

Others might cavil at Wright's strange habit of using a lower-case "g" for the God through most of the book. While his reasons for doing this are justified—a scholar striving for as much objectivity as possible—it remains jarring to the reader. The spelling of "gods" (plural) and "God" (singular) has always been a traditional convention to nearly everyone in biblical scholarship.

On balance, however, this is unquestionably a splendid, thought-provoking work. While it is regrettable that so much space had to be devoted to backing the reader out of the cul-de-sacs of revisionist New Testament scholarship, Wright can hardly be blamed for the wrongs of others. His refreshing return to the fonts of solid historical information, particularly the extrabiblical evidence supplied by Josephus and other sources, stands in pleasant contrast to the weird and radical misreadings that currently pass for scholarship.

We look forward to volume 3.

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, MI 49008

PAUL L. MAIER

Wright, Stuart A., ed. *Armageddon In Waco: Critical Perspectives on the Branch Davidian Conflict*. University of Chicago Press, 1995. xxvi + 394. \$15.95.

The success of American society is often credited to the lofty ideals upon which it was built. But far too often the reality of the American experience falls short of those ideals. Stuart A. Wright's book, *Armageddon In Waco: Critical Perspectives on the Branch Davidian Conflict*, attempts to point out one highly publicized example of American ideals falling short, the Branch Davidian standoff outside Waco, Texas, in 1993. Wright edits a compilation of fifteen essays written by scholars in sociology and religion who hold American ideals of religious freedom and equal protection under the law up to the reality of the events which occurred during the fifty-one-day standoff.

Armageddon in Waco is just one of many books about the Branch Davidian conflict that were published coincidentally with the Congressional hearings held in July of 1995 to examine the Branch Davidian conflict. These books range from reasoned scholarly accounts to conspiracy theories accusing the government of genocide. *Armageddon at Waco* seeks to steer clear of "conspiracy theories" while offering a "critical perspective" on events ranging from the initial purpose of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (BATF) raid, through the fifty-one-day siege on the Mt. Carmel compound with its massive media coverage, and concluding with the congressional hearings nearly two years later.

While intentionally avoiding the concept of conspiracy theories, this volume makes clear its two predominant themes. "First, that marginal religions and their members are accorded diminished human and social value . . . second, that minority religions are more likely to be victimized by extreme efforts of social control" (x). The book challenges American society to reexamine its antagonism toward new or marginal religious groups through an examination of the events leading up to the February 28, 1993 "assault" on the Branch Davidian compound known as Mt. Carmel, the fatal fire in which seventy-four members died, and Attorney General Janet Reno's subsequent justification of the assault.

The book begins with an historical background of the Branch Davidians. This section is followed by an intriguing examination of the justification for the initial raid on the compound. James R. Lewis's examination of the label "cult" is compelling. He asserts this label cemented a stereotype in the minds of law enforcement officials, the media, and the American public. The label, "cult," dehumanized the Branch Davidians and allowed law enforcement officials to overstep boundaries they would not have considered otherwise. Christopher G. Ellison and John P. Bartkowski examine the accusations of child abuse and sexual misconduct at Mt. Carmel and how these accusations influenced the attitudes and eventual actions of law enforcement officials. James D. Tabor's essay on "Religious Discourse and Failed Negotiations" points to a crucial aspect of the standoff's ultimate outcome. He maintains the FBI's refusal to accord legitimization to David Koresh and his Branch Davidian followers is important. First, the FBI marginalized the religious views of the Branch Davidians. Then the FBI questioned the Davidians devotion to both their unique beliefs and to David Koresh personally, which exacerbated the problem. Rather than try to understand their religious perspectives and commitment, the FBI chose to believe Koresh "brainwashed" his followers. Tabor explains how law enforcement officials insulated themselves from differing viewpoints, choosing to rely on the positions of "anti-cult" groups or to dismiss religious devotion completely. This insulation led them to chose the psychological warfare tactics which strengthened the Davidians' interpretation of the initial BATF raid as fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. It also strengthened a tendency on the part of law enforcement officials to interpret most communications with Koresh as either "Bible babble" or delaying tactics.

Throughout the volume, each author weaves the common theme of societal intolerance toward new or marginal religions into their work. This thesis is compelling, and the arguments are well-reasoned. Yet in many places throughout the book's six sections, essays overlap virtually to a point of redundancy. In several instances, the information for parallel essays could have been combined to focus the thesis of the book more sharply.

The drawbacks aside, *Armageddon at Waco* is an intriguing study of American society's challenge to find a place for people with views that reach outside the mainstream of religious thought. While avoiding the conspiracy theory mind set, *Armageddon at Waco* takes the Branch Davidian conflict and asks a much larger question regarding religious freedom in America. It leaves one to ponder how little it would take for any religious group in America, whose views differ from the majority, to be judged "outside" the mainstream, or "cultist," thus eliminating their right to America's ideal of religious freedom. This volume is important reading for anyone interested in the field of religious liberty and the history of this recent challenge to one of our basic American ideals.