny and would ultimately convince Jones of the need to move the Peoples Temple from California to a more isolated location. On December 13th, 1973, Jim Jones was arrested for soliciting sex from an undercover male police officer (Guinn, 2017, 301). This incident would ratchet up Jones' paranoia as he became convinced that authorities were monitoring his and the Peoples Temple every move. Several other defections from the group in 1973, including of one member of Jones' esteemed Planning Commission, only further spiraled Jones into paranoia (Guinn, 2017, 285).

This paranoia manifested itself in two clear ways. Prior to the move to Redwood Valley, Jones' paranoia was exhibited in his lengthy rants from the pulpit. The move to Redwood Valley was perhaps the first concrete manifestation of Jones' paranoia, as he sought to shelter his congregation from the criticism they were receiving in Indianapolis for the promotion of a socialist agenda, as well as avoid a nuclear apocalypse that Jones believed was heading for the Eastern seaboard of the United States. Though the move was motivated in part by paranoia, it was also motivated by the desire to find a more fertile ground for both the Peoples Temple recruitment efforts as well as its socialist agenda. The move to the jungles of Guyana, which was

planned over many years beginning in the 1970s could not be justified in the same way, as Guyana was already a country with a socialist government, and it was rather clear that the dense jungle of Guyana would provide few possibilities for evangelization. Instead, the move to Guyana was motivated purely by Jones' desire to escape the legal and public relations troubles the Peoples Temple was facing in California.

The public relations problems of the Peoples Temple began with the gang of eight incident previously discussed and culminated in a widely read series on the Peoples Temple published by *New West*, a respected regional magazine. The articles discussed Jones' behaviors within the Peoples Temple, alleging that Jones regularly abused members physically, held the children of members as quasi-hostages by personally adopting them, forcefully encouraged marriages between unwilling members, and ultimately created an environment of near-constant terror within the Peoples Temple (Guinn, 2017, 367). Most concerning to Jones was the fact that many of these allegations were true or held elements of truth. Physical discipline was a regular method of control within the Peoples Temple, and the discipline was often administered by Jones himself (Guinn, 2017, 367). The fact that many of the marriages within the Peoples Temple were unhappy and the product of Jones' machinations was common knowledge, as was the fact that he had adopted Tim Stoen's child when his wife defected from the Peoples Temple rather than allow the child grow up outside of the organization (Guinn, 2017, 339). Highly publicized allegations like those found in the *New West* articles and the legal troubles that began to plague Jones because of Stoen's eventual defection from the group brought Jones' paranoia to a new level and forced him to consider a permanent relocation to the group's outpost in Guyana.

The second way Jones' paranoia manifested itself was in what came to be called white night exercises. These consisted of Jones testing his close advisors in the Planning Committee, and eventually his entire congregation, using fake suicide drills and other fake crisis situations during which followers were expected to show loyalty to Jones and the Peoples Temple. The first documented white night was on an evening in September 1975 when Jim Jones gathered his Planning Committee members and told them to drink from a bottle of wine. Shortly after they finished drinking, Jones informed them that he had poisoned them and they were going to die (Guinn, 2017, 312). A few attempted to run away from the room or to shoot themselves with a pistol with an empty chamber, while others expressed sadness that they would no longer be able to help the Peoples Temple survive in the face of persecution from the American government (Guinn, 2017, 312). Jones was satisfied with their reaction and confessions of loyalty and told them that the poison was fake and that they would survive with the knowledge that they could now face death without being afraid. The white night would become a common exercise at Jonestown, and it served as a way for Jones to subconsciously influence his followers to learn self-destructive behaviors (Richardson, 1980, 251).

The behavior Jones wanted to condition his followers to accept was the act of revolutionary suicide. Revolutionary suicide was part of Black Panther political ideology that said that it was better to commit suicide than be persecuted and killed by one's enemies (Moore, 2013, 315). Through the practice of white nights, Jones hoped to make instill the practice of committing revolutionary suicide in his congregation, and by fomenting paranoia he made the act seem justifiable. The frequency of politically motivated murders in the 1960s and 1970s made the act of revolutionary suicide more palatable (Moore, 2013, 310), and it ultimately gave agency to Peoples Temple members who believed they could be killed by their opponents at any moment.

Jones' paranoia escalated parallel to the legal issues and defections plaguing the Peoples Temple. Tim Stoen went from being Jim Jones' right-hand man and a powerful member of the Peoples Temple who could navigate the intricacies of California politics to being public enemy number one. Grace Stoen had defected from the Temple in 1976, leaving her son in the custody of the Peoples Temple with an understanding that she would be able to visit the child whenever she wished (Guinn, 2017, 330). Jim Jones loved the child as though it was his own, though it was unclear whether he or Tim Stoen was the biological father (Guinn, 2017, 233). Tim Stoen soon defected after his wife did, and this posed a problem for Jones and the Peoples Temple. Not only was Tim Stoen perhaps the most knowledgeable about the Peoples Temple and its many pitfalls, but the defection of such a high-profile member would without a doubt encourage more defections. Though 1976 arguably represented the best year for the Peoples Temple from a financial and a political influence perspective, it is clear in retrospect that the group was experiencing the most internal turmoil it had ever experienced.

This internal turmoil threatened to boil over with the involvement of forces outside of the Peoples Temple control. After the suspicious death of a Peoples Temple member named Bob Houston, whose father was well acquainted with politicians in Washington, a group named Concerned Relatives would form (Guinn, 2017, 327). As the name of the group implies, it was composed of concerned relatives of Peoples Temple members. Through successful lobbying efforts led by Bob Houston's father, the group attracted the attention of Leo Ryan, a California congressman with a flair for the dramatic and a tendency to seek attention.

Prior to Jones' public relations and legal problems, the Jonestown settlement had been only for the Peoples Temple's most troublesome members (such as those with serious drug addiction issues), but the mounting troubles for Jones and his organization resulted in a rapid change of mentality, forcing Jones to move his most loyal members away from California and join him in refuging in the Guyanese jungle. Still very loyal to Jones, about 1000 members joined him to permanently adopt the settlement as their home (Poster, 2019, 325). Though they were familiar with Jones' eccentricities, none were prepared for the turbulence and derangement that would characterize life in Jonestown.

2.3 - What happened at Jonestown? (1978)

Before discussing life at Jonestown itself, it is worth clarifying exactly how an American religious organization was given permission to permanently lodge itself in the depths of the Guyanese jungle. As previously mentioned, the government of Guyana was run by a socialist party, leading one to believe that it would not be sympathetic to Americans establishing permanent residencies. Despite its socialist proclivities, the Guyanese government desperately sought the help of larger countries like the United States to prevent Venezuela from acting on its claims to Guyanese territory. Permanently settling a large group of Americans in the west would provide a disincentive for Venezuelan invasion (Poster, 2019, 310). The Guyanese government was therefore not only favorable to having the Peoples Temple establish a permanent residency in their territory, but encouraged it. The circumstances of the late 1970s allowed for the arrangement to be favorable to both parties involved, and so the Peoples Temple took refuge in the jungles of Guyana.

Prior to Jones' move to Guyana with nearly 1000 members of the Peoples Temple, Jonestown had been a small farming operation with about 70 residents, most of them recovering drug addicts or criminals. The arrival of Jones and his congregation throughout August 1977

would bring massive changes, all of which were negative. Though the facilities at Jonestown were adequate for accommodating 70 residents, they were far from adequate enough to house 1000 people, many of whom were elderly. The overpopulation of an area that was not accommodating in the first place because of the lack of infrastructure resulted in an effectively untenable situation.

Despite the absurdity of having 1000 people live in a space barely unable to accommodate 1/10th that number, the residents of Jonestown strove to make life bearable. The efforts included 12 hours of hard labor to grow food and attempts at evangelization in nearby towns and cities (Guinn, 2017, 362). These efforts were largely unsuccessful, but they provided a reprieve from hard labor. Meetings with government officials also took place infrequently to discuss the state of Jonestown, with the officials leaving these meetings with the impression that Jonestown was a well-run religious commune with little to be concerned about (Guinn, 2017, 378).

Though Jones and the Peoples Temple were able to make all seem well to the occasional visitors, the reality of life in Jonestown was one of no privacy and near-constant ideological harassment. Through loudspeakers arrayed across Jonestown, Jones played past sermons at blaring volumes and broadcasted his musings across the same speakers for hours per day. Though the speakers were occasionally used to play music, Jones' rants about current events and the dangers posed to the Peoples Temple by the CIA and the US government were the mainstay. The lack of privacy in one's own private space because of housing arrangements which saw a dozen people placed in small, shoddy buildings without proper furnishings only magnified the sense that one was always being watched (Guinn, 2017, 355).

Jones did his best to maintain the constant sense of paranoia that Peoples Temple members felt by continuing the tradition of white nights, making frequent use of the exercise to convince Peoples Temple members that they were still being persecuted, even in the deep jungles of Guyana (Moore, 2011, 104). Frequently, he would wake up his congregants in the middle of the night, claiming that they were under attack by United States government forces, and needed to kill themselves in an act of revolutionary suicide before they could be humiliated by their opponents. Through these white nights, Jones not only fomented the paranoia of his congregants by convincing them that were constantly under attack, but he also conditioned them to committing an act of revolutionary suicide. Though the notion of revolutionary suicide had been an aspect of Peoples Temple doctrine since the early 1970s, Jones' white nights made the act a part of their lives. Peoples Temple could not be sure whether the liquid they drank would result in their death until Jones told them otherwise.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, life at Jonestown was not acceptable to all its residents. Not only was life difficult and stressful, but the Peoples Temple had lost track of its mission in Guyana. From its remote location in Guyana, the Peoples Temple could not effectuate the social change it worked toward in Indianapolis and California. Jones' health was also degrading rapidly, with him spending all day in his cabin taking narcotics and ranting over the Jonestown speaker system. Some residents quietly began to plan an escape.

Opportunity for escape presented itself with the visit of Congressman Leo Ryan and a contingent of American media personnel from well-respected outlets in the days before November 18th, 1978. Leo Ryan came on behalf of the group of Concerned Relatives that had organized themselves when the Peoples Temple still called California its home. Leo Ryan's visit was meant to verify that the behaviors the Peoples Temple, specifically Jim Jones, had been accused of in California were not being replicated in Guyana. Jones had been unable to elude the

legal troubles that had begun over the custody of Grace Stoen's child. Jones was ordered to appear at trial in California but refused to do so despite the advice of his advisors. As a result, the IRS suspended social security payments to Peoples Temple members that were collected in Jones' name.

Jones attempted to have Ryan's visit annulled because he feared it would break the stranglehold he had on Peoples Temple members. His wife and the members of the Planning Committee convinced him that they could not avoid the visit, and so it happened on the day of the 17th of November 1978. The visit went surprisingly well, with Jones and his Planning Committee members being able to put up a veneer of respectability, making it seem as though Jonestown was a hospitable living space for all its members. Things began to go poorly when some Peoples Temple members asked Congressman Ryan if they could accompany him back home to the United States, and he acquiesced to their request. More than a dozen members and their families approached Ryan, and Jones had no choice but to agree to their departure despite his reluctance.

Jones' agreement was a ruse, as he planned for his most trusted and well-armed followers to follow Ryan and his contingent back to the airstrip where their plane was stationed. All the media members and Congressman Ryan were subsequently murdered by Jones' bodyguards while Jones planned for the act of revolutionary suicide to take place at Jonestown. By mixing poison into a fruity drink, Jones had his Planning Committee members distribute the poisoned drinks to all the members of the Peoples Temple. Jones recorded some final thoughts about the Peoples Temple and its mission while the collective suicide was taking place. A large majority of the members went willingly to their death, though a few of the corpses found at Jonestown showed signs of struggle, indicating that they were murdered rather than being allowed to escape into the jungle (Moore, 2013, 306).

The lengthy history of the Peoples Temple therefore came to a chaotic and tragic end on the 18th of November with an act of collective suicide. Jones had worked toward creating a paranoid environment which saw his Peoples Temple being in a constant state of crisis, believing that they were being persecuted by the US government and other sinister forces. Not wanting to admit defeat to these sinister forces, they followed their beloved leader into death through an act of what was called revolutionary suicide, believing themselves martyrs for their beliefs. Whether or not Jones truly believed that the Peoples Temple was the victim of ceaseless surveillance and persecution is still a matter of debate to this day, though what is clear is that the Peoples Temple was a group whose members fervently believed that their organization worked toward the betterment of the world, and that they were being persecuted for their activism. Rather than succumb to such persecution, these same members decided to participate in an act of revolutionary suicide as an act of protest at their being persecuted. The result was the tragic death of 918 men, women, and children.

2.4 - Why the massacre at Jonestown Is Not an Incident of Religious Violence

When analyzing the Peoples Temple, its history, and the events of the 18th of November 1978, one is struck by the fact that despite being seen as the penultimate example of religious violence (Levi, 1982, 4), the Peoples Temple was a group that spoke very little about religion in its latter days, with its leader Jim Jones going so far as to say that God was irrelevant (Guinn, 2017, 28). Aside from Jim Jones' seeming condemnation of God and the Christian message

towards the end of his life, two clear reasons as to why the Jonestown massacre should not be considered an incident of religious violence can be identified.

The *first* of these reasons was alluded to above, this reason being that the Peoples Temple more closely resembled a community organization with political interests rather than a religious organization. Though the Peoples Temple maintained its status as a church for its entire existence, this label hardly suited it after its move to the Redwood Valley. By all accounts, although it continued to hold regular Sunday services, these services had little content related to Christianity and were more focused on current events and public policy when new guests were invited to attend the services (Guinn, 2017, 158). When only the core group of Peoples Temple members were in attendance, Jones' conspiracy theories were the focus of his sermons, as he railed against the American government and their secret plans to place the African American population in concentration camps (Moore, 2013, 102). The Peoples Temple had no connections to a mother church during its years in California, lacked any sort of consistent theological doctrine, and had a leader that regularly denounced God and Christianity using harsh language, leading one to believe that the Peoples Temple could no longer be considered a religious body during its sojourn in California and onwards.

The *second* and final reason that the Jonestown massacre should not be analyzed through the lens of religious violence is the doctrine of revolutionary suicide which it made explicit was central its ideology. As a group that believed it was facing opposition from every corner and believed that it would potentially be violently eliminated because of this opposition, the group adopted the notion of revolutionary suicide from the Black Panther Party and Huey Long, who argued that it was best to with one's dignity and ideals intact as opposed to being killed by opposition forces (Moore, 2013, 313). Jim Jones confirmed that this was the motive for the act of mass suicide and the killing of those who did not wish to kill themselves in his final audio recording obtained by the FBI, which went as follows:

> "We said, 1000 people who said, we don't like the way the world is. (Tape edit) Take some. (Tape edit) Take our life from us. We laid it down. We got tired. (Tape edit) We didn't commit suicide; we committed an act of revolutionary suicide protesting the conditions of an inhumane world." (Moore, 2011, 110)

Jones' final recorded words are a convincing testament to the lack of religiosity involved in the Jonestown massacre. Not only did the activities and ideology of the group seem completely unconcerned with religion, but its leader's final words confirm that its actions were not religious in nature.

Despite being often discussed as the penultimate example of the danger of religious violence, it is rather clear that the massacre at Jonestown should not be called an incident of religious violence. Not only did its leader condemn Christianity and religions, and state that the reason for the massacre was the desire to protest the inhumane conditions of the world through an act of revolutionary suicide, but the history of the organization shows that it was largely unconcerned with matters related to religion, and was instead motivated by the desire to institute policy changes that it believed would make the world a more just and equitable place. In short, the massacre at Jonestown cannot reasonably be understood as an incident of religious violence because all evidence points to the Peoples Temple not being interested in matters related to Christianity like doctrine, theology, and church structure despite being a nominally Christian organization. The motives for the suicides and murders were to be found in the lengthy history of

the Peoples Temple and its relationship to paranoia, conspiracy, and the ideas of revolutionary suicide, something which Jones himself confirmed with his last recorded words.

More specifically, the Jonestown massacre proves Cavanaugh's central theoretical consideration that a religion cannot exist in isolation to be correct. Cavanaugh argues against the notion of religious violence because the motives for committing an act of violence cannot be attributed to solely religious reasons. Not only did the Peoples Temple lack any theological doctrines to serve as the basis for their penultimate act of violence, but there is also no indication that they would have undertaken said violent act without the negative interactions the group regularly experienced, leading it to develop a persecution complex. One is therefore led to believe that the Jonestown massacre should not be considered an act of religious violence, as an examination of the organization's history shows that the massacre was the product of the Peoples Temple's persecution complex developed alongside the racism, political marginalization, and legal issues that the group experienced.

Chapter 3 - The Waco Conflict

Alongside the Jonestown massacre discussed in chapter 2, no incident involving new religious movements has marked the American psyche as much as the Waco conflict that took place between the 28th of February and the 19th of April 1993. During the conflict, 76 members of the Branch Davidians, a sect of the Seventh Day Adventists, and 4 agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms died (Kerstetter, 2004, 458). The events of the conflict are shrouded in ambiguity and conflicting accounts. The United States federal government made its position regarding the conflict clear, saying that the Branch Davidians were a dangerous cult led by a megalomaniac named David Koresh, an abuser of children who was essentially holding his congregant's captive through manipulation and brainwashing (Tabor and Gallagher, 1995, 17). They argued that his arrest needed to be undertaken swiftly and actions taken in trying to do so were justified by the level of abuse which Koresh inflicted upon his followers (Wright, 1995, 134). Though the actions of BATF and FBI agents seemed intense and overexaggerated, they argued that the fire that engulfed the Branch Davidian compound was started by the Branch Davidians themselves to fulfill their apocalyptic aspirations and that therefore little could have been done to salvage their lives. The US government narrative is therefore one that places the blame squarely on the Branch Davidians for their own deaths, with a particular emphasis placed on David Koresh as being an egomaniac who sought to preserve his own power at the expense of his congregant's lives. The population of the United States internalized this narrative, as demonstrated by the fact that according to a CNN poll taken after the conflict, 93% of Americans agreed with the statement that Koresh was the one responsible for the events that took place (Wright, 1995, 11).

Scholars studying the topic have come to take a largely different view than the narrative espoused by the US government, arguing against the notion that the Branch Davidians were simply a cult that blindly followed their leader to the death he commanded them. These scholars seek to better understand the motivations of the Branch Davidians for confronting the federal authorities who sought to arrest Koresh and question the notion that they were simply a deluded group of cultists who were hypnotized by Koresh's falsehoods. This thesis will follow in the footsteps of these scholars, aiming to analyze the conflict through a critical lens to better understand what role the interactions of the Branch Davidians with society at large had in motivating the decision to engage in a conflict with the BATF and FBI, and why this conflict should not be seen as an incident of religious violence.

This thesis will analyze the Waco conflict through the same critical lens used by scholars to argue that the conflict at Waco should not be understood as an incident of religious violence. Instead, the conflagration at Mount Carmel should be understood as being the result of the failure of all parties involved to properly communicate their positions, desires, and objectives, resulting in an uncontrollable conflict in which all parties refused to concede at risk of seeming weak.

The conflict at Mount Carmel had three principal parties, the BATF, the FBI, and the Branch Davidians. All parties had individuals who genuinely wished to resolve the conflict with as little bloodshed as possible, but these individuals were undermined by bad communication between all three parties and by actors who were more concerned with not seeming weak or having made too many concessions. The FBI and BATF approached the siege with a hostage rescue mentality, acting upon rumor and the sensationalized accounts of apostates for most of their information about the group (Shaw, 2009, 871). The treatment of the siege as a hostage rescue operation led to the FBI and BATF to act in an overly aggressive and impatient manner,

even though a Child Protective Services investigation had cleared Koresh and the Branch Davidians of allegations of child abuse only months earlier (Wright, 1995, 147). Not only did the FBI and BATF act on arguably false information, but they also failed to consider the nature of Branch Davidian religious beliefs. The Branch Davidians believed that they would be at the forefront of a struggle between the forces of good and evil that would initiate the reign of the Kingdom of God (Tabor and Gallagher, 1995, 4). They believed that they represented the forces of good while the United States federal government represented the forces of evil. The BATF knew nothing of Branch Davidian beliefs and therefore did not believe that the Branch Davidians would respond with force when federal agents with helicopters and heavy weaponry showed up at their doorstep (Guinn, 2024, 143). Despite the deeply held religious beliefs of the Branch Davidians, they showed a capacity to compromise on these beliefs through actions like the release of dozens of Branch Davidians into the custody of the FBI, an organization they believed was fundamentally evil (Tabor and Gallagher, 1995, 4). Despite clear progress being made in negotiations throughout the siege, the FBI's lack of patience and the hostage rescue mentality with which the FBI approached the conflict led to negotiations being undermined by its overly aggressive actions (Guinn, 2024, 257). The conflict was therefore characterized by a failure to properly gather intelligence, and the failure to properly communicate between all parties involved. Though the religious beliefs of the Branch Davidians certainly played a large role in the conflict, framing the conflict as being religious in nature exonerates the BATF's and FBI's many errors before and during the conflict that perpetuated the conflict and resulted in its tragic end. To view the siege of Mount Carmel as an incident of religious violence is to decomplexify the conflict in a disingenuous and inaccurate manner.

Though it will be argued that the Branch Davidians are not wholly at fault for the conflict at Waco, this is in no way intended to excuse the actions of David Koresh and his followers. David Koresh was a deeply flawed individual who may indeed have been guilty of many of the accusations leveled against him. Despite his many flaws, it is nevertheless true that neither he, nor the Branch Davidians he led were wholly responsible for the conflict in question as government officials have claimed. The purpose of this analysis is to show how conflicts and violence that are portrayed as being religious in nature are in fact the product of social, economic, and political factors in addition to religious factors.

3.1 - The Branch Davidians: Humble Beginnings (1873 -1989)

The Branch Davidians began as a small sect of the Seventh Day Adventist denomination. Seventh Day Adventist theology emphasized the incoming apocalypse and the battle between good and evil that would characterize this apocalypse. Seventh Day Adventists were rather strict in their adherence to doctrine, but this strictness was not enough for a Bulgarian immigrant named Victor Houteff, who began in his own sect of Adventists in 1929 (Tabor and Gallagher, 1995, 35). Unlike the Adventists who believed that the Kingdom of God would be spiritual in nature, Houteff believed that the Kingdom would have a material presence in present day Palestine, and that God would rule there with an elect group of 144,000 worshippers (Tabor and Gallagher, 1995, 35). Houteff's goal was to assemble these 144,000 elect worshippers and await the apocalypse alongside them in Palestine (Wright, 1995, 48). He believed that the Bible contained secrets as to when this apocalypse would occur, and he became known as a prophet by his few followers. In 1935, he would move this small band of followers (numbering somewhere

in the double digits) to Mount Carmel, a small ranch in Waco, Texas to await the apocalypse (Wright, 1995, 48).

Until Hoeteff's death in 1955, the small group led a simple life on Mount Carmel, not completely isolated but largely ignoring the happenings in neighboring Waco. Their presence was tolerated by the locals despite their beliefs being seen as eclectic. Waco was known for being a particularly religious part of Texas, and so the presence of a secluded religious sect that minded its own business was not unusual (Guinn, 2024, 17). Victor's wife Florence succeeded him as leader of the group calling itself the Shepherd's Rod. Much like her late husband, Florence was seen as a prophet with the ability to find hidden messages in the holy scriptures. She made use of her ability to foretell that the apocalypse would occur on the 22nd of April 1959 (Guinn, 2024, 23). Though the prophecy attracted quite a bit of attention, the end of the current age and ascension of the elect did not occur, and Florence Houteff moved on from the Shepherd's Rod to work as an accountant for IBM in California (Guinn, 2024, 24).

Despite the setback faced by the group due to failed prophecy, a couple named Ben and Lois Roden were ready to take up the mantle left by Hoeteff. Forty believers remained at Mount Carmel, and Ben Roden believed a fresh start was in order. He renamed the group to the Branch Davidians, alluding to Jesus' words in John 15:1-3 that his disciples were branches of the true vine. Though Ben was the nominal leader of the group, the couple worked together to reinvigorate the group of followers that had halved to about forty (Guinn, 2024, 26). They traveled to Israel to recruit followers, though these efforts were largely unfruitful, only managing to acquire a few more followers.

In 1977, Ben Roden passed away and Lois Roden formally succeeded him as the leader of the group. Lois struggled with her son George Roden over control of the group. By all accounts, George Roden was driven by a lust for power and sought to lead the Branch Davidians despite his clear mental health issues. Lois would manage to stymie the coup attempts of her son, taking the Branch Davidians in a new direction. Lois emphasized the arrival of a new revelation, this revelation being that the holy spirit was both male and female, and that therefore, the female elements of the Christian message needed to be emphasized more (Talty, 2023, 82). This implied the legitimation of female Prophets and priests, as well as other factors.

It was through Lois' leadership that Vernon Howell, who would come to be known as David Koresh, was introduced to the Branch Davidian community. Koresh was born in 1959 to a teenage mother and an absent father. His upbringing was difficult, having been sexually abused by relatives and struggling with learning disabilities (Talty, 2023, 27). One thing the young Koresh showed an aptitude for was the memorization of the Bible. Following his brief tenure with the Texas school system, Koresh worked as a handyman and an aspiring musician. He began to attend Seventh-Day Adventist services in 1979 and was introduced to the Branch Davidian community shortly afterward. In 1981, he began to work as a handyman for the community, and he developed a close relationship with Lois. This relationship did not go unnoticed by community members, and it quickly became common knowledge that Koresh was sharing Lois' bed for what were termed private lessons.

Koresh's presence became more welcome as Koresh's expansive knowledge of the Bible was made evident, surpassing Lois' knowledge. Koresh's knowledge of the Bible was so evident that world-renowned biblical scholar James Tabor later admitted that Koresh likely possessed more knowledge of the Bible than he did (Guinn, 2024, 88). It became clear that because of their close relationship, Koresh would succeed Lois as leader of the group following the two taking a

trip to Israel in 1985, during which Koresh revealed that he experienced several revelations, something which most members accepted gladly.

Following a brief conflict with George Roden, Koresh had secured the leadership position of the community in 1986 and, ultimately, had reinvigorated it. Many members who either lived abroad or had simply left upon Roden's ascendance returned to the community to take up permanent residence. Koresh's clear command of the Bible also earned the respect of his congregants and contributed to his strong hold over the community. For the time being, there was little that was suspicious or wrong seeming in the community. The violence that had taken place between George Roden and Koresh had been unwelcome, but with Roden's arrest, the community could return to a more peaceful and unproblematic existence, led by a prophet whose command of the Bible was unmatched. In 1989, Koresh would receive a revelation that would change the state of affairs on Mount Carmel dramatically, and ultimately set into motion the events that would end with the death of all of Mount Carmel's remaining residents on the 19th of April 1993.

3.2 - The Branch Davidians: Revelation (1989-1993)

In the summer of 1989, David Koresh received a revelation that few could have expected. Calling it the new light revelation, Koresh stated that God had told him that all the married couples at Mount Carmel needed to separate for Koresh to arrange the marriages to best please God (Tabor and Gallagher, 1995, 68). Koresh also added that God had told him that his children would receive special favor in the Kingdom of God and would ultimately become rulers in said Kingdom. For most, this was a shocking revelation. They were already happily married and were torn by their obedience to God (whose words that Koresh conveyed to them with the authority of a prophet) and their desire to maintain their earthly relationships.

One member who did not go along with the new light revelation was Marc Breault, a Branch Davidian member who left the group in response to Koresh's demand that he be able to take his wife as his own and have children with her. Breault would prove to be a troublesome thorn in Koresh's foot, as he would inform on the Branch Davidians and attempt to lead an apostate movement among the Branch Davidians who did not reside at Mount Carmel, such as the small community of Branch Davidians living in Australia.

Breault had been witness to Koresh's more troubling patterns of behavior such as his consistent use of corporal punishment and his relationship with minors in the Mount Carmel community. Breault alleged that Koresh had been marrying minors and having sexual relations with them, even going so far as to have children with them (Wright, 1995, 104). That this is the case seems to have been confirmed by congressional testimony given after the siege of Waco by Kiri Jewell, a member of the Branch Davidians who said she was ten years old when Koresh undressed her and rubbed his penis on her vagina during a trip with her, her mother, and another Branch Davidian (Guinn, 2024, 111). Having heard of this disturbing incident through friends still living at Mount Carmel, Breault rapidly contacted Jewell's father, who was a non-Branch Davidian residing in Michigan. When Kiri visited her father during the holiday season of 1991, he obtained a court order that prevented her from returning to Mount Carmel, and ultimately sought full custody of his child, though the Branch Davidians fought this in court (Guinn, 2024, 112).

The ultimate result of Breault's work to have Koresh arrested for his sexual abuse of children and his use of corporal punishment was the involvement of Texas Child Protective

Services (CPS) and their investigation of the Branch Davidians. CPS investigated the Branch Davidians over a period of months, going so far as to undertake many surprise visits. Despite serious accusations made by Breault and the father of Kiri Jewell, the result of the investigation was to say that there was no evidence of child abuse of any kind taking place at Mount Carmel (Wright, 1995, 146). Despite the result of the investigation, many within CPS believed it should continue (Wright, 1995, 146).

In response to the involvement of the legal system in the affairs of Branch Davidians and the apostate activities of Marc Breault, Koresh began to change his theology. For the entire existence of the Branch Davidians, their leaders had prophesied that the end times would occur in Jerusalem where God had made their home prior to the destruction of the First and Second Temples. Now surrounded by enemies, called the forces of Babylon by Koresh, he was forced to revise this doctrine, now believing that the final confrontation between the forces of good and the forces of Babylon would occur at Mount Carmel itself (Guinn, 2024, 118). Koresh's changing of expectations regarding the apocalypse signaled that he felt the forces of evil were forcing the hand of the Branch Davidians.

Koresh was largely correct in his assumption. Not only had CPS focused their attention on the Branch Davidians, but the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms had begun to investigate the Branch Davidians in the summer of 1992. The BATF had been tipped off by a mailman who believed the packages he was delivering were of a suspicious nature and contained illegal firearms (Kerstetter, 2004, 456). In charge of regulating the issuing of firearms, the BATF investigated the Branch Davidians and ultimately found that they were stockpiling firearms and turning semi-automatic rifles into automatic rifles, something which required extensive background checks and licenses to do (Guinn, 2024, 105). The Branch Davidians lacked the required permissions, so whoever was responsible for dealing with the firearms in question was guilty of breaking the law. Given Koresh's overbearing leadership of his congregation, few had any illusions about who was responsible for the Branch Davidians' illegal modification and purchasing of firearms.

In conjunction with the allegations of child abuse levelled at Koresh, the allegations regarding firearms provided the BATF with enough evidence to press charges against Koresh and arrest him. BATF agents were certain they had accumulated enough evidence in the second half of 1992 to arrest Koresh with regards to the allegations concerning firearms. Despite the CPS investigations yielding no results regarding all the other rumors surrounding Koresh and his abuse of children, those in the BATF wishing to arrest Koresh believed that he was indeed guilty of the other allegations and that therefore, his arrest needed to be undertaken urgently (Guinn, 2024, 143).

BATF agents were also propelled to action by a scandal that threatened the existence of the agency. The BATF was not well liked by the American public. As author T. Jefferson Parker put it, "the BATF had it rough because most Americans liked alcohol, tobacco, and firearms - and disliked regulation." (Guinn, 2024, 128) The BATF therefore suffered from a reputation that framed it as being overbearing and useless (Guinn, 2024, 128). Not only was the BATF concerned with improving its reputation on a constant basis, but it was also particularly concerned with doing so early in 1993 because of a 60 Minutes television report that outlined an apparent plague of sexual abuse and harassment within the BATF (Guinn, 2024, 156). In response to the 60 Minutes piece, the newly elected President Bill Clinton publicly mused about having the BATF merged with the FBI. Hearings regarding the sexual assault scandal were scheduled for the 10th of March 1993, and BATF felt they needed a public relations victory

before the hearings took place, else they risked being placed under the foot of the FBI. A raid of Mount Carmel to arrest Koresh, a leader of an eclectic religious group that was derogatorily referred to as a cult by many, seemed a sure way to boost the agency's reputation while also doing something good.

With hindsight it has become evident that the BATF was severely underprepared for its raid on Mount Carmel. The BATF underestimated Branch Davidian preparedness for the incoming raid, something which led the BATF to commit too few resources to the operation and ultimately fail to take a proper approach to the raid. Much of the BATF's information regarding the Branch Davidians and the layout of the Mount Carmel compound came from Marc Breault, a man who had not stepped foot in Mount Carmel for approximately 3 years. The BATF therefore did not know how many floors there were in Mount Carmel's respective buildings, did not know where the entrances and potential avenues of escape were, and ultimately did not know exactly who lived within the compound (Guinn, 2024, 176). Though they knew where Koresh's bedroom was located because of the work of an undercover agent named Robert Rodriguez, they did not know whether women and children would be near Koresh during the raid and arrest.

The BATF agents undertaking the raid were also certain that Koresh would come to his arrest willingly and that the Branch Davidians would not resist. To put it simply, the BATF felt as though they were dealing with a bunch of religious fanatics who would freeze in the face of armed and trained law enforcement agents (Wright, 1995, 174). They therefore felt that despite typically only doing seizure operations in small buildings, that the raid on Mount Carmel would proceed smoothly regardless of Mount Carmel's comparatively immense size. Though they committed more resources than usual to the raid, they committed nowhere near what was necessary, and ultimately believed that it would be over within an hour or two. An agent responsible for flying a helicopter in the raid unironically believed that he would have time to fly back to Houston in time to make his golf game taking place the afternoon of that same day (Guinn, 2024, 189). Overall, the BATF gave the impression of cockiness regarding the operation, believing that the Branch Davidians were too simple-minded to make the raid difficult. Nothing could be further from the truth. As was previously mentioned, Koresh had altered the theology of the Branch Davidians to suit the situation at hand. Because of the involvement of law enforcement agencies like the CPS in the affairs of the Branch Davidians, Koresh anticipated that there would be a confrontation at Mount Carmel in the near future. Though the BATF believed that Agent Rodriguez had successfully infiltrated the Branch Davidians without having been noticed, Koresh had known that he was a secret agent from their first meeting (Guinn, 2024, 197), something which only heightened Koresh' expectations of an impending conflict. The BATF therefore severely underestimated the preparedness of the Branch Davidians for the raid. Not only had they underprepared in terms of gathering the proper resources for the raid, but they also failed to consider what would happen if the raid went wrong in terms of its execution. A report by the treasury department following the conflict stated that "It does not appear that *anyone* in the BATF's leadership asked obvious questions, beginning with, *what happens if*?" (Emphasis added) (Guinn, 2024, 180) Overall, one is left with the impression that the BATF took a rather amateurish approach to the operation.

Not only did BATF agents fail to consider what would happen if the operation went awry, but they also failed to properly consider who they were raiding. Though the BATF agents readily labeled the Branch Davidians as being religious fanatics, they knew almost nothing about Branch Davidian beliefs (Guinn, 2024, 160). Agent Mike Russell was recorded as saying, "It was all based on their illegal firearms. We didn't consider nothing about religion." (Guinn, 2024,

160), an admission that is truly striking in hindsight. Branch Davidian theology was based around the conflict between the forces of good and the forces of evil that would take place at the end of history, a time Koresh and the Branch Davidians believed was imminent. The Branch Davidians believed themselves the forces of good, and they believed that the forces of Babylon discussed in the Book of Revelation were represented by the United States government in the modern day (Tabor and Gallagher, 1995, 4). The inability of the BATF to understand that the Branch Davidians would believe that the prophecy of the end times was being fulfilled when a large group of armed Federal agents raided their property without notice was a huge oversight in their planning, and ultimately contributed to the failure of their operation.

Perhaps the biggest oversight in the BATF's planning was how they approached the operation in the first place. The BATF treated their operation as a hostage rescue operation because of the many rumors surrounding Koresh and his treatment of children rather than as the arrest of the leader of a group illegally stockpiling and modifying firearms (Wright, 1995, 174). This approach to the operation meant that not only were the BATF's preparations rushed, but it also meant that they viewed the operation through a lens that mandated they proceed using force. In reality, the arrest of Koresh could have taken place without force at all. Koresh regularly made trips to Waco to make purchases, go to bars, or simply speak to people he wished to speak to (Tabor and Gallagher, 1995, 164). The arrest of Koresh could have taken place during one of his somewhat regular visits to Waco, but the BATF's bad preparation once again led them to believe that Koresh had stopped making regular visits even if that was not the case (Guinn, 2024, 158). Marc Breault, who perhaps wanted Koresh arrested more than anyone else, told the BATF that using force to arrest Koresh would be a terrible idea, but they ignored his advice despite trusting all of his information regarding other matters related to the Branch Davidians (Guinn, 2024, 158). The belief that the Branch Davidians living at Mount Carmel were somehow hostages of Koresh could have been dismissed out of hand by the simple fact that CPS had completed a full investigation of the compound in the months preceding the BATF's preparations for the operation (Tabor and Gallagher, 1995, 19). Instead of doing so, the BATF rushed into the operation, misunderstanding the stakes at hand, as well as the group they were undertaking the operation against.

Under Koresh's leadership, the Branch Davidians had grown slightly in size to include approximately 125 people, all of whom respected his seemingly implacable knowledge of scripture (Tabor and Gallagher, 1995, 29). They also respected his interpretations of scripture and believed him when he said that he needed to marry as many Branch Davidians as possible to create a new ruling class for the Kingdom of God, which all Branch Davidians believed was coming soon. Despite the loyalty he commanded among those at Mount Carmel, apostates like Marc Breault worked tirelessly to undermine Koresh and have him pay for the things they alleged he subjected the residents of Mount Carmel to. Breault was largely successful in his efforts, managing to ensnare Koresh and the Branch Davidians in legal issues, and force the investigation of the group by the CPS and the BATF. Although the former had failed to verify the veracity of the allegations against Koresh, the latter dove headfirst into an operation which was badly planned and was ultimately based on assumptions that proved to be wholly false. Nevertheless, the BATF prepared for their raid on Mount Carmel, planned for the 28th of February 1993, completely unprepared for what was to come. Their lack of preparation would necessitate the involvement of the FBI, an agency that brought an even more militant approach to the siege that transformed a failed raid into a catastrophic loss of life.

3.3 - What happened at the Branch Davidian compound? (February 28th to April 19th, 1993)

The events of the raid and subsequent siege of the Branch Davidian compound at Mount Carmel that took place between February 28th and April 19th, 1993, are overshadowed by the fire that engulfed the compound on the final day and killed 76 Branch Davidians. Debates still abound regarding who began the fire in question, and no solid conclusion has been arrived at by scholars (Tabor and Gallagher, 1995, 2). This thesis will avoid discussing this unresolvable issue and will instead focus on the events between February 28th and April 20th, 1993, that could have ended the hostilities, but ultimately did not do so. In the brief recapturing of the events of the siege that will be undertaken in this section, it is hoped that the reader will be able to see that the siege of Mount Carmel was not an incident of religious violence, but was instead a product of severe miscommunication between all parties and the impatience of the federal government agencies who were ill prepared and ultimately discouraged by the slow progress they made throughout the siege. Though the religious beliefs of the Branch Davidians certainly played a role in their decision to defend themselves, these same beliefs did not impede the progress made by negotiators throughout the conflict, leading one to believe that the religious beliefs of the Branch Davidians were not the only factor behind the prolonged nature of the conflict. The siege of Mount Carmel shows all the signs of being a complex conflict with many causes, not simply being the product of religious beliefs.

The BATF decided to undertake their raid on the 28th of February in the morning, believing that it would proceed smoothly and be brief. Aside from their belief that the Branch Davidians would crumble in the face of trained law enforcement agents, the BATF also believed that the raid would proceed without a hitch because they would be able to catch the Branch Davidians off guard (Guinn, 2024, 179). As was discussed in section 3.2, Koresh understood some sort of conflict with federal agents would take place soon, his sense of anticipation only being heightened by the fact that the group was being monitored by an undercover agent. The BATF's element of surprise was completely taken away on the morning of the raid when Koresh was informed by a mailman that the BATF was surrounding the compound and conducting a large-scale operation (Guinn, 2024, 195). The mailman, named David Jones, informed Koresh of the incoming operation after helping a cameraman who was on his way to film the BATF operation for a news agency with his car troubles (Cook, 2023, 51). The cameraman told Jones what he was on his way to film, and Jones promptly went off to inform Koresh because of his sympathy for the group (Guinn, 2024, 195). The BATF's element of surprise was therefore completely removed. Despite being informed that this was the case, agency heads agreed to move forward with the operation, believing that since all the Branch Davidian weapons were stockpiled in one room, Koresh would not be able to distribute the firearms to his followers to allow them to defend themselves.

Once again, the BATF was proceeding on false information. Nearly all Branch Davidians had been armed with weapons ever since Koresh began suspecting that the forces of Babylon were encircling the congregation (Guinn, 2024, 213). The false notion that the Branch Davidians held all their weaponry in one location was given to the BATF by Marc Breault, but the information was years old and false as a result. The BATF were therefore very surprised when they were met with gunfire when surrounding the property and flying over the property with helicopters.

To this day, there is no certainty as to whether the BATF or the Branch Davidians shot the first bullets in the conflict. Regardless of who fired first, a massive gun battle ensued during which the BATF fired about 1,500 bullets and the Branch Davidians fired 15,000 (Guinn, 2024, 219). A member of the Branch Davidians called 911 shortly after the first shots were fired, and communications between the two parties largely proceeded with the help of 911 agents in the initial phase of the conflict. Eventually, a ceasefire was negotiated. 4 BATF agents and 6 Branch Davidians died during the initial conflict, with Koresh having been seriously injured (Guinn, 2024, 231).

Despite the hostilities, lines of communication were set up between the parties in question. The BATF implored Koresh to release all the children in the building into their hands, and he partially acceded to their request by releasing 4 children (Guinn, 2024, 231). On March 1st, control over the operation was passed onto the FBI, the situation clearly having been over the head of the BATF (Guinn, 2024, 233). The FBI knew as little about the Branch Davidians as the BATF did, believing nearly all the salacious rumors about Koresh were true, and that he was therefore not worthy of being given any leeway. The FBI approached the siege with the same militant mindset used by the BATF despite that mindset having yielded no results.

Though there were no more shots being fired following the initial raid, the FBI brought lots of heavy equipment to Mount Carmel, including tanks, hoping to intimidate the Branch Davidians into surrendering. Unsurprisingly, this strategy did not result in a Branch Davidian surrender, but only led to them being more determined to not submit themselves to the aggressor forces of Babylon. Despite the entrenchment of all parties involved, negotiations proceeded, and the conflict was almost resolved early on. The FBI agreed to Koresh's demand that a one-hour audio tape would be broadcasted on major syndicated broadcasting networks containing his teachings. Koresh demanded that this audiotape be played during primetime saying that if it was, he and the Branch Davidians would surrender peacefully. The FBI agreed but had the networks in question broadcast the tape at 1:30 pm rather than a primetime hour, leading to Koresh abandoning his plan to surrender (Guinn, 2024, 244).

Despite abandoning his plan for surrendering, all hope was far from being lost when the siege is examined in hindsight. By the 5th day of the siege, Koresh had allowed for 21 children to be given into the hands of the FBI (Guinn, 2024, 250), leading one to believe that avenues for surrender were open. The FBI, having been heavily criticized for its failure to prevent the Jonestown massacre, was afraid of allowing another such mass suicide event to take place (Guinn, 2024, 123). Koresh assured negotiators that no such plan for mass suicide was in place, and Koresh's actions during the siege seem to testify to this. Koresh's mother had reached out to celebrity lawyer Dick DeGuerin to represent her son in the case of his eventual arrest, and DeGuerin agreed pending an ability to pay. Koresh agreed with DeGuerin that he would make a deal with a publisher to publish his own account of the siege of Mount Carmel to pay DeGuerin with the proceeds of the book (Talty, 2023, 310). Koresh's acquisition of a celebrity lawyer to represent him in the case of arrest is a clear indication that Koresh intended to live past the siege. Koresh's continual (if slow) release of Branch Davidians into FBI control and his making of plans for life beyond the siege clearly indicate that Koresh expected the negotiations to proceed and result in the Branch Davidians' surrender.

Though slow progress was being made, the FBI found themselves frustrated with Koresh and losing patience. Since the notion that Koresh was a disingenuous psychopath was common among the FBI agents working at Mount Carmel (Tabor and Gallagher, 1995, 206), they believed that negotiating was futile, and that Koresh needed to be dealt with through force.

Koresh's abandonment of his plan of surrender only reinforced this notion, leading the FBI leader of the operation Dick Rogers to tell negotiator Gary Noesser that "it's time to teach him a lesson" (Guinn, 2024, 244). Despite avenues of communication being open and negotiations continuing, it was clear to those involved that the FBI was losing patience with the Branch Davidians and Koresh. They therefore resorted to harsher tactics in response to being told that Koresh was waiting on God to tell him the proper time to surrender.

Beginning on the 21st of March, the FBI began blaring sounds of dying rabbits and obnoxious music over loudspeakers directed at the compound at all times of the day (Guinn, 2024, 263). The sounds were so loud that journalists located 2 miles away complained that the noises were far too loud (Guinn, 2024, 263). The FBI also began pointing blinding lights into the compound at all hours. The strategy was evidently to make life unbearable for those still inside the compound, but the FBI underestimated the resilience of the Branch Davidians, who were used to stringent conditions because of their austere lifestyle. They, much like the BATF, completely misunderstood the religious beliefs of the Branch Davidians and how their aggressive attitude would be interpreted by them.

The Branch Davidians believed that they were being surrounded by the forces of Babylon during the initial raid by the BATF, and fully believed that they were likely to die on the day of the initial conflict (Guinn, 2024, 208), Koresh having told them they would die in the conflict with the forces of Babylon for many years now. As the conflict dragged on and the FBI became involved, many became dejected and began to believe that this was not the final conflict with the forces of Babylon as they had hoped, since they remained alive (Guinn, 2024, 230). No one in the FBI understood Branch Davidian theology and were therefore convinced that the Branch Davidians intended to either kill themselves or remain on the compound forever. Neither of these were true, but the FBI refused to change course.

Noted biblical scholars like James Tabor and Phillip J. Arnold petitioned the FBI to be able to speak to Koresh to potentially make avenues in negotiations and give Koresh like-minded people to speak to (Guinn, 2024, 207). They were refused, as was Koresh's demand to speak to theologians and scholars (Guinn, 2024, 278). FBI agents regularly demeaned the religious beliefs of the Branch Davidians during official press conferences, making it known that they believed Koresh was a charlatan (Talty, 2023, 315). These press conferences were seen by Branch Davidians, and hardly improved the relations between both parties. The impression given was that not only was the FBI not aware of Branch Davidian religious beliefs, but that they believed their beliefs were irrelevant to the ongoing conflict.

Though some negotiators attempted to make inroads with Koresh and listen to the explanations of his religious beliefs given by him, the impatience of the FBI and their refusal to listen to what they called "bible babble" (Tabor and Gallagher, 1995, 108) undermined the progress made by negotiations and therefore ensured that the Branch Davidians would remain doggedly in the compound. Little progress was made during the last half of March and the first half of April, forcing the FBI to reconsider their tactics. The use of nerve gas to force the Branch Davidians out had originally been rejected by Attorney General Janet Reno (Guinn, 2023, 289), but was approved as the conflict dragged on.

The precise reason for AG Reno's change in mentality is not known, but all parties involved were experiencing fatigue and frustration. With no end in sight, it's likely that AG Reno came to adopt the FBI's position that the only thing that would result in a Branch Davidian surrender would be a large show of force. The Branch Davidians still sought a peaceful solution to the conflict, saying that they would come out of the compound when Koresh had finished

writing down his revelation of the seven seals found in the Book of Revelation (Talty, 2023, 354). Though the Branch Davidians provided reports of Koresh's progress, the process was far too slow for the FBI agents on scene, whose superiors were demanding concrete results in terms of Koresh's arrest and the release of all Branch Davidians into FBI custody. The FBI therefore proceeded with its plan to release nerve gas into the compound.

The CS gas used was non-lethal and intended to irritate the Branch Davidians within the compound to force them out. The Branch Davidians had proven to be resilient beyond the expectations of the FBI, but the nerve gas would truly make life unbearable as breathing would become a labor and exposed skin would itch beyond belief (Guinn, 2024, 295). As gas canisters were thrown into the compound, the FBI drove tanks over all Branch Davidian possessions outside the compound to clear the way for FBI agents to evacuate those inside, but also as a show of force to show that the Branch Davidians were completely at the mercy of the FBI and surrender was the only option. A tank drove directly into the compound, causing the roof to collapse. The Branch Davidians were all huddled in one room, trying to equip each other with gas masks and locate all the Branch Davidians remaining in the building.

Shortly after the roof collapsed, a fire began to consume the building. Although the initial canisters of nerve gas thrown into the building were non-flammable, flammable ones had been thrown in during the later stages of the operation (Guinn, 2024, 296). How the fire began is still debated to this day, and whether it was accidental or intended by either the FBI or the Branch Davidian is unknown. That the FBI would start the fire on purpose seems unlikely. Though they had clearly run out of patience with the Branch Davidians, there is no indication that they simply wanted them to all perish. It is also just as unlikely that the Branch Davidians would have purposefully started the fire. By all accounts, Koresh was preparing for life after the siege, and he spoke on a consistent basis with negotiators about what his conditions would be like in jail (Talty, 2023, 310). The fire therefore seems to have been accidental, which is not hard to believe given the compound was filled with firearms, ammunition of all kinds, and nerve gas. The only certainty is that 76 Branch Davidians perished in the flames, with 9 escaping through the windows into the custody of the FBI.

3.4 - Why the Siege of Mount Carmel Should Not Be Understood as an Incident of Religious Violence

The conflict between the Branch Davidians, the BATF, and the FBI was one with many moving parts, and shortly after it occurred it became a conflict for which people to project their political opinions and interests upon. Those who believed that the federal government was too involved in the lives of its citizens held up the Branch Davidians as exemplars of fighting against tyranny and standing up for one's right to bear arms. In the years following the conflict, the number of right-wing militia groups rose from a dozen groups to nearly nine-hundred groups, an evident signal to the federal government that many disagreed with its supposed encroachment on the Branch Davidians 2nd Amendment rights and their right to religious freedom (Cook, 2023, 195). On the other hand, those who believed that religions tended to be violent jumped on the conflict as proof of their argument. They argued that not only was Koresh a manipulative and ultimately maniacal religious leader who abused children, but that he also led his followers to their deaths because of his refusal to concede the power he had manipulated his devotees into giving him (Tabor and Gallagher, 1995, 206). Unfortunately for both sides, the conflict at Mount Carmel defies categorization. The Branch Davidians and David Koresh were indeed victims of

the aggression of federal government agencies, but they were also guilty of failing to keep certain promises and were ultimately guilty of many of the crimes that they were accused of. Nevertheless, those who argue that the siege of Mount Carmel is an incident of religious violence fail to appreciate *two crucial factors*. The *first* factor being that the decision to initiate the conflict was undertaken by secular actors, and the *second* being that the prolonged nature of the conflict was because of failures of communication and strategy by all actors involved, not solely because of the religious beliefs of the Branch Davidians.

To argue that the siege of Mount Carmel was an incident of religious violence ignores the glaringly obvious fact that it was the BATF who initiated the conflict by conducting a raid on the Branch Davidian compound. It's certainly true that the religious beliefs of the Branch Davidians factored into their decision to defend themselves in such a ferocious and abrasive manner. But American history is replete with examples of groups using firearms to defend themselves from government forces, one such incident occurring only one year earlier at Ruby Ridge, Idaho, when the Weaver family defended themselves in the same manner that the Branch Davidians did despite never citing religious reasons (Dobratz et al, 2003, 317). When Koresh was asked why he chose to defend himself and the Branch Davidians, he is quoted as saying, "that's just the American way." (Kerstetter, 2004, 455) The plethora of entirely secular militia groups that were created following the attack to fight against federal government encroachment testifies to the current in American culture that views defense of one's property using force as normal (Cook, 2023, 194). As Cavanaugh points out extensively in his writings, the distinction between the secular and the religious is an ambiguous one (Cavanaugh, 2009, 4). The Branch Davidians did indeed defend themselves because of their religious beliefs. And yet they also strongly believed that their way of life on Mount Carmel merited being defended, not for strictly religious reasons, but because they had created a community that they all voluntarily participated in without bothering those around them (Cook, 2023, 140). One is therefore left wondering to what extent the decision of Branch Davidians to defend their property was motivated by religious beliefs or other factors. The fact of the matter is that the decision of the Branch Davidians to defend themselves was motivated by many factors both in their control and out of their control. To argue that the conflict that ensued was simply a religious conflict not only ignores the fact that two of the three parties involved were secular, but also casts the individuals who were part of the Branch Davidians as being utterly at the mercy of their religious beliefs, when the evidence shows this to be untrue.

Not only did the BATF initiate the conflict, but they did so in an overly aggressive manner based on the belief that Koresh's congregants were essentially hostages (Tabor and Gallagher, 1995, 4). Had the BATF and FBI not been gripped by this false notion, Koresh's arrest could have been handled in a more passive and strategic manner. Prior to the raid undertaken by the BATF, CPS had concluded an investigation saying that none of the accusations made against the Branch Davidians were true regarding the abuse of children (Tabor and Gallagher, 1995, 19). Had the BATF taken this fact into consideration, they could have taken a more patient approach to arresting Koresh and the Branch Davidians, one that would have involved learning more about the group's religious beliefs, and perhaps undertaking a more substantial infiltration of the group through undercover agents. Christopher G. Elison and John P. Bartowski have argued that the moral panic over the abuse of children that gripped the BATF can be understood as characteristic of the political environment of the 1990's, during which moral panics about the relationship between isolated religious groups and child rearing were frequent across North America (Wright, 1995, 136). When one considers the fact that the BATF

launched into action without properly considering the consequences of their actions and coming up with a backup plan (Guinn, 2024, 180), Elison and Bartowski's argument seems sensible.

It also becomes clear when examining the conflict in hindsight that the BATF was propelled into action by the desire to salvage its reputation and prevent the dissolution of the agency that was threatened by important politicians (Guinn, 2024, 156). The BATF had been heavily scrutinized for its role in the siege of Ruby Ridge as well as the agency's inability to deal with claims of sexual abuse from within (Guinn, 2024, 156). The desire to salvage the reputation of the agency by scoring a public relations victory in the form of arresting Koresh, who had a reputation as being manipulative and abusive, had subsequently been admitted to by some within the agency at the time. It goes without saying that the desire of the BATF to recover its reputation had little to do with religion or religious violence. In hindsight it seems obvious that the BATF could have simply arrested Koresh on one of his many excursions into Waco, as was suggested by Marc Breault, who warned against the siege of the compound despite his desire to see Koresh humiliated (Guinn, 2024, 158). Despite this, the BATF chose to raid the compound in a high-profile way with media organizations closely filming the affair with the permission of the BATF. Regardless of the precise motivation for the BATF's actions, it's clear that incompetence and impatience in the face of the agency's rapidly degrading reputation played a large role. One is left wondering how the conflict can be viewed as an incident of religious violence when these undeniable facts are considered.

As was previously mentioned, the religious beliefs of the Branch Davidians factored into their decision to fight the BATF. The belief that they needed to fight against the forces of Babylon to secure their own salvation has been noted by all those who have studied the conflict, especially those who argue that the conflict should be seen as an incident of religious violence (Newport, 2009, 61). Less noted by those making that same argument is the fact that the Branch Davidians conceded a great deal to the BATF and FBI regardless of their belief that they were the forces embodying evil. Throughout the conflict, the Branch Davidians released more than 20 children into the hands of the FBI to guarantee their safety (Guinn, 2024, 250). Had the Branch Davidians been motivated solely by their dogmatic religious beliefs, it seems unlikely that they would have given their children into the custody of those they considered to be fundamentally evil. Furthermore, Koresh had agreed to come out of the compound during the earlier stages of the conflict with the rest of the Branch Davidians if the FBI arranged to broadcast a one-hour tape that Koresh gave to them during primetime. The strange decision of the FBI to not simply have the tape played during primetime and instead having it played at 1:30 pm led to the Branch Davidians reneging on the agreement (Ginn, 2024, 243). One can criticize Koresh for being immature and far too concerned with not seeming to be disrespected by the FBI, but to say that religion factored into his decision to renege on the agreement is to misunderstand the situation, especially since Steve Schneider, a close associate of Koresh has stated clearly that, "David felt the FBI was messing with his manhood." (Talty, 2023, 306)

The FBI also had the same issue with feeling disrespected. As was noted earlier in section 3.3, the head of the operation for the FBI spoke of the need to teach Koresh a lesson (Talty, 2023, 302). Although negotiations were constant throughout the conflict, certain elements within the FBI sought to undermine these negotiations. During one incident when the release of some Branch Davidians into the hands of the FBI had been negotiated and agreed upon, an FBI agent proceeded to drive over some Branch Davidian vehicles with a tank in a show of force, leading Koresh to cancel the agreement (Talty, 2023, 339). One is left with the impression that all the parties involved lacked the maturity necessary to resolve the conflict peacefully.

Once again, perhaps Koresh can be criticized for not simply giving up when the situation was clearly not in the favor of the Branch Davidians, but this has little to do with their religious beliefs. Had the religious beliefs of the Branch Davidians been at the root of the conflict, it is unlikely that Koresh and the Branch Davidians would have made any concessions to the FBI and BATF, forces they believed to be fundamentally evil. Negotiations during the conflict were constant, as were Branch Davidian promises to eventually leave the compound if certain conditions were met. The FBI's unwillingness to meet these conditions because of a lack of patience ultimately characterized the latter half of the conflict and was clearly a major factor in the tragic end of the conflict as the FBI refused to wait for Koresh's documenting of the seven seals, preferring instead to use a major show of force to attempt to end the conflict quickly. The conflict did indeed end quickly, but it ended tragically rather than in reconciliation.

At the heart of Cavanaugh's theoretical considerations regarding religion and violence is the idea that no religious body can exist in isolation. The Branch Davidians lived a rather isolated existence on the outskirts of Waco on Mount Carmel, a compound that the Branch Davidians raised their children and lived collectively within. Despite their best attempts to live an isolated existence, the Branch Davidians could not avoid interacting with the institutions of the United States government and its legal system. As tensions mounted with the legal system and those who had apostatized, David Koresh believed that the final conflict that would inaugurate the reign of the Kingdom of God was arriving quickly, and so began to stockpile firearms. This attracted the attention of the BATF, who prepared to raid the Mount Carmel compound with the goal of arresting Koresh, a man they believed to be a manipulative conman who sexually abused children. The failure of the BATF to properly plan for the raid or consider taking a less bombastic but equally effective course of action like arresting Koresh outside of the compound began a tragic chain of events that ended with the death of nearly all the Branch Davidians living at the compound. Unable to exist in isolation, the Branch Davidians were forced to contend with secular forces. Though they did so in a way that was informed by their religious beliefs, they were forced to undermine these beliefs or reframe them to guarantee their safety. The fact that the Branch Davidians did indeed compromise their beliefs suggests that much like Cavanaugh argues, the Branch Davidians could not exist simply as a religion and as nothing else. They had to contend with surrounding society in a way that forced them to compromise what they believe, and act differently than they would have liked to. The siege of Waco therefore cannot be understood as an incident of religious violence, as not only was the conflict initiated (and arguably perpetuated) by secular forces, but the Branch Davidians did not act purely based on their doctrines and religious beliefs, choosing to compromise with the secular actors despite their theological beliefs telling them they should not.

Chapter 4 - The Aum Affair

On March 20th, 1995, Japanese society experienced a shocking act of terrorism that most Japanese citizens believed impossible. For the first time since the Second World War, chemical weapons were used against a civilian population**,** but rather than being used in a wartime context, they were deployed in the Tokyo subway by a new religious movement named Aum Shinrikyo. The attack, which involved the releasing of sarin gas onto the crowded Tokyo subway to murder as many commuters as possible, resulted in the death of 12 citizens and the injuring of several thousands (Watanabe, 1998, 81). Had the sarin gas been released properly and the attack not been botched, the death of more than 10,000 citizens would have been the likely result (Lifton, 2000, 3). This act of terrorism fundamentally altered the image Japanese society had of itself as being safe from irrational acts of terrorism and would change the relationship between the Japanese government and religious movements (Wilkinson, 2009, 2).

Aum Shinrikyo was known by the Japanese public at large but was hardly seen as the kind of group that would commit an indiscriminate and colossal act of terrorism. In the months following the attack, extensive media coverage of the group analyzed its religious beliefs and sought to understand why a nominally Buddhist group would undertake such a violent act. This media coverage mostly discussed Aum's eclectic and esoteric beliefs, as well as their apocalyptic beliefs. Aum's history as a group that stockpiled weapons in preparation for a global apocalyptic conflict became the focus of the media coverage, and Aum was portrayed as an irrational and wacky religious group led by a megalomaniacal leader intent on preserving their existence in the face of global nuclear annihilation (Lifton, 2000, 234). The conventional wisdom quickly became that the attacks of March 20th, 1995, colloquially dubbed the Aum Affair, were the product of Aum's religious beliefs and that therefore the incident should be considered a prototypical incident of religious violence. The media was not alone in holding this opinion, as influential and respected scholars of Japanese religions like Ian Reader shared their view that the Aum Affair was the product of religious beliefs (Reader, 2012, 180).

This thesis will take a markedly different view and propose that the Aum Affair should not be seen as an incident of religious violence. Instead, it will argue that much like the Jonestown massacre and the Waco conflict, the Aum Affair was the product of Aum Shinrikyo's interactions with a hostile outside world. These interactions were the product of political and social factors that had little to do with religious doctrine. To illustrate this point, it will be necessary to recount the history of Aum as a religion in detail, showing how Aum did not simply commit a single act of large-scale violence, but instead had a lengthy history of committing violent acts in response to perceived threats to its existence. These violent acts were far from being indiscriminate but were instead targeted acts undertaken to eliminate perceived threats to Aum's existence. This thesis will argue that the Aum Affair of March 20th, 1995, was similarly a targeted act of violence, intended to eliminate a specific threat to the group rather than initiate an apocalypse as is so often proposed.

A brief introduction to the group and its existence in its infancy (1984-1987) will be followed by an in-depth recounting of the history of Aum as a group and its violent acts from 1987 to 1995, the years during which Aum began committing violent acts, succeeded in attracting a significant number of members, and ultimately crumbled because of the decision to undertake the attack of March 20th, 1995. Subsequently, the events of March 20th, 1995, will be discussed to prove that it was a targeted incident of violence rather than a manifestation of apocalyptic beliefs.

4.1 - The Early Life of Shoko Asahara and the Beginnings of Aum Shinrikyo (1984-1987)

Aum Shinrikyo was a little-known but fervent religious movement that began in 1984 and ultimately continues its existence to this day, though its presence has been severely diminished and discredited by the Aum Affair. Its leader, Shoko Asahara, was jailed shortly after the attack and executed in 2018 by the Japanese government for orchestrating acts of terrorism and murder. Much of the discussion surrounding Aum has revolved around the group's eclectic beliefs and its abnormal leader. Many have been quick to resort to psychological explanations for why Shoko Asahara and his followers committed an act of violence with such destructive intent, pointing to the unusual nature of the group's beliefs and its leader's grandiose claims such as claiming to be able to levitate and a familial kinship with Jesus of Nazareth, who lived 2000 years before Aum's existence (Lifton, 2004, 62). No totalistic explanation, whether psychological or about the nature of religions and their propensity for committing violence, could adequately explain the events of the Aum Affair. Instead, what is required is an in-depth exploration of Aum's interactions with the world outside of the confines of its religious beliefs to see how hostility from the outside world led to Aum developing a persecution complex and feeling as though it needed to engage in violent acts to eliminate its enemies.

In 1984, the year of Aum Shinrikyo's creation by Shoko Asahara, it would have been difficult to predict the group's violent descent into religious extremism. The group simply resembled one of the many new religious movements that were flowering everywhere in post-war Japan, focused on bringing individual fulfillment through traditional Eastern religious practices to a Japanese population that was in the throes of an economic boom.

Shoko Asahara and his childhood have been the subject of much psychoanalytic intrigue. Born half-blind and to a family of modest means, Asahara attended a school for the blind. Though he was visually impaired, he was less so when compared with the rest of the student body, something that he used to cajole and bully fellow students into doing his bidding (Wilkinson, 2009, 41). Testimonials given by his former classmates not only confirm that Asahara was violent and a bully, but also that he was extremely ambitious, expressing the desire to become Prime Minister of Japan and become wealthy (Wilkinson, 2009, 41). Some scholars have come to associate Asahara's grandiose ambition in his early life with the daring and attention-grabbing actions of Aum under Asahara's leadership. That Asahara was extremely ambitious is evident and undeniable, and interestingly, a former high-ranking member of Aum told an interviewer that the reason for the Aum Affair of 1995 was motivated by Asahara's desire to "become a king" (Wilkinson, 2009, 58). Despite this, it would be a mistake to argue that Asahara's dominance over Aum was so thorough that the group was merely an extension of his ambitions. As will be demonstrated, Aum's actions were often the product of its interactions with the outside world, interactions that became more hostile as time went on.

Asahara sought to enter Tokyo University, but upon failing to do so, became disillusioned and sought spiritual direction. He joined a small Buddhist group named *Agonshū* in 1981 and began building the spiritual worldview that would come to define the early years of Aum's existence. Asahara particularly appreciated *Agonshū's* emphasis on achieving enlightenment through yogic and meditative practices (Wilkinson, 2009, 52). Though he eventually grew disillusioned with the group, their ideas nevertheless oriented Asahara's understanding of Buddhism, motivating him to start his own religious group.

Asahara created Aum in February 1984 after leaving *Agonshū*, though the group only formally adopted the name Aum Shinrikyo, meaning supreme truth, in 1987 (Susumu, 1995, 384). Nominally Buddhist, the group was organized into small communities in which group members lived, engaging in yogic practice and hanging onto the words of their guru Asahara. Asahara himself sought to establish his credentials by making claims to different kinds of divinity. Despite claiming to be a Buddhist, he claimed to be both the brother of Jesus Christ and the reincarnation of the Hindu god Shiva (Lifton, 2004, 62). Through literature pamphlets, TV appearances, and the sale of spiritual trinkets such as amulets and spells to ward off evil, Aum slowly grew its following. In particular, the Japanese media was impressed by Asahara's claims to be able to levitate (Lee and Knott, 2020, 15). Aum's presence in the media would go a long way toward establishing a form of credibility for the group, as the Japanese media largely took an uncritical approach to Aum and its mission (Lee and Knott, 2020, 15). Asahara's meeting with the Dalai Lama in 1987 would further burnish Asahara's credibility as a religious guru (Wilkinson, 2009, 132). Aside from establishing a considerable presence in the media landscape, Asahara and Aum focused on building a financial base for the group.

Aum, like nearly all religious movements, sought to attract new followers through evangelization. It did so largely through friendly media appearances, the publication of literature, and the selling of spiritual trinkets. That it expected its followers to be unequivocally dedicated is clear (Lee and Knott, 2020, 21), but exactly what these followers were supposed to believe is less clear. Simply put, Aum's beliefs were eclectic and esoteric. Despite professing loyalty to a form of Tibetan Buddhism, Aum integrated elements from all the world's major religions (Pye, 1996, 268). Out of the amalgamation of doctrines that Aum held as a newly created religion, a few stand out as being consistent. The first of these is a focus on individual spiritual fulfillment that would allow for a believer's soul to move up a spiritual hierarchy and achieve enlightenment (Susumu, 1995, 397). Through meditative practice and rituals conducted with Asahara, believers were convinced of their ability to achieve a form of spiritual purity that only those who received Asahara's teachings could come to reach. The emphasis on meditative practice was not uncommon among Buddhist groups in Japan, particularly newer sects, but Asahara's role as mediator between non-enlightenment and enlightenment was. Not only does Asahara's role as mediator highlight his power over Aum as a deified Guru, but it also illustrates how Aum's emphasis was on individual transcendence and not the enlightenment of the collective, as Asahara could pick and choose who was a more enlightened member and who was not (Susumu, 1995, 387).

Early Aum's second important theological belief was Aum's goal of establishing the mythical Kingdom of Shambhala in modern-day Japan (Susumu, 1995, 397). The mythical Kingdom of Shambhala is a Tibetan Buddhist concept that seeks to institute a reign of Buddhism like that supposedly found in Shambala, a mythical East Asian Buddhist kingdom (Susumu, 1995, 397). Aum believed it could achieve this through evangelization and the expansion of its communes, where dedicated believers were expected to live. This belief is important to highlight as not only was it a consistent part of Aum's early theology, but it illustrates how Aum was concerned with establishing an earthly kingdom, confident in its ability to bring the truth to Japanese society (Susumu, 1995, 397). In other words, there is no evidence that Aum held any sort of apocalyptic beliefs in its early existence, as it was optimistic about its future. As its efforts waned, Aum began to grow pessimistic about its continued existence as an organization, leading it to develop apocalyptic beliefs and begin using violence to defend itself from perceived threats.

4.2 - The Rise and Fall of Aum Shinrikyo (1987-1995)

Having examined the early life of both Shoko Asahara and Aum, it should be rather clear that the group did not begin as an apocalyptic sect seeking to initiate armageddon through a sarin gas attack or any other form of indiscriminate violence. Instead, the group was an esoteric Buddhist sect that sought to establish the mythical Kingdom of *Shambhala* in Japan by bringing its truth to the Japanese population. Aum was therefore a religious group that based itself concretely in the world, engaging in communal life and interacting with society at large to expand its membership. However, as time passed, the group grew to become more hostile to the outside world and became significantly more violent as a result. This section will outline how this transition from a group seeking to establish an earthly *Shambala* became a group that regularly used targeted acts of violence to defend itself from a world it perceived as being against it. Following the attack, authorities concluded that Aum had been responsible for the deaths of 31 people throughout its existence (none of this violence took place during Aum's formative years between 1984 and 1987) (Connah, 2021, 69). The incidents covered in this section do not cover all incidents of Aum's violence, though the incidents covered will be the most significant in showing how a contraction of Aum's operational space led to it becoming violent.

After Aum's formative period from 1984 to 1987, the picture became less rosy for Aum as a group. Recruitment slowed and media coverage became significantly more critical (Connah, 2021, 68). Previously viewed as being eclectic and amusing due to Asahara's miraculous claims and the ferocity of its membership, the media transitioned from being impressed by the dedication of Aum's membership to asking what activities Aum could be conducting behind the closed doors of its compounds. This progressive turning against Aum was compounded by the public claims being made by disaffected parents of Aum members. Aum's membership was disproportionately young and well-educated (Wilkinson, 2009, 41). Perhaps unsurprisingly, many parents of newly minted Aum members were not pleased that their children had abandoned all their previous plans to live in Aum compounds, effectively cutting themselves off from the outside world and their previous lives. Joining other Aum members in their compounds required new Aum members to give nearly all their possessions to the organization (Lee and Knott, 2021, 21), in addition to further commitments made once living inside the compound. Disaffected parents organized themselves under the name the Aum Victims Society to act against Aum and its compounds beginning in 1989. They hired a young and well-known lawyer named Sakamoto Tsutsumi to bring their case against Aum for fraud. They accused Aum of falsely claiming that a transfusion of Asahara's blood (something that Aum charged $10,000 for) would bring spiritual enlightenment and therefore said that the group was engaging in a form of fraud (Watanabe, 1998 89). As Aum's behind-the-door practices came to light because of Tsutsumi's constant presence in the media, Aum's credibility diminished significantly, as did its ability to recruit new members.

The attention attracted by Tsutsumi represented a serious threat to Aum's continued ability to evangelize, and the group was propelled to action. The murder of Tsutsumi and his family was ordered by Asahara and carried out by Aum members on the 4th of November 1989 (Watanabe, 1998, 89). The Japanese police amazingly failed to make any connection between Aum and the murder, even though Aum memorabilia was left behind by the Aum members at the crime scene, and many of Tsutsumi's colleagues argued to police that Aum was clearly the culprit (Trinh, 1998, 261). Following the Aum Affair, the Japanese police would publicly apologize for their incompetence in investigating Aum throughout the years, a laxity that was

likely the product of the fear of Japanese authorities to prosecute and blame religious groups for acts of violence in the face of the Japanese constitution's permissiveness regarding said groups and their freedoms (Trinh, 1998, 232). This incident served as a catalyst for Aum's future uses of targeted violence, as Aum dispatched a threat to its existence without a single consequence, and they had no reason to believe that they would be punished given the incompetence of the Japanese authorities. Despite Aum's efforts at evangelization, its image issues and rejection by the general Japanese population continued. In 1990, Aum formed its own political party and ran at least 20 candidates in the general election taking place in the same year. The outcome was a catastrophic failure for Aum. Despite being confident that the group's candidates would be crucial to forming the next Japanese government, the group received less than 2,000 votes among all its candidates, far less than was required to win a single seat (Watanabe, 1998, 89). Furthermore, Asahara received fewer votes than one of his deputies (Watanabe, 1998, 89), something that risked ruining his image as an implacable guru. Such a pitiful result compounded the feeling of rejection that began with the critical coverage of the Aum Victims Society lawsuit brought by Tsutsumi. Previously, Aum had been able to freely undertake evangelization efforts while feeling a certain receptivity from the population. The years of 1989-1990 marked a decisive shift in this dynamic, as Aum's operational space contracted and its sense of being persecuted increased significantly.

The years between 1990 and 1994 did not reverse the trend of Aum's increasing sense of rejection, as it continued to face critical press coverage, declining recruitment, internal tension, and numerous legal challenges. By all accounts, Aum had reached the apex of its recruitment efforts and was now experiencing a flight of some of its members (Connah, 2021, 68). This coincided with Aum's teachings becoming more apocalyptic. Between 1990-1994, Asahara published several treatises referring to armageddon and an eventual apocalypse (Wilkinson, 2009, 65). The chants and mantras of the Aum faithful made use of these concepts, with a prevalent chant referring to the purging of bad souls to prepare for the incoming apocalypse (Wilkinson, 2009, 38). Such rhetoric seems to confirm Jurgensmeyer's supposition that religions tend to view conflicts in cosmic and transhistorical terms. Yet one must appreciate that Aum's cosmicism was a product of its hostile interactions with the outside world as well as its own internal troubles. There is no evidence that Aum would have engaged in violent actions if it had continued to have a positive relationship with the structures of power and society. This suggests that the tendency towards cosmicism is not the product of anything innate to religion, but that the tendency to view conflicts as being dualistic is the product of a group feeling as though its existence is being undermined, whether because of religious factors or otherwise.

On June 27th, 1994, Aum members released sarin gas into an apartment complex that was housing 3 judges who were overseeing a lawsuit leveled against Aum by the prefecture of Matsumoto. The attack did not kill the intended targets, but 7 civilians died, and many were injured (Watanabe, 1998, 92). Matsumoto was one of many prefectures attempting to prevent Aum from building a compound in their town. In 1990, a town named Namino-San dedicated half of its annual budget to legal fees for a case against Aum (Watanabe, 1998, 90). Aum felt particularly threatened by the Matsumoto case, as not only was it garnering a great deal of attention, but it also seemed like an open and shut case against Aum. The Matsumoto incident is a rather clear example of the hostility that was building against Aum. Prefectures across Japan were unwilling to tolerate Aum's presence, regardless of how much they isolated themselves. Years of negative media coverage had turned the Japanese population decisively against Aum.

Even though the police failed to link Aum's violent acts to Aum itself, the media often speculated that Aum was responsible (Watanabe, 1998, 92).

Media coverage was not enough to dissuade Aum from engaging in violence. The release of sarin gas in Matsumoto indefinitely delayed the case against Aum, and thus they became more confident in the ability of violence to preserve their existence. In March 1995, after being tipped off about a massive raid to be undertaken by the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department on Aum compounds, Aum responded with what seemed logical given their success in the Tsutsumi and Matsumoto cases, the use of targeted violence.

4.3 - What happened on the 20th of March 1995?

Sections 4.1 and 4.2 trace the increasing sense of rejection Aum felt as a religious group between the years 1989 and 1995. Aum's interactions with the legal system, body politic, and the media landscape were characterized by hostility and failure. Parallel to this sense of rejection was the development of Aum's apocalyptic beliefs as the group felt the hostility of outside society to the pursuit of its activities. The tension between Aum and the structures of power culminated in the March 20th, 1995, Tokyo subway sarin gas attack.

In March 1995, Asahara was tipped off by an informant about a country-wide raid that was to take place on Aum's compounds (Wilkinson, 2009, 76). Specifically, the raid was to be conducted by the Tokyo Metropolitan police department. An arm of the state acting against Aum after years of leniency represented a dramatic threat to Aum's continued existence in a way that citizen action did not. Aum, emboldened by past success in using violence, planned an aggressive attack to distract the TMPD from their investigations into Aum. The attack was planned in a secretive way amongst the Aum elite, with most members not knowing the attack was being planned (Lifton, 2004, 65). The plan was to cause such a disturbance that the TMPD would be preoccupied with investigating the attack rather than Aum. On the 20th of March, a public holiday in Japan, Aum released sarin gas on the subway cars passing directly under the TMPD headquarters, specifically the Hibiya, Marunouchi, and Chiyoda lines (Wilkinson, 2009, 1). Since it was a public holiday, the subway cars would be filled disproportionately with TMPD officers going to work while other workers had the day off. The gas was released by poking holes into sacks filled with sarin gas, though because of a failure to properly puncture the bags, the gas was not fully released, something which saved thousands of lives by all accounts (Lifton, 2013, 3). Nevertheless, 12 people died and thousands more were injured. The attack did cause chaos as Aum had hoped, but the TMPD suspected Aum was behind the attack from the start, and so the plan was a massive failure. Asahara went into hiding following the attack but was arrested weeks later while hiding at one of Aum's compounds (Watanabe, 1998, 93). Instead of distracting the police through a dramatic yet targeted attack, the attack propelled the police into action as discussion of the attack consumed nearly all the attention of the Japanese media for the weeks and months following the attack.

In short, there was little that was apocalyptically motivated in the decision to undertake the attack on the 20th of March 1995. The fact that it was done on the subway lines directly under the TMPD headquarters on a public holiday during which the TMPD members were working but ordinary Japanese commuters were not confirms the fact that it was an incident of targeted violence. The motive was simple, Aum was attempting to distract the TMPD and undermine the investigation into Aum, just as they had done with the Tsutsumi lawsuit and the Matsumoto case. Numerous scholars have read Aum's apocalyptic beliefs into the attack due to

its catastrophic nature, but the fact that Aum had previously used sarin gas in Matsumoto undermines this case. The use of sarin gas was not the product of Aum attempting to set off a nuclear apocalypse as is often speculated. Furthermore, the sarin used on the Tokyo subway was less potent than that used in Matsumoto, seemingly confirming that Aum was not trying to simply kill as many people as possible to cause apocalyptic panic (Wilkinson, 2009, 73). They were trying to panic the TMPD, not the population at large. The Aum Affair of March 20th, 1995 should therefore not be understood as an incident of religious violence, but should instead be discussed as a continuation of the targeted acts of violence which Aum used during most of its existence to remove perceived threats.

4.4 - Why the Aum Affair is Not an Incident of Religious Violence

As discussed throughout this thesis, Cavanaugh's theory rests upon largely upon two precepts, the argument that the definition of what constitutes a religion is ambiguous at best, and the fact that a religion cannot exist outside the confines of the society within which it finds itself and therefore any action taken by a religious group should not be evaluated on a basis that excludes socio-political factors. The Aum Affair ultimately proves both central aspects of Cavanaugh's theory.

Regarding the ambiguity of the definition of a religion, Aum Shinrikyo and its eclectic theology seems to defy the typologies of what can typically be attributed to a religion. Shoko Asahara, the group's leader, included aspects of all the world's major religions into his theology (Pye, 1996, 267). Many of these elements were inherently contradictory, such as his claim to be both the brother of Jesus Christ and his claim to being a potential Dalai Lama (Pye, 1996, 267). Aum's incredible eclecticism has led scholars like Michael Pye to argue that Aum should in no way be considered a Buddhist group despite their claim to being nominally Buddhist (Pye, 1996, 267). Nevertheless, the same scholar argues that Aum should be considered a religion, because the group was legally registered as a religion, it had shared beliefs, it had a community of believers, and it had ritualized practices (Pye, 1996, 262).

Cavanaugh points out that for most of human history, *the state and religion were concepts that were not viewed separately* (Cavanaugh, 2009, 59). If Aum as a religion could not legitimately exist as a religion without the sanction of the state, Cavanaugh's supposition regarding *the interdependence of religion and the state still holds true to this day*, with respect to Aum especially. This has led respected scholars of religions like Manabu Watanabe to say the following regarding Aum's status as a religion: "We cannot tell whether Aum Shinrikyo is a false religion or not. This is a surely not a task for scholars of religion" (Watanabe, 1998, 97). If determining what can be rightfully called a religion is not the task of scholars of religion, one must ask oneself who the task can be attributed to, and whether the task can be accomplished in the first place. If the task of providing legitimacy to a religious body is the domain of the state, as Dr. Pye proposes with the respect to Aum Shinrikyo, then Cavanaugh's quarrel with the ambiguity of what constitutes a religion and his theory regarding the interdependence of religions and the state throughout history is proven correct.

Regarding the relationship between the interdependence of a religious group's actions and the environment which it exists in, the case of the Aum Affair and all of Aum's violence serves as perfect illustration of Cavanaugh's theoretical framework. As shown throughout 3.3, Aum's violent actions were almost always undertaken in response to rejection by the wider societal body. In the case of Aum's first major act of violence, the murder of Sakamoto

Tsutsumi, the act was undertaken specifically in response to organization by the Aum Victims Society, an organization that organically arose from the dissatisfaction of the parents of Aum members (Watanabe, 1998, 89). The Aum Affair itself was the product of Aum leaders' fear that the organization would be severely undermined by a raid undertaken by the TMPD. Had the organization not feared an incoming raid and sought to distract the TMPD, it is unlikely that it would have taken such drastic action.

By examining the organization's history and showing how each major act of violence was in response to a perceived threat to the group, section five of this thesis has shown that Aum as a religious group did not exist in isolation and that its actions were fundamentally in response to actors that were not religious but were instead part of the wider body politic. In this respect, the Aum Affair perfectly illustrates Cavanaugh's belief that the notion of religious violence is an unhelpful one, since the concept fails to consider that the actions of religious groups cannot be purely motivated by religious beliefs, since those beliefs themselves are shaped by the religious group's interactions with society at large. The fact that Aum's apocalyptic beliefs became more substantial as their rejection by society was made clear is evidence of this, and evidence of Cavanaugh's theory.

Conclusion:
The Massacre at Jonestown, the Siege of Waco, the Aum Affair, and the Myth of Religious Violence

William Cavanaugh's theoretical framework called the myth of religious violence is complex, as he undertakes a lengthy historical analysis of the period leading up to the advent of the nation-state and beyond to show how the notion of religious violence is a manifestation of the power dynamics in any given historical period (Cavanaugh, 2009, 4). In doing so, Cavanaugh argues that the idea religious violence is an unhelpful and ultimately dishonest way of framing acts of violence, as such a label decomplexifies violent acts and conflicts, making them seem as though they are motivated by a singular aspect when such a thing is far from being the truth. Although Cavanagh's research and analysis are complex enough that they cannot be done justice in a thesis as short as this one, his theory does have one particularly important thread, this being that no religion can exist in isolation (Cavanaugh, 2014, 487). As a body composed of individuals with their own interests and livelihoods outside of religion, a religious body must inevitably interact with the other institutions that make up a society. In doing so, its beliefs and actions become influenced by these interactions. In this respect, no act of violence undertaken by a religion can possibly be seen as being the product of only religious beliefs, as the beliefs that might influence a religion to act violently are often a product of the social order within which the religion exists. This thesis has discussed and analyzed three case studies involving religious groups that attempted to isolate themselves as much as possible and ended up committing drastic acts of violence. By doing so, this thesis hopes to make a modest if important contribution to the scholarship analyzing the relationship between religion and violence by showing that the relationship is non-existent.

The Jonestown massacre is perhaps the most well-known act of religious violence of the 20th century. It is without a doubt true that nearly all incidents of religious violence taking place after the Jonestown massacre on November 18th, 1978, have been viewed in light of this infamous massacre (Barker, 1986, 330). Amongst the public, the massacre is understood as being the product of Jim Jones' megalomaniacal nature, and his capacity to brainwash his congregants to the point of having them commit a mass suicide (Ulman and Abse, 1983, 657). This thesis has shown that this overly simplistic narrative is far from being the truth. Instead, the Jonestown massacre should be understood as being the product of the Peoples Temple's lengthy history of developing a persecution complex that spiralled out of control, resulting in their move to the Guyanese jungle and their committing an act of revolutionary suicide rather than being persecuted by their imagined enemies. As a congregation that was made up of 80-90% African Americans, the idea that the group was being persecuted for their anti-racist and socialist ideas was not far-fetched for these members who had personally lived with racism and witnessed its brutality (Moore, 2011, 104). Jones fomented the fears of his congregants, saying that the forces of the United States government were monitoring the groups every move and preparing to place its members in concentration camps (Moore, 2013, 102). As Jones experienced issues with the United States legal system, he led his congregation to Guyana to escape the consequences of his actions and to escape the group's persecutors.

Jones therefore took drastic action to isolate his congregation, but even his move to another continent could not ensure their isolation, as his legal problems and the concerns of family members of the People's Temple congregants continued to plague the group. In response to the inability of the group to escape the institutional constraints of United States citizenship and

the persecution that entailed for Jones and his followers, he directed his followers to commit an act of revolutionary suicide rather than continue to be harassed by the institutions of the United States government. The Peoples Temple therefore did not commit an act of religious violence. Not only did Jones rarely discuss Christianity, going so far as to denounce God in favor of socialism, but the act of violence the Peoples Temple collectively undertook against itself was the product of its desire to no longer interact with the institutions it felt were persecuting it. Cavanaugh's assertion that religions cannot exist in isolation, and that they therefore do not commit acts of violence purely because of reasons of doctrine or belief, is proven correct by the case of the Jonestown massacre.

The siege of Waco which took place between February 28th and April 19th, 1993, gripped the attention of Americans during the time of its taking place. David Koresh, the group's leader, was portrayed by the FBI, BATF, and the American media as being a manipulative and selfish cult leader who had abused young girls and held his congregation as quasi-captives (Wright, 1995, 11). The accusations leveled at Koresh were numerous and salacious, and these accusations motivated the BATF and eventually the FBI to take violent action to arrest Koresh.

The Branch Davidians lived a relatively isolated life as a religious group with sincerely held religious beliefs. These beliefs anticipated a final conflict with the forces of Babylon, embodied by the United States federal government. Unfortunately for all parties involved, the FBI and BATF failed to properly account for these beliefs and refused to consider peacefully arresting Koresh outside the compound (Guinn, 2024, 158), leading to a violent conflict. Throughout the conflict, the Branch Davidians showed that despite their beliefs, they were willing to compromise with the forces of Babylon by releasing Branch Davidian children into the custody of forces they felt were fundamentally evil. Despite progress in negotiations and promises by Koresh that he would peacefully leave the compound, the FBI lost patience with Koresh and the group and took especially aggressive actions on the 19th of April that resulted in a tragic loss of life.

The Branch Davidians therefore could not escape the clutches of the social order within which they lived. Had their isolation been total, no reports of the abusive behavior that Koresh perpetrated would have escaped Mount Carmel and attracted the attention of law enforcement agencies. The notion that a religion can live and act in total isolation, however, is a false one that fails to consider that interactions with the broader social body are inevitable. In the case of the Branch Davidians, the activities of apostates like Marc Breault led law enforcement to investigate the Branch Davidians and their leader. The agencies involved approached the arrest of David Koresh in a strategically unsound and generally incompetent manner that resulted in the death of more than 80 Branch Davidians and 4 BATF agents. Though the religious beliefs of the Branch Davidians played a large role in the decision to defend themselves against incursions by law enforcement agencies, to categorize the conflict as being an incident of religious violence fails to consider the many moving parts involved in the conflict. The decision to approach the arrest of Koresh in a confrontational manner was made by secular forces who proceeded with the operation based on inaccurate information. The conflict was prolonged by failures of communication involving all the parties present at Mount Carmel. The conflict at Mount Carmel was therefore not an incident of religious violence but was a product of strategic failures and communication difficulties that extended a conflict that should have never begun.

The Aum Affair, which saw the first open use of chemical weaponry since the Second World War, attracted the attention of scholars of religious violence because of the group's eclectic and apocalyptic theology. Japanese media and scholars were quick to label the Aum

Affair as being a direct consequence of these apocalyptic beliefs (Lifton, 2000, 234), and western scholars have subsequently labeled the affair as being a product of the group's religious beliefs. This thesis has argued against the perpetuation of this argument, arguing that the decision to use chemical weapons should be understood as being one of Aum's many targeted acts of violence which it resorted to to remove threats to the group.

Aum Shinrikyo began using violence to remove perceived threats to the group in 1989 when a young media-savvy lawyer threatened to entangle the group in legal mires that could potentially end with the group's dissolution (Watanabe, 1998, 89). When Aum experienced no consequences for their brutal murder of Tatsuki and his family, the use of violence became a regular method for the group to dispose of unwanted threats. When Aum began to experience a decline in recruitment and it became clear that Aum's vision for Japan was incompatible with Japanese society itself, it began to develop apocalyptic beliefs and make use of violence more regularly. The group began developing chemical weaponry to prepare for a global conflict it believed was inevitable, hoping that doing so would secure its existence. In 1994, when a legal quagmire with the city of Matsumoto threatened the group, Aum made use of these chemical weapons to remove the threat (Watanabe, 1998, 92).

Aum's relationship with violence culminated with the sarin gas attack on the Tokyo Subway on the 20th of March 1995. After being made aware of serious investigations into Aum being planned by the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department, Aum leaders chose to take drastic action to distract the TMPD and ultimately remove as many TMPD officials as possible by releasing sarin gas on the subway lines directly under the TMPD headquarters in Tokyo (Wilkinson, 2009, 76). The attack was a failure, as TMPD saw Aum as being primary suspects for the attack and subsequently proceeded with their investigations of the group.

The Aum Affair was therefore not an incident of religious violence. Aum regularly made use of targeted violence throughout its history, and it did so to remove perceived threats to the group. These perceived threats became more numerous throughout the group's history as it became clear through electoral failures and legal complications that Aum's evangelization efforts would be largely unfruitful. The group's use of violence increased accordingly, but this violence was always targeted in nature. The Aum Affair of March 20th, 1995 was no different, as it was primarily targeted at the TMPD in order to distract the organization from investigating too deeply into Aum. Although Aum did hold apocalyptic beliefs, these beliefs only manifested once it became clear to Aum leaders that the group was being rejected by society. Aum's apocalyptic beliefs were therefore directly the product of its negative interactions with the broader social body. Aum's use of violence was also the product of its negative interactions with institutions outside of its own, as the Japanese legal system and Japanese citizens disaffected with the group organized to take action against Aum. In order to get rid of these threats, Aum resorted to violence. Although this violence was justified using theology, they were primarily motivated by Aum's desire to survive as a group. The Aum Affair was therefore not the product of religious beliefs as so many have suggested but was rather the result of Aum's lengthy history of using violence to deal with perceived threats to its existence. Though these acts of violence were justified theologically, they were ultimately motivated by the negative interactions that Aum had with the Japanese legal system and other hostile aspects of the social body. The Aum Affair therefore testifies to the veracity of Cavanaugh's theory, as despite Aum's best efforts to live an isolated existence in its compounds across Japan, Aum members could not escape entanglement with the broader Japanese social body, leading it to commit violent acts to preserve its existence.

The three case studies discussed throughout this thesis highlight the importance of Cavanaugh's theory, and ultimately prove it to be correct. *Religious bodies do not exist on an island where only their theological beliefs motivate their actions*. Like any other institution, they are composed of individuals, each with their own considerations and motivations that complement their religious beliefs. In the three case studies analyzed, the religions in question attempted to isolate themselves as much as possible, the Peoples Temple going so far as to move its operation to another continent. Despite their efforts, neither the Peoples Temple, the Branch Davidians, nor Aum Shinrikyo could isolate themselves to the point of no longer having to interact with the broader social body within which they existed. Legal issues and issues of apostasy forced each group to interact with institutions they did their best to ignore, resulting in the development of persecution complexes and toxic relationships with the institutions in question. This toxicity fomented and resulted in drastic acts of violence. Though these acts of violence were framed through theological constructs, they were nevertheless primarily the product of each group's negative interactions with the institutions they tried to isolate themselves from. Each case study in question therefore proves Cavanaugh's argument that *a religion cannot exist in isolation*, and that its actions are inevitably the product of a religion's interactions with broader social, economic, and political institutions that it cannot avoid interacting with.

Bibliography

Agne, Robert R. "Reframing Practices in Moral Conflict: Interaction Problems in the Negotiation Standoff at Waco." *Discourse & Society* 18, no. 5 (2007): 549–78. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926507079634.

Avalos, Hector. *Fighting Words: The Origins of Religious Violence*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2005.

Barker, Eileen. "Religious Movements: Cult and Anticult Since Jonestown." *Annual Review of Sociology* 12, no. 1 (1986): 329–46. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.so.12.080186.001553.

Beltran, William. "Jonestown, Paradise Lost: An Investigation of Jim Jones and the Peoples Temple." *The Eastern Illinois Political Science Review* 3, no. 1 (2013): 1–19.

Bromley, David G. "Deciphering the NRM-Violence Connection." *Violence and New Religious Movements*, March 9, 2011, 15–30. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199735631.003.0001.

Cavanaugh, Mary M. "Theories of Violence: Social Science Perspectives." *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 22, no. 5 (2012): 607–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2011.598757.

Cavanaugh, William T. *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Cavanaugh, William T. 2014. "'Religious Violence as Modern Myth.'" *Political Theology* 15 (6): 486–502. doi:10.1179/1462317X14Z.00000000094.

Cloutier, David. "Cavanaugh and Grimes on Structural Evils of Violence and Race: Overcoming Conflicts in Contemporary Social Ethics." *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 37, no. 2 (2017): 59–78. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44987551.

Cook, Kevin. *Waco Rising: David Koresh, the FBI, and the Birth of America's Modern Militias*. New York, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2023.

Connah, Leoni. 2021. "Violence and New Religious Movements: The Relationship Between Cognitive Dissonance and Perceived Pressure". *International Journal for the Study of New Religions* 11 (1):57–75. https://doi.org/10.1558/ijsnr.19504.

Crockford, Susannah. "How Do You Know When You're in a Cult?" *Nova Religio* 22, no. 2 (November 1, 2018): 93–114. https://doi.org/10.1525/nr.2018.22.2.93.

Dorman, Benjamin. "Scholarly Reactions to the Aum and Waco Incidents." *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 2012. https://doi.org/10.18874/jjrs.39.1.2012.153-177.

Dwyer, Philip. "Violence and Its Histories: Meanings, Methods, Problems." *History and Theory* 56, no. 4 (2017): 7–22. https://doi.org/10.1111/hith.12035.

Eller, Jack David. *Cruel Creeds, Virtuous Violence: Religious Violence Across Culture and History*. Amherst (New York): Prometheus Books, 2010.

Fuller, Steve. "Genealogy." *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, February 15, 2007. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405165518.wbeosg028.

Gagné, André, Spyridon Loumakis, and Calogero A Miceli, eds. *The Global Impact of Religious Violence*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf et Stock, 2016.

Garland, David. "What Is a History of the Present" On Foucault's Genealogies and Their Critical Preconditions." *Punishment and Society* 16, no. 4 (October 2014): 365-84. https://doi.org/10.1177/1462474514541711.

Gregg, Heather S. "Defining and Distinguishing Secular and Religious Terrorism." *Perspectives on Terrorism* 8, no. 2 (2014): 36–51. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26297135.
Gregory, Brad S., and Ingolf U. Dalferth. "Disembedding Christianity.: The Reformation Era and the Secularization of Western Society." In *Reformation Und Säkularisierung: Zur Kontroverse Um Die Genese Der Moderne Aus Dem Geist Der Reformation*, 25–56. Mohr Siebeck GmbH and Co. KG, 2017. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt2250vdq.5.
Griffiths, Devin. "The Comparative Method and the History of the Modern Humanities." *History of Humanities* 2, no. 2 (September 2017): 473-505. https://doi.org/10.1086/693325.
Guinn, Jeff. *The Road to Jonestown: Jim Jones and Peoples Temple*. Simon & Schuster, 2018.
Guinn, Jeff. *Waco: David Koresh, the Branch Davidians, and a Legacy of Rage*. New York, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2024.
Gutting, Gary. *Foucault: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. Accessed April 28, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central.
Johnson, Doyle Paul. "Dilemmas of Charismatic Leadership: The Case of the People's Temple." *Sociological Analysis* 40, no. 4 (1979): 315–23. https://doi.org/10.2307/3709960.
Juergensmeyer, Mark. *God at War: A Meditation on Religion and Warfare*. New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2020.
Juergensmeyer, Mark. *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017.
Juergensmeyer, Mark. "The Global Rise of Religious Violence." *Nordic Journal of Religion & Society* 31, no. 2 (July 2018): 87–97. doi:10.18261/issn.1890-7008-2018-02-01.
Juergensmeyer, Mark, Margo Kitts, and Michael Jerryson, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Violence.* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
Kisala, Robert, and Mark Mullins. *Religion and Social Crisis in Japan: Understanding Japanese Society Through the Aum Affair*. Basingstoke, Hampshire, England: Palgrave, 2002.
Klein, Axel. "Twice Bitten, Once Shy: Religious Organizations and Politics after the Aum Attack." *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 39, no. 1 (2012): 77–98. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41495890.
Klippenstein, Kristian. "Spiritual Siblings: The Function of New Religions in Peoples Temple Doctrine." *Nova Religio* 22, no. 2 (2018): 40–64. https://doi.org/10.1525/nr.2018.22.2.40.
Kerstetter, Todd. "'That's Just the American Way': The Branch Davidian Tragedy and Western Religious History." *The Western Historical Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (January 2004): 453–71. https://doi.org/10.2307/25443054.
Knott, Kim, and Benjamin J. Lee. "Ideological Transmission in Extremist Contexts: Towards a Framework of How Ideas Are Shared." *Politics, Religion, & Ideology* 21, no. 1 (January 2, 2020): 1–23. https://doi.org/10.1080/21567689.2020.1732938.
Langan, John. "The Elements of St. Augustine's Just War Theory." *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 12, no. 1 (1984): 19–38. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40014967.
Levi, Ken. *Violence and Religious Commitment: Implications of Jim Jones's People's Temple Movement*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1982.
Lewis, James R. "Sects and Violence: The 'Standard Model' of New Religions Violence." *Journal of Religion and Violence* 1, no. 1 (2013): 99–121. https://doi.org/10.5840/jrv20131121.
Lifton, Robert Jay. "Aum Shinrikyo: The Threshold Crossed." *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma* 9, no. 1/2 (March 2004): 57–66. doi:10.1300/J146v09n01_05.

Lifton, Robert Jay. *Destroying the World to Save It: Aum Shinrikyo, Apocalyptic Violence, and the New Global Terrorism*. New York, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000.
Littman, Rebecca, and Elizabeth Levy Paluck. "The Cycle of Violence: Understanding Individual Participation in Collective Violence." *Political Psychology* 36, no. S1 (2015): 79–99. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43783845.
Moore, Rebecca. "Narratives of Persecution, Suffering, and Martyrdom." *Violence and New Religious Movements*, March 9, 2011, 95–112. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199735631.003.0004.
Moore, Rebecca. "Rhetoric, Revolution and Resistance in Jonestown, Guyana." *Journal of Religion and Violence* 1, no. 3 (2013): 303–21. https://doi.org/10.5840/jrv2013134.
Newport, Kenneth G. "'A Baptism by Fire': The Branch Davidians and Apocalyptic Self-Destruction." *Nova Religio* 13, no. 2 (2009): 61–94. https://doi.org/10.1525/nr.2009.13.2.61.
Nongbri, Brent. *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015.
Pinker, Steven. *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*. New York, New York: Penguin, 2012.
Poster, Alexander. "Jonestown: An International Story of Diplomacy, Détente, and Neglect, 1973–1978." *Diplomatic History* 43, no. 2 (2018): 305–31. https://doi.org/10.1093/dh/dhy072.
Powers, Paul R. *Religion and Violence A Religious Studies Approach*. Routledge, 2021.
Pye, Michael. "Aum Shinrikyō. Can Religious Studies Cope?" *Religion* 26, no. 3 (1996): 261–70. https://doi.org/10.1006/reli.1996.0020.
Raudino, Simone. "Religion and Conflict: Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Evidence." In *Beyond the Death of God: Religion in 21st Century International Politics*, edited by Simone Raudino and Patricia Sohn, 45–64. University of Michigan Press, 2022. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3998/mpub.11866503.5.
Reader, Ian. "Globally Aum: The Aum Affair, Counterterrorism, and Religion." *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 2012. https://doi.org/10.18874/jjrs.39.1.2012.179-198.
Richardson, James T. "People's Temple and Jonestown: A Corrective Comparison and Critique." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 19, no. 3 (1980): 239. https://doi.org/10.2307/1385862.
Robbins, Thomas. "Comparing Incidents of Extreme 'Cult Violence': A Comment on 'Is the Canon on Jonestown Closed?'" *Nova Religio* 6, no. 2 (January 2003): 365–75. https://doi.org/10.1525/nr.2003.6.2.365.
Rowe, Paul S. *Religion and Global Politics*. New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.
Rowley, Matthew. "What Causes Religious Violence?" *Journal of Religion and Violence* 2, no. 3 (2014): 361–402. https://doi.org/10.5840/jrv20153234.
Shaw, Brent D. "State Intervention and Holy Violence: Timgad/Paleostrovsk/Waco." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 77, no. 4 (2009): 853–94. https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfp069.
Shimazono, Susumu. "In the Wake of Aum: The Formation and Transformation of a Universe of Belief." *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 22, no. 3–4 (1995). https://doi.org/10.18874/jjrs.22.3-4.1995.381-415.

Sjoberg, Gideon. “The Comparative Method in the Social Sciences.” *Philosophy of Science* 22, no. 2 (1955): 106–17. https://doi.org/10.1086/287408.
Smith, Huston. “Postmodernism’s Impact on the Study of Religion.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 58, no. 4 (1990): 653–70. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1465184.
Strenski, Ivan. “Lessons for Religious Studies in Waco?” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 61, no. 3 (1993): 567–74. https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lxi.3.567.
Tabor, James D., and Eugene V. Gallagher. *Why Waco? Cults and the Battle for Religious Freedom in America*. California: University of California Press, 1997.
Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018.
Talty, Stephan. *Koresh: The True Story of David Koresh, the FBI and the Tragedy at Waco*. Boston, Massachusetts: Mariner Books, 2023.
Trinh, Sylvaine. “Aum Shinrikyô: Secte et Violence.” *Cultures et Conflicts*, no. 29–30 (1998): 229–90. https://doi.org/10.4000/conflits.718.
Ulman, Richard Barrett, and D. Wilfred Abse. “The Group Psychology of Mass Madness: Jonestown.” *Political Psychology* 4, no. 4 (1983): 637. https://doi.org/10.2307/3791059.
Watanabe, Manabu. 1998. “Religion and Violence in Japan Today: A Chronological and Doctrinal Analysis of Aum Shinrikyo.” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 10 (4): 80–100. https://doi.org/10.1080/09546559808427483.
Watts, Jill. 1991. “`This Was the Way’: Father Divine’s Peace Mission Movement in Los Angeles during the Great Depression.” *Pacific Historical Review* 60 (4): 475. doi:10.2307/3639873.
Weed, Ronald. 2014. “Putting Religion First? Diagnosing Division and Conflict in the Religious Violence Thesis.” *Political Theology* 15 (6): 536–51. doi:10.1179/1462317X14Z.00000000098.
Wellman, Jr., James K., and Kyoko Tokuno. “Is Religious Violence Inevitable?” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43, no. 3 (June 2004): 291–96. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5906.2004.00234.x.
Wilkinson, Gregory E. 2009. “The Next Aum: Religious Violence and New Religious Movements in Twenty-First Century Japan.” *University of Iowa Research Online*, May 1–227. https://doi.org/10.17077/etd.aua24mpa.
Wright, Stuart A. *Armageddon in Waco: Critical Perspectives on the Branch Davidian Conflict*. Chicago.: University of Chicago Press, 1995.