

The Wacko in Waco

By Dr. Greg Bahnsen

Grit your teeth and prepare for another round of witless polemics in the broadcast and print media - secular polemics against "fundamentalist" religion, liberal polemics in favor of stricter gun control, dispensational polemics about "signs of the times," etc. etc.

The occasion for this polemical outpouring is the violent confrontation and subsequent stand-off between government police forces (particularly the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms) and a religious cult with a lunatic leader in Waco, Texas. By the time this Penpoint is printed and circulated, the stand-off will most likely be resolved; that is my hope and prayer - and that the resolution will have been peaceful. Some lessons and commentary may be apropos even in advance.

On Saturday, February 28, a small army of federal agents surrounded and began an assault on a large compound which was home and church to approximately 100 men, women and children who call themselves the "Branch Davidians." The agents purposed to serve a search warrant and then seize illegal firearms being stored in the compound. Dreadful proof that the compound was indeed heavily armed - and prepared to fight back - was provided by the ensuing, bloody shoot-out, which left both sides with their wounded and dead. A tense stand-off has followed for at least twelve days. BATF, FBI, and other police personnel have swelled to over 400; more powerful guns, armored vehicles, and helicopters were brought in for serious combat, if necessary, although the federal agents planned to hold siege and wait for the Branch Davidians to surrender.

The leader of the religious cult, who had previously changed his birth-name to David Koresh, claimed to be the Lamb spoken of in the book of Revelation, the one who opens the seven-sealed scroll and unleashes judgment on the world. Koresh apparently took offense when the news media reported that he identifies himself with Jesus Christ (although followers heard him say it). Rather, he claims, he is (simply) a messiah sent from God, but one who has experienced sin so that he can better judge others.

The wacko claims made by this impostor are more than matched by the immorality of his behavior. Former cult members report that Koresh has taken hundreds of thousands of dollars from his followers, who are made to live on sparse food and cheap wages. Koresh has taken more than a dozen wives across an age range of the early teens to sixty-something - some unions being incestuous - and fathered as many children. His meglomania and violence have been carried as front-page news. It would strain understatement to say he is not a sympathetic character in the

public eye. This pseudo-"messiah" is sure to be "crucified" by the media, if not the federal police (from whom he may hope to gain the fame of martyrdom).

Some Lessons

1. Those with an antipathy to religion, especially Christianity, will allude to this bloody fiasco as further proof of the danger and potential violence of a religious mindset (or undifferentiated "fundamentalism"). Such a suggestion, however, displays an outrageous double standard. When individuals who make no claim to religion engage in terrorism, amass illegal arms, take hostages, resist arrest (etc.), we never hear newsmen and writers allude to the danger and potential violence "of the unbelieving mind"!
2. Christianity in particular may not reasonably be tarred with the brush of this wacko cult leader in Waco. Intelligent and literate commentators, even among unbelievers, should be aware of that fact. To be a "Christian" is to follow the historic Jesus as "the Christ." In the pages of Scripture, Jesus claims to be the only Messiah who can reveal the Father and mediate to Him for sinners. Claiming to be another messiah automatically disqualifies someone from following the Messiah of the Bible - from being deemed a "Christian." Moreover, the Biblical Messiah conspicuously declared that His kingdom was one of peace and purity - not the violence, greed, and incest of David Koresh. Pundits ought not to mention Christianity in the same sentence with Koresh and the "Branch Davidians."
3. The Waco experience is far from persuasive evidence that we need more regulations on firearms in this country. Think about it. The "Branch Davidians" already have illegal weapons. Why, then, would anyone think that more laws attempting to control guns would have any affect upon them whatsoever?? When you outlaw weapons, outlaws will still obtain them.
4. Regrettably, the wacky theology of date-setting dispensational theologians will take a boost from the wacko messianic claims of Koresh. Didn't Jesus predict such false Christs? (Matt. 24:5, 23-24) Yes, in the generation of His hearers! (v. 34) Tragedies like the one in Waco often become a double embarrassment to believers - first, because cultists like Koresh claim to be Christians who are fulfilling prophecy; and second, because misguided Christians claim - in a less honorable sense - that indeed they are!
5. Pray that God will empower the preaching of the gospel in our day that it might transform our land, if you (like me) wish to be delivered from the violence - both armed and rhetorical - arising from Waco.