

# Christian Identity: An American Heresy

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#### I. INTRODUCTION

Christian Identity is a belief system so strange, indeed bizarre, that most Americans who know anything about it dismiss it outright and relegate those who believe it to the quaint and quirky fringes of the nation’s religious subcultures.

How seriously, for example, can one take the notion that God created Adam as a white man and that other races are sub-human? Or the belief that the lost tribes of Israel traversed Europe, landed in Great Britain, and crossed the Atlantic to inherit—as white Christian racialists—the promises of God? Or that Jesus came only to reach out to and save this particular “Israel,” comprised solely of white supremacists?

Little wonder that Americans do not take this ideology seriously, or that American Christians and their church leaders pay it scant attention. An occasional news story on the white supremacist movement may mention Christian Identity, and most readers quickly recognize the obligatory description of its basic racist and anti-Semitic beliefs.

In American history, and particularly in American Christian history, these ideas are not as bizarre as they may seem at first glance. Anti-Semitism has been a consistent, harrowing theme of Christian theology since the days of the

early church, and has been the driving force of countless pogroms and “everyday bigotry” aimed at Jews for generations.<sup>1</sup>

Jonathan Edwards, Increase Mather, and other well-known colonial religious leaders held Jews and Judaism in utter contempt. Derogatory stereotypes of Jews were perpetuated by Protestant religious leaders who saw them as a threat to the emerging power of their “Christian nation” in the nineteenth and twentieth century. More recently some Black Muslims joined the chorus of condemnation with accusations of Judaism as a “gutter religion.”<sup>2</sup> And in keeping with this despicable tradition, nationally known Christian evangelist Jerry Falwell declared in January of 1999 that the Antichrist “will be a full-grown counterfeit of Christ. Of course he’ll be Jewish.”<sup>3</sup> Though Falwell later apologized, his point was made.

In a similar vein, white Christian leaders throughout the nation’s history have used the Bible and their propensity to maintain power as a foundation for slavery and racism. The vile interpretations of scripture rendered to justify the enslavement, torture, and murder of Africans and African-Americans are legion in both North and South. The racist descriptive language of countless Christian apologists for slavery infused the religious culture from the colonial period through the twentieth century Social Gospel movement to our own day, relentlessly reinforcing the perceived inferiority of persons of color.<sup>4</sup>

In short, as quick as we may be to readily dismiss the racist and anti-Semitic tenets of Christian Identity, so must we be quick to recognize that the core of that heresy has deep roots in the Christian “mainstream” of American religious thought and culture.

While Christians must work relentlessly to distance themselves from this sordid past by recasting and recovering—and practicing—a radically inclusive understanding of community, they must also expose and counter Christian Identity for what it is: an American heresy. Though the Christian faith has multiple and varied forms, traditions, denominations, and doctrinal differences, there are certain, categorical truths that bind its manifestations: Christian Identity’s notion of salvation by race is not one of them.

Identity is so far afield from the foundational tenets of Christian teachings

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1. For more on this history, see LEONARD DINNERSTEIN, *ANTI-SEMITISM IN AMERICA* (1994); JOHN DOMINIC CROSSAN, *WHO KILLED JESUS* (1996); JAMES CARROLL, *CONSTANTINE’S SWORD: THE CHURCH AND THE JEWS* (2001).

2. CHATTANOOGA TIMES/CHATTANOOGA FREE PRESS, Oct. 18, 2001, at A6.

3. THE JERUSALEM POST, Jan. 17, 1999, at 5.

4. See VINCENT HARDING, *THERE IS A RIVER: THE BLACK STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM IN AMERICA* 8 (1981); MARTIN E. MARTY, *RIGHTEOUS EMPIRE: THE PROTESTANT EXPERIENCE IN AMERICA* (1970); FORREST G. WOOD, *THE ARROGANCE OF FAITH: CHRISTIANITY AND RACE IN AMERICA FROM THE COLONIAL ERA TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY* (1990).

as to be unrecognizable. It is so removed from the basic teachings of Jesus as to be a caricature of his way of life and his admonitions about living justly and righteously. It is so intent on appropriating the story of the ancient Israelites that its interpretation of that story is simply preposterous. It is so certain of its own convoluted “truths” about race that it advocates violence as a means to secure white supremacy and to achieve racial purity. Christian Identity defines the word heresy.

American religious leaders must take this heresy seriously. It is an old and persistent infection in our midst, easy to dismiss in the mix of all the other serious problems confronting us. But hanging on in the body politic, it feeds and festers where it might, gathering one or two here, binding believers into a settlement and a congregation there. Occasionally, it convinces a follower that killing “the other” is justified by the God who loves only white Christians. It bred the violent Order of the 1980s. It fed a national militia movement in the 1990s. It helps elect people to public office. It despises all other Christians, liberal or conservative.

*Christian Identity: An American Heresy* seeks to expose the theological underpinnings of this belief system in a new way, and to call religious and civic leaders to counter this heresy boldly and publicly. The Center for New Community believes that there is a theological imperative for democratic community, and that such an imperative must be recovered anew in our time.

This work builds upon other teaching tools of the past, most notably Leonard Zeskind’s 1986 publication, *The “Christian Identity” Movement*, published by the Division of Church and Society of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. It has been at Zeskind’s urging that this article has been completed, finally putting to print work that the Center for New Community has had the privilege of carrying out with congregations and communities of Christians and Jews, and with persons of all races across the nation as it seeks to build democratic community deeply rooted in the Biblical story of justice and hope.

## II. BRITISH ISRAELISM AND THE ROOTS OF WHITE SUPREMACIST THEOLOGY IN AMERICA

In the spring of 1996 some forty pastors and other church leaders gathered in Estes Park, Colorado for a seminar sponsored by Pastor Pete Peters of Scriptures for America. They worshiped, sang, prayed, and studied together, shared camaraderie at meal times, and had pictures taken to mark the occasion. Panels were organized, presentations were taped and made available for sale, and appropriate press reports about the seminar were arranged. The “unprecedented” and “first of its kind” event was covered extensively in *The*

*Jubilee*, the Midpines, California-based bimonthly newspaper “Proclaiming Liberty Throughout All the Land. . . .”<sup>5</sup>

What marked this seminar from countless others held by religious groups across the nation that spring was its focus on the “Israel Identity” message. After more than two decades traversing the country to plant and cultivate the seeds of religion-based hatred, Pete Peters is one of the few Christian Identity leaders in the U.S. able to pull together such a seminar that, according to *The Jubilee*, sought to “dispel media and Jewish lies about the Christian-Israel message.”<sup>6</sup> His standing in the pseudo-religious movement was especially enhanced after the successful “Meeting of Christian Men” he organized in 1992, at which the framework for the contemporary militia movement was developed by the nation’s leading white supremacists. Peters was in his element at the “96 seminar” gathered with other Identity pastors, authors, and leaders in a shared commitment to teaching the “truth “ of the Christian-Israel message.

At the heart of that message is the understanding that white Christians are the true Israelites—those who have inherited the promises and blessings of God spelled out in Hebrew and Christian biblical texts.

A. *An Ideology for Empire: British Israelism  
in the Nineteenth Century*

Contemporary Christian Identity is rooted in an early nineteenth century religious/social movement, British Israelism. In 1840 Jonathan Wilson, a Scotsman, published *Lectures on Our Israelitish Origins*, in which he revealed that the ten lost tribes of Israel had migrated over time throughout Europe and into Great Britain. Through an analysis of English and Hebrew language similarities, and the proximity of social institutions like the monarchy to the British form of government, Wilson concluded that the Anglo-Saxon peoples were indeed the lost tribes and had, thereby, inherited the promises given by God to the northern kingdom of Israel.<sup>7</sup>

Wilson’s work was foundational to an explicitly racial understanding of the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon peoples that took shape and form in the nineteenth century—an understanding firmly grounded in the mainstream of the racist notions of white superiority shaped even by the physical and social sciences of the day. In the capable hands of Edward Hine, a Wilson

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5. *Ministers’ Conference: Turning the Tide of Hatred*, THE JUBILEE, May/June 1996 [hereinafter *Ministers’ Conference*].

6. *Id.*

7. MICHAEL BARKUN, RELIGION AND THE RACIST RIGHT, ch.1 (1994). Barkun’s work represents one of the most comprehensive histories of British Israelism currently available. See also LEONARD ZESKIND, THE CHRISTIAN IDENTITY MOVEMENT (1986).

disciple, this analysis gave rise to British Israelism, a social movement that would spread throughout Great Britain by century's end, reinforcing the nation's political aspirations to expand relentlessly an empire on which the sun never set.

However, in his own 1871 book, *Identification of the British Nation with Lost Israel*, Hine went beyond his teacher to declare that "the Island Nation" itself was the true home of the lost tribes. In a contemporary, abridged version of this book available from The American Institute of Theology in Harrison, Arkansas, Hine waves the flag of the undefeated, monarch-driven British empire to prove that only Great Britain could have inherited Israel's lot.<sup>8</sup> Hine, in short, foreshadowed the contemporary Christian Identity assertion that the United States is the true homeland of the chosen people of God—those white British Israelites who came to North America's shores and brought with them the inheritance given their forebears.

According to Hine, "The Identity is a very valuable one. The British people, in a national sense, have been led to accept this term as being applicable to themselves . . . God applies it to Israel, and we have agreed to apply it to ourselves . . . Thus we have been led to a distinct avowal that we are the Lord's inheritance consequently, the people of Israel."<sup>9</sup>

#### B. *The Leap of the Atlantic: Henry Ford and the Cauldrons of Anti-Semitism*

In 1884 Edward Hine sailed to the U.S. to plant and nourish the seeds of British Israelism in the fertile soil of white America. In a visit that lasted four years he tapped into the belief widespread among European Americans that the young nation was, indeed, the new promised land given by God to them, the chosen people. Linking with academics and others predisposed to this sense of entitlement, Hine gave new shape to the social, cultural, religious, and political framework that would lead in the early twentieth century to the Anglo-Saxon Federation of America and, eventually, to the more vile and vicious racism and bigotry of Christian Identity.<sup>10</sup>

But it was the auto magnate Henry Ford and his associate, William Cameron, who helped put a distinctly American touch on British Israelism in the 1920s and made of it a lasting ideology. Through his Dearborn Independent newspaper—distributed throughout the nation by his dealers—Ford spread his vile anti-Semitism. He went so far as to publish "The

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8. EDWARD HINE, *IDENTITY OF THE TEN LOST TRIBES OF ISRAEL WITH THE ANGLO-CELTO-SAXONS* (abridged, The American Institute of Theology, Harrison, Ark., no date) (1871).

9. *Id.* at 63.

10. BARKUN, *supra* note 7, chs. 2-3; ZESKIND, *supra* note 7, at 15-20.

International Jew” (based on the infamous Czarist forgery, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*), a piece that supposedly “exposed” the alleged Jewish conspiracy to take over the world economy. Cameron’s own deeply-held convictions about Jews led him eventually to devote his energy full time to the Anglo-Saxon Federation and *Destiny* magazine, using both to advance his British/Anglo Israelism and to forge strong links with the racist and political right in the U.S.<sup>11</sup>

C. *The Church of Jesus Christ Christian:  
Wesley Swift and American Identity*

In 1946 Wesley Swift, the son of a Methodist pastor who had long been active in racist and right wing groups, organized the Anglo Saxon Christian Congregation—soon to be known as the Church of Jesus Christ Christian—in Lancaster, California. Taking up the mantle of Henry Ford, William Cameron, and Gerald L. K. Smith, and building on the strength of the ever-present racist movement of the 1930s and 1940s, Swift gave birth to contemporary Christian Identity. “More than anyone else,” Michael Barkun writes, “Wesley Swift was responsible for popularizing Christian Identity in right-wing circles by combining British-Israelism, a demonic anti-Semitism, and political extremism.”<sup>12</sup>

In 1956 Swift ordained one of his proteges, William Potter Gale, as an Identity pastor. Gale became a lifelong devotee of Identity and helped put a systematic framework on the previously unorganized ideology. Gale’s 1963 booklet, *The Faith of Our Fathers*, not only coalesced the basic tenets of British/Anglo Israelism, but also began to wrap them in a cloak of violent anti-government rhetoric.<sup>13</sup> By 1969 Gale had clearly articulated a strong and inflexible anti-government position infused with Identity anti-Semitism, and made good on his writing by helping found the Posse Comitatus. The Posse was said to be the highest law enforcement authority in the land, representing the power of citizens at the county level, and took root in counties throughout the nation. Gale’s hatred of the IRS, in particular, led him to call for armed action against its agents, and eventually led to his own conviction for mailing death threats to IRS employees. His blend of anti-Semitism with hatred of the “Zionist Occupation Government” (“ZOG”) in the U.S. laid the foundation for Christian Identity to the present day.

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11. BARKUN, *supra* note 7, chs. 2-3.

12. *Id.* at 60-61.

13. *Id.* at 66.

### III. "CHRISTIAN ISRAEL:" THE IDENTITY NOTION OF THE BIBLICAL TRIBES OF ISRAEL

A key pillar of Christian Identity's theological construct is the racialist notion—rooted in British Israelism—that the Biblical tribes of Israel emigrated from the Middle East northward through Europe, finally occupying all of central and western Europe and, particularly, the isles of Great Britain. Proponents contend these tribes are the true Israel, the white European stock whose descendants later crossed the Atlantic to birth "Israel's new name America, the only founded Christian Nation," the "great Christian Kingdom."<sup>14</sup>

In its "Doctrinal Statement of Beliefs," Kingdom Identity Ministries, based in Harrison, Arkansas lays out this foundational Identity belief in simple and stark terms:

We believe the White, Anglo-Saxon, Germanic and kindred people to be God's true, literal Children of Israel. Only this race fulfills every detail of Biblical Prophecy and World History concerning Israel and continues in these latter days to be heirs and possessors of the Covenants, Prophecies and Blessings YHVH God made to Israel.<sup>15</sup>

In equally stark terms, a pamphlet from Mission to Israel Ministries in Scottsbluff, Nebraska ("Could You Be An Israelite And Not Know It?") asserts:

If Israel exists today, as she must, there is only one people whom all these identifying marks fit—and they certainly do not represent the modern-day 'Jews.' They do however, describe perfectly the Anglo-Saxon, Celtic, Germanic, Scandinavian, and kindred peoples; the multitude of nations who became a great nation, with a new home, a new religion, and who have blessed the world with the gospel of Yahshua and numerous other blessings.<sup>16</sup>

In short, Identity adherents believe that the Biblical tribes of Israel and their progeny are white people, and Christian to boot.

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14. RESTORATION BIBLE CHURCH, THE BLESSINGS OF THE SONS OF JOSEPH (tract from Restoration Bible Church, Berkley, Mich.); *The Adamic Race: Adam's Pure Blood Seedline*, map from THE 11TH HOUR REMMANT MESSENGER (Mailing to Coeur d'Alene, Idaho resident Heather Lalley) [hereinafter *The Adamic Race*].

15. KINGDOM MINISTRIES, DOCTRINAL STATEMENT OF BELIEFS (tract from Kingdom Ministries, Harrison, Ark.).

16. MISSION TO ISRAEL MINISTRIES, COULD YOU BE AN ISRAELITE AND NOT KNOW IT? (tract from Mission to Israel Ministries, Scottsbluff, Neb., panel 5).

A. *Name Games: The Re-Formation of  
Israel in the West*

To this day Identity believers engage in a clever name game to prove the “re-formation” of Israel in the west. This language deconstruction process was passed on from their nineteenth century predecessors, the British Israelists, who—like their cohorts in the physical sciences of that period—conjured up an array of pseudo-scientific methods to prove beyond doubt that the British were the true Israelites. Edward Hine’s classic *Identity of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel with the Anglo-Celto-Saxons* is still reprinted in Identity circles today. His convoluted “proofs” of Israelite settlement patterns into Europe and “the Isles” were as much a justification of God-ordained, nineteenth century British imperialism and monarchy as they were for the theology he advanced.

More than a century later, contemporary Identity believers go to great lengths in this name game to “prove” their sacred lineage as God’s chosen people, i.e., white, Christian, Anglo-Saxon, Nordic, Germanic stock. More than a game, however, this process is foundational to Identity theology, providing its followers a convincing pseudo-intellectual cornerstone on which to build their racist beliefs. The importance of the name derivation process is not to be underestimated. Virtually every Identity tract, pamphlet, schemata, magazine, and book includes variations of the supposed emigration maps of the Israelites, complete with explanations of the tribal name shifts as, over the generations, they became white Europeans. For example:

By shortening “Isaac’s sons” one comes up with “Saxons.”

The mark of the tribe of Dan is said to be evident in “Dan-emerke” and its people, the Danes, or in the root of the word “Scan-din-avians.” Even “London” is not safe from such analysis.

Ireland, known in ancient times as Hibernia, is said to mean “Hebrew’s land.”

The people whom the Greeks called Scythians, who eventually are said to have migrated to Germany from Russia and Poland, are said to have been known as “Sakka” by the Persians. Whether it is from the Assyrian word “Iskuza” from which the Greeks reportedly came up with “Scythian” or from the Persian “Sakka,” both terms “according to the American Institute of Theology” surely must have derived from the word Isaac, the Son of Abraham and Sarah.<sup>17</sup>

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17. Hine, *supra* note 8; RODNEY SKURDAL, COMMON LAW PRECEPT CORAM IPSO REGE (filed by Freeman Rodney Skurdal, Musselshell County, Mont., Oct. 28, 1994); BIBLE RESTORATION MINISTRIES, OUR IDENTITY IN THE BIBLE AND HISTORY (handout from Bible Restoration Ministries, Royal Oak, Mich.); AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF THEOLOGY, MARKS OF

B. *The Tribes of Israel: The Heart of  
Identity's Identity*

More than an exercise in obtuse word deconstruction and intricate historical and theological proof of racial superiority, the name game is at the heart of Identity's identity, and has profound implications for its leaders and followers. It directs and defines Identity theology, backing its claims that Jews are power-hungry enemies of God, seeking "to subvert the Word of God, for the purpose of enslaving God's true Israel people."<sup>18</sup> It helps ground the Identity claim that persons of color are inferior or sub-human, or that the non-white races should be kept separate from the chosen (white) people of God.

For example, in his Winter 2000 issue of *The Watchman*, Pastor Dan Gayman of the separatist, decades old Church of Israel in Schell City, Missouri goes to great length in the lead article, "The Lost Tribes of Israel," to "make an objective and unbiased look into this long neglected area of theology."<sup>19</sup> Gayman claims some two hundred followers in households throughout southwest Missouri's Vernon County and environs. He disclaims association with Christian Identity, as do some of his contemporaries attempting to shake the negative connotations Identity conjures up. In the 1980s, however, he received some \$15,000 in stolen money from the violent Order, which he subsequently turned over to the government.<sup>20</sup>

Nonetheless, while he embodies an arm of Identity theology that today professes to repudiate violence and anti-government fervor, he and his congregation embrace and practice a doctrine of "ethnic separatism" and "racial purity" that is plainly racist. The church has even drawn and helped resettle white South Africans since the collapse of apartheid. Gayman relishes the "persecution" he suffers whenever he is the subject of media stories, wearing it as a badge of honor and further vindication of his anointment. Of the lost tribes, he concludes:

The ten lost tribes of Israel have been found. They can be found among the Caucasian race of people that historically have explored, settled, developed, and civilized the areas where the tens of millions of Anglo-Saxon people live on this earth. These are the people who historically have embraced Jesus

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ISRAEL (tract from The American Institute of Theology, Harrison, Ark.).

18. *Ministers' Conference*, *supra* note 5.

19. Pastor Dan Gayman, *The Lost Tribes of Israel*, *THE WATCHMAN*, Winter 2000, at 1.

20. KEVIN FLYNN & GARY GERHARDT, *THE SILENT BROTHERHOOD* 464-65 (1990). Gayman received two separate payments of \$10,000 and \$5,000 from members of The Order, which he later turned over to the government. *Id.* He also testified for the government in the sedition trial of Order members. *Id.*

Christ, the Bible, and the Christian faith.<sup>21</sup>

In 1994, Montana Freeman Rodney Skurdal filed a dense, twenty-page document declaring his status as an expatriate “sovereign citizen,” free from the application of U.S. law. The document is vintage Christian Identity, full of scriptural interpretation and name deconstruction to back his assertion that he is part of “true Israel,” and solidifying yet another link between Identity and the “Christian Patriot” movement. Skurdal’s document was also baldly racist, falling back on Identity claims about the superiority of the white race through its lineage to Adam, created by God as white.<sup>22</sup> Following a lengthy Freeman standoff with law enforcement outside Jordan, Montana, Skurdal was arrested, convicted, and sentenced to serve fifteen years for conspiring against the banking system and other charges incurred for his activities both before and during the standoff.

#### IV. OF JEWS AND (WHITE) CHRISTIANS: SEEDS OF SUPERIORITY

In late summer of 1998 three thousand households in northern Idaho received an unexpected mailing from Carl Story and self-described Evangelist Vincent Bertollini in neighboring Sandpoint. With the glossy, six-foot long, multi-color scroll depicting “*The Adamic Race Pure Blood Seedline*,” the two Silicon Valley multimillionaires had finally begun to make their mark in Christian Identity circles, and in the northwest. Negative public reaction to the mailing was swift and widespread, and virtually guaranteed press coverage of the two Identity newcomers.

Story and Bertollini have since followed up with other mass mailings extolling their hatred of Jews. *The 11th Hour Remnant Messenger* arrives unexpectedly in the mailbox of homes and businesses, demonizing Jews as a “non-race, the seed of Satan having Satan’s DNA genetics.” The Jew, they write, “is a hybridized, mongrelized and bastardized people with no homeland.”<sup>23</sup> But according to Bertollini, he “has never advocated hate or white supremacy.” The literature he and Story put out, he claims, “just says

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21. Gayman, *supra* note 19, at 6.

22. SKURDAL, *supra* note 17. Furthering his own attempt to distance himself from the violence espoused by many Identity believers, Pastor Dan Gayman claims that the U.S. Department of Justice “arranged for me to make a video directed to the Montana Freemen to encourage them to surrender peacefully to law enforcement officers so that the loss of lives would not occur.” THE WATCHMAN, Winter 2000, at 26.

23. *The Wannabe’s That Want to Be and Shall Never Be “SATAN’S JEWS”*, THE 11TH HOUR REMNANT MESSENGER (Mailing to Coeur d’Alene, Idaho resident Heather Lalley); *Hate Mail Delivered to Sandpoint*, THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW, Oct. 17, 1999.

we white people are different.”<sup>24</sup>

The expensive depiction of “*The Adamic Race Pure Blood Seedline*” that Story and Bertollini created and mailed free to thousands across the U.S. represents another foundation block of Christian Identity ideology, and is key to understanding its racist construct.

#### A. Adam: God’s White Man

Identity is fixated on Adam. In this belief system, Adam was not the first man. Before him there were allegedly other “pre-Adamic” peoples created, inferior to Adam and sometimes referred to as “mud people,” with the racist connotation explicit. Adam was created by God in a separate act, recorded, according to Identity believers, in Genesis 2:5-7. Again turning to a skewed interpretation of the Hebrew word “aw-dawm” or “awdawm,” Identity makes the racial leap quickly and incisively:

First, let us consider the word which denotes our White Race. The Hebrew word “AWDAWM” . . . called Adam in your Bible . . . is from a root word meaning “to be of a ruddy complexion, to show blood in the face” . . . something obviously not applicable to negroes or mongolians, but only to the white race.<sup>25</sup>

Created on the sixth day (Genesis 1:26-28) and numbering “in the millions” by the time Adam was created, pre-Adamic peoples (“the blacks, Orientals and other races”) were (and are), according to Identity, weak and wretched and without souls.<sup>26</sup> They were “enosh,” a Hebrew word allegedly “used in a derogatory sense,” with its root meaning implying “weakness, physically or morally; wretchedness.” None were worthy of being Adam’s partner, so God created Eve, “the mother of the new race.”<sup>27</sup> And in the final chapter of the American Institute of Theology *Correspondence Bible Course*, the vile, racist reality of Identity theology is unleashed:

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24. Kim Murphey, *Hates Affluent New Godfathers*, LOS ANGELES TIMES, Jan. 10, 1999, at p.14.

25. THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF THEOLOGY, MAN AND BEAST 22 (correspondence Bible course, The American Institute of Theology, Harrison, Ark.) [hereinafter MAN AND BEAST].

26. *The Adamic Race*, *supra* note 14.

27. MAN AND BEAST, *supra* note 25, at 22-23.

This, then, is the Negro's *raison d'être*, that is, his justification for existence. When we turn to the Bible for knowledge and instruction, we are informed that the "beasts of the earth and field" were created among the lower "kinds of flesh" to fill their place in the Divine plan where they would be most needed. They were given erect postures, well-developed hands and feet, articulate speech; withal, tool-making and tool handling bipeds (two-footed beasts) possessing the essential characteristics to fit them for their position as servants. Each division in God's creation is designed for a specific purpose and reaches its highest fulfillment when it brings itself into full compliance with the Divine will.<sup>28</sup>

While Identity preacher Everett Siliven Ramsey does not agree that "Blacks do not have a soul," he—like other Identity followers—clearly believes that the Bible is the exclusive story of the Adamic (i.e., white) race. His moderation (by Identity standards), however, is always tainted by his true feelings about the "pre-Adamic" races:

Before Adam/Noah, there were yellow and black races, but they had no nations, countries or governments; at least not recognized in the Bible. Biblical and non-Biblical scholars have written decades ago the fact that the Bible speaks only to Adam and his descendants and their nations.<sup>29</sup>

Or, as Dan Gayman puts it succinctly, "there is no racial unity in Adam."<sup>30</sup>

#### *B. Racial Purity: Fixed on Exclusion*

Having staked an exclusivist claim on the Bible for whites in order to ground their racial superiority and blessedness, it is logical that Identity believers would advocate and promote racial purity as well. They do so with a vengeance, oblivious to the circular nature of their argument that starts from a racialist position and always ends up there.

Maintaining white racial purity is integral to Identity theology. Accordingly, race-mixers cannot inherit the promises of God given Adam and his descendants, and they are, moreover, seen as a dire threat to the survival and well being of the chosen white race . . . a slap in the face of God.

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28. THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF THEOLOGY, *ANTHROPOLOGY CONFIRMS THE BIBLE* 298 (correspondence Bible course, The American Institute of Theology, Harrison, Ark.) [hereinafter *ANTHROPOLOGY CONFIRMS THE BIBLE*].

29. DR. EVERETT RAMSEY, *RACE AND THE BIBLE* 9, 27 (1995).

30. PASTOR DAN GAYMAN, *DO ALL RACES SHARE IN SALVATION?* 48 (1985).

The final chapter in the massive *Correspondence Bible Course* lays out the racial construct of Adamic exclusiveness. Turning to the science of anthropology, “evidence” is given (primarily from long discredited nineteenth century texts) not only for the inferiority of the non-white races, but also for the prohibition on race mixing, which “is bound to result in race suicide.”<sup>31</sup>

Dan Gayman and his colleagues write extensively on this topic. Pastor Gray Clark’s treatise on the Bible as the “The Book of Adam’s Race,” notes that “The astute reader will not only see that Adam was white, but that he could only produce white children.”<sup>32</sup> Clark then makes the transition to his call for racial purity: “When God created, he also made it clear in Genesis chapter one that purity of creation is His Original Design and therefore, desire.”<sup>33</sup>

In the same issue of The Church of Israel publication, Gayman himself weighs in on the topic. After castigating “zealous missionaries” whose “bitter fruit of world missions” has turned into a “flood tide from the third world” that threatens America and “every other Israelite nation of the world,” Gayman sounds the warning: “The bells of judgment are tolling in America and the Christian West. God will not be mocked! Repent of the sin of miscegenation! Come out of that multi-racial, multi-cultural church and worship with your own kind.”<sup>34</sup>

Most Identity leaders are masters of doublespeak, proclaiming that they do not hate those of “other” races while holding tenaciously to their belief that whites are God’s chosen people. Pete Peters is adept at the game. In one of his tracts on “the race issue,” he asserts that “To hate and fight others is to fall into the hands of our anti-Christ enemies and to fall prey to their dialectical tactics. God loves all races and calls them good . . . and has a plan for them . . . but first His people must clean up their act.” In short, God’s “covenant people . . . must repent and turn back to the laws of their God or perish.”<sup>35</sup>

### C. Jews: The “Seed of Satan”

In its crusade to appropriate the mantle of “God’s chosen people,” Christian Identity believers have developed an entire cottage industry around the proposition that Jews are the offspring of Satan. While rival factions battle

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31. ANTHROPOLOGY CONFIRMS THE BIBLE, *supra* note 28, at 293.

32. Pastor Gray Clark, *The Book of Adam’s Race*, THE VISION, Sept. 1997, at 4-5.

33. *Id.*

34. Paster Dan Gayman, *A Vision of Racial Purity for the Covenant People*, THE VISION, Sept. 1997, at 1 [hereinafter *A Vision of Racial Purity for the Covenant People*].

35. PASTOR PETE PETERS, *A Scriptural Understanding of the Race Issue*, SCRIPTURES FOR AMERICA 18 (1990); *see also* PASTOR PETE PETERS, A JUST LOOK AT RACISM (tract from Scriptures for America, La Porte, Colo.).

in print over intricacies of the “one seed” or “two seed” theory, both end up in a racist, biological determinism that cast Jews as the progeny of the devil.

Like most contemporary Identity adherents, Story and Bertollini are two seeders, espousing the more bizarre theory of Jewish Satanic origins. Based on their reading of Genesis 3;15, two seeders believe that Eve was seduced by Satan, and that Cain was the offspring of their liaison, “a Mongrel, Hybrid, a Non-Race.”<sup>36</sup> Cain’s brother Abel, on the other hand, was the offspring of Eve with the pure, white Adam, the second of the two “seeds” to which Eve gave birth. Cain’s murder of Abel marked the beginning of a “war” that has never ceased—the war between the Satanic forces of “Jewry” and the pure race born of Adam, the white, Adamic race, whose seedline continued through the birth of Seth.<sup>37</sup>

Identity’s one seeders believe that Jews descended from Jacob’s brother Esau, who sold his birthright to Jacob, cursed God, and married outside the Israelite race. Esau’s actions brought God’s hatred upon him and his descendants, the Edomites, also called the Jews. Even today, according to Peters, these Jewish “impostors” continue to attempt to steal Israel’s identity, which belongs solely to the Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian, and Germanic peoples descended from the tribes of Israel, the true chosen people of God.<sup>38</sup>

#### V. JESUS WAS AN ISRAELITE: IDENTITY CHRISTOLOGY

Identity Christology—its understanding of Jesus—is rooted in its primary racial premise about the Satanic origin of the Jews and the divine purity of the Adamic (white) race, as well as in its notions about the dispersion of the true Israelites. As an Israelite—not a Jew—Jesus allegedly came to save only the House of Israel, the Adamic race which, according to Identity, eventually emigrated to Europe, Great Britain, and (finally) the United States. For Identity believers, salvation through Jesus Christ is exclusively for whites.

##### A. *Jesus: An Aryan Israelite, Not a Jew*

To arrive at the origin, identification, and purpose of the Identity Jesus, one must journey again through the historical labyrinth of the tribes of Israel. Painstaking efforts are made by Identity believers to prove that Jesus was not only in the direct lineage of David of the House of Judah (and therefore a descendant of Identity’s white Adam), but also that he was himself a Judahite a member of the tribe of Judah separated from wicked Babylonian Judaism

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36. *The Adamic Race*, *supra* note 14.

37. *Id.*

38. *Ministers’ Conference*, *supra* note 5, at 7.

after the Assyrian captivity of the northern tribes in 721 B.C.

Pastor Everett Siliven Ramsey of Faith Baptist Church and Ministries in Houston, Missouri writes in his lengthy commentary on the book of Romans that

Due to the excessive wickedness and brutality of the Edomites under Herod, most of the true seed of Judah, Benjamin and Levi left Jerusalem. The Benjamites settled around Galilee and this became the home of Jesus Christ and most of the disciples were from that tribe. All of the disciples were Israelites except Judas, who was a Jew (Edomite mix).<sup>39</sup>

The Edomites, descended from the intermarriage of Esau's progeny with the Canaanites, were the "mongrelized" people that Identity refers to as Jews" . . . "a people distinct and separate from God's people of Israel, although living among them."<sup>40</sup> According to Betty Jane Dryburgh, Director of Education for the American Institute of Theology, Jesus was a Nazarene "who would not walk in Jewry." Dryburgh explains that "Nowhere in the scripture does it say the 'Christ' (which is a title) was a Jew;" where it does, there is a mistranslation based on the similarity of the word Judean with Jew.<sup>41</sup>

Identity believers also capitalize on the many sayings of Jesus recorded in the New Testament that speak of his mission to "the house of Israel." While the mission of the historical Jesus was, indeed, exclusively to Israel—and not to the Gentiles, who were brought into the Christian movement after his death—it is, by definition of Christian Identity, an Israel comprised *only* of the covenantal people of the Adamic race, the inheritors of the promises of God given the tribal Israelite ancestors, from which Jesus himself stemmed. For Identity believers, the Israelite Jesus who spoke to the house of Israel was speaking exclusively to a white race ordained by God: "It is impossible to truly understand the Bible—or any part of it—without understanding that the Anglo-Saxon-Germanic and Scandinavian peoples of today are the ISRAEL of the Bible."<sup>42</sup> In short, the Israelite Jesus and the Bible that records his words speak "always and only to ISRAEL,"<sup>43</sup> the white race of European stock.

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39. DR. EVERETT RAMSEY, A KINGDOM COMMENTARY ON ROMANS 46-47 (1994).

40. THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF THEOLOGY, CAN ANYTHING BE JUDEO-CHRISTIAN? 156 (correspondence Bible course, The American Institute of Theology, Harrison, Ark.).

41. B.J. DRYBURGH, CHRISTIANITY OR RELIGIOUS TRADITION? 22 (The American Institute of Theology, Harrison, Ark.).

42. THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF THEOLOGY, ISRAEL IN THE NEW TESTAMENT 159 (correspondence Bible course, The American Institute of Theology, Harrison, Ark.).

43. *Id.*

### B. *Trekking in Great Britain: Jesus' Anglo-Saxon Years*

Of all the Identity claims about Jesus' heritage and exclusive mission, none is more unfathomable than the proposition that he spent time as a young man in Great Britain, working in the tin mines of his uncle, Joseph of Arimathea. Here Identity again exposes its roots in British Israelism and its remarkable claims for authenticity in what can only be called "creative historical analysis."

The four Gospel accounts denote nothing of Jesus' life between boyhood and adulthood; most stories of his work span a period of a few years prior his death. Seizing upon these "lost years" of Jesus' life, The American Institute of Theology provides one of the most expansive explanations in Identity literature to link Jesus to Great Britain and to Anglo Saxon roots. The explanation begins with Joseph of Arimathea, who according to "Palestinian tradition" was a wealthy importer of tin from mines which he owned in Cornwall in the British Isles. Accordingly, it would be only natural that Joseph would occasionally make trips to inspect these British mines, and that he likely took his nephew Jesus along on the journey during his young adulthood. Citing numerous "traditions" from Cornwall, Somerset, and Glastonbury, Joseph and Jesus are, indeed, said to have sojourned in Great Britain, where Jesus was taught "how to extract tin and purge it of the wolfram."<sup>44</sup>

Joseph, in fact, was said to be so favored by both religious and civic authorities that he was given land in perpetuity near Glastonbury and, upon his death, was buried there. Such an honor reportedly affirms not only ancient traditions and historical records, but also "the official acts and records of kings of the Middle Ages . . ."<sup>45</sup> who recognized his close connection with Jesus. Accordingly, "All of these lend strong support to the ancient legends and records of the places that it was here that Jesus Christ spent those 18 years of His life which the Bible does not account for. And where else would we expect Him to go, but to what was to become the principal home of His own people, ISRAEL?"<sup>46</sup>

### C. *Salvation: For Whites Only*

In "The Doctrinal Standards" of Dan Gayman's Church of Israel, the

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44. THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF THEOLOGY, *THE MISSING YEARS IN THE LIFE OF CHRIST 189-93* (correspondence Bible course, The American Institute of Theology, Harrison, Ark.).

45. *Id.* at 193.

46. *Id.*; *see also* (commentary by) E. RAYMOND CAPT, *THE LOST CHAPTER OF ACTS OF THE APOSTLES 11* (1996).

racial construct of contemporary Identity is laid bare: “We believe that election is by race, and salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ.”<sup>47</sup> While Gayman, his followers, and other Identity pastors and leaders adamantly proclaim that they do not hate other racial groups, their racist theology unequivocally stands on the foundational belief that salvation is for whites only.

For some fifty years Gayman and the Church of Israel have created a body of literature virtually unmatched in Identity circles. Gayman would deny that he is a Christian Identity believer. He has not openly joined more virulent and violent Identity voices, nor kindled the anti-government fervor that has driven the political edge of the racist movement for the past twenty years. He has, however, laid a solid, racist theological foundation that is consistent with Identity tenets developed over the latter half of the twentieth century. During that time, his southwest Missouri church has attracted settlers from across the U.S. and far beyond its shores, folk looking for the true faith and seeking to live with others who, like themselves, will inherit its promise.

In a 1997 edition of his bi-monthly publication, *The Vision*, Gayman railed in his opening editorial “A Vision of Racial Purity for the Covenant People” against the “flood tide of third world aliens” and the “millions of non-whites” who have come to the shores of America and other nations.<sup>48</sup> “The Issue of Race” is the theme for the entire thirty-page publication, aimed at establishing the church, in the words of author Thomas Bowman, as “separatist—but not racist, segregationist, but not supremacist”<sup>49</sup>—a distinction without a difference. Gayman is riveted by the drive for “racial purity” and by a commitment to help the remnant, “covenant people”—the lost sheep of the house of Israel—attain the salvation that is available only to them. “Jesus Christ,” he writes, “came into the world to redeem Israel and prepare the earth for the restoration of His Kingdom in a new heaven and a new earth.”<sup>50</sup> Only white people, however, need apply.

Gayman and his followers are, of course, not in their racist, exclusivist view of salvation for whites only through Jesus Christ. It is here—in their Christology and in their salvation history—that the primary elements of Identity “theology” come full circle. As the American Institute of Theology puts it succinctly, “A convincing array of scientific evidence is now adduced in support of the Biblical premise upon which the fact is established that the Negro is not of Adamic origin.”<sup>51</sup> From white Adam and his lineage in the true

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47. *The Doctrinal Standards of the Church of Israel*, THE WATCHMAN, Winter 2001, at back cover.

48. *A Vision of Racial Purity for the Covenant People*, *supra* note 34, at 1.

49. *Id.* Thomas Bowman, *We Are Not Racist*, THE VISION, Sept. 1997, at 10-11.

50. Gayman, *supra* note 19, at 5; *see also* PASTOR DAN GAYMAN, DO ALL RACES SHARE IN SALVATION? (2d ed. 1995).

51. ANTHROPOLOGY CONFIRMS THE BIBLE, *supra* note 28, at 294.

tribes of Israel, down through the true Israelite Jesus, and onward through 2000 years of the holy remnant's migration to present day Anglo/Aryan nations, Identity's God has purportedly shaped a covenant people—white people who seek redemption through an equally white Jesus.

The Identity notion of white salvation has dire consequences. Identity theology is predominantly pre-millennialist, holding that the Second Coming of Christ will be preceded by a chaotic period of Tribulations that will usher in the Millennium (a thousand years of peace and harmony on earth). In short, the quicker the Tribulations, the quicker the Kingdom of God. For Identity believers, human action to precipitate this violent and chaotic period (a twisted version of the works righteousness beliefs of many Christians) is key to their salvation, and the sooner white Christians can precipitate the Tribulations, the sooner they will inherit the Kingdom. Thus, the Second Coming is linked directly to a period of violence, building toward a genocidal, racial Armageddon against Jews and persons of color.

By such beliefs and commitments, Christian Identity provides the theological rationale for white nationalism in America, and for the violence that increasingly accompanies this warped, heretical notion of biologically determined, race-based salvation. This is the essence of Identity: that white Christians are not only God's lost Israel, the covenant people, but that they have a primary responsibility to rid the earth by any means necessary of pre-Adamic peoples of color and Satanic Jews that the Kingdom of God might be ushered in for white salvation.

#### VI. FROM MARTYRS TO MORTARS: THE THEOLOGICAL GLUE OF THE WHITE SUPREMACIST MOVEMENT IN AMERICA

On a cold winter day in 1983, North Dakota farmer Gordon Kahl decided that he had had enough. Enough from the banks who wanted his land. Enough from the Zionist-controlled federal government behind the banks. Enough from the IRS. Enough from the hated Jews. Though he had not paid federal taxes since 1967, and had served time for only a year, he was a free man, a sovereign citizen above the law. As he returned from a Posse Comitatus meeting, two U.S. Marshals stopped him on a lonely country road to serve papers for tax evasion. There he made a fateful decision. Following a brief, armed standoff with the Marshals, shots rang out, and Kahl and his cohorts opened fire. When the shooting stopped the Marshals were dead, and two other law enforcement officers who had arrived as backup were wounded. Kahl went on the run, making it quietly through the safe houses of the violent right in America's heartland for four months until law enforcement agents

caught up with him in Arkansas. There he died in a blaze of gunfire. There he became another of many martyrs to the violent, Identity-driven white supremacist movement in 1980s America.<sup>52</sup>

The economic and political turbulence of the 1980s was a boon to Christian Identity and its growing legions of true believers. Having simmered in the cauldrons of the organized racist movement for years, it exploded on the American scene with the Aryan Nations, The Order, and numerous other followers who, like Kahl, took up the summons to violent action against the unseen “Jewish conspiracy” allegedly wrecking their lives. A decade later, the movement took a more organized approach, manifested in the Christian Patriots’ frenzy of militia organizing and common law court hearings, and always under girded by Identity theology. As the new century loomed, however, Identity began to change its stripes once again. It held tight, however, as the theological glue binding the white supremacist movement in America.

#### A. *The Deadly 80s: From Aryans to the Order*

The line of Identity succession from Wesley Swift continued through William Potter Gale to Richard Butler. While Butler’s Identity roots are set in Swift’s California church, he left there in 1973 to resettle in Idaho and begin his own congregation and compound the Church of Jesus Christ Christian-Aryan Nations. The Aryan Nations compound became one of the most well-known and notorious manifestations of the Identity-driven white supremacist movement in the U.S. well into the 1990s. It was a primary gathering place for racists from across the nation, and an incubator and training center for new leaders in the racist movement. Butler’s annual World Aryan Congress was the place for every self-respecting racist to be and to be seen. Grounded deeply in Identity ideology, Butler shaped and honed the violent far-right as a formidable force on the American landscape, especially in the turbulent 1980s, and sought to make the Pacific Northwest a “white homeland” in the midst of a racially diverse nation.

By 1983 Butler’s influence had helped shape the ideology and criminal actions of Robert Mathews, a relative unknown in the racist movement. In the span of a few years Mathews gave birth to the worst fears about the racist movement’s potential for violence and mayhem as he organized The Silent Brotherhood, otherwise known as The Order. Though not Identity, he had significant ties to Butler and was deeply influenced by *The Turner Diaries*—the novel by neo-Nazi William Pierce that also influenced Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh. Mathews turned The Order into a finely tuned

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52. See JAMES CORCORAN, *BITTER HARVEST* (1990) for the complete story of Gordon Kahl.

domestic terrorist organization. He and his twenty-three hard-core followers got away with millions of dollars from bank and armored truck heists to bankroll the racist movement, and did not hesitate to kill. As James Coates writes in his book on the survivalist right, “William Pierce’s novel about ZOG provided Matthews with an action plan, but Butler’s Identity church supplied the philosophical and theological underpinnings. . . .”<sup>53</sup>

The Order was not the only violent right show in town, however. During the 80s, Identity-influenced survivalist compounds and training centers dotted the American landscape. Arkansas was home to the Covenant, the Sword, and the Arm of the Lord, whose influence spilled northward into Missouri and its many training centers. Other compounds were based in Oklahoma and Nebraska. Identity’s web of hatred had spread far and wide, and had spawned a level of racist and anti-Semitic violence that few had thought possible.

B. *The Militant '90s: From Militias to  
Common Law Courts*

By the 1990s the violent manifestations of Identity Christianity had been tempered, due to widespread public reaction, and to a massive and overwhelming response from law enforcement. The Order was brought to a grinding halt by 1985. The political fervor that reinforced the spread of the ideology had quieted. Hard core believers like Richard Butler continued to run his Aryan Nations empire, while pastors like Pete Peters continued to churn out Identity tapes and tracts. Once again, however, changes were afoot that were to reawaken the movement and spin it in new directions. By mid-decade the so-called Christian Patriot movement, with its militias, common law courts, and fraudulent financial schemes, would sweep the country.

It was in August 1992 that federal agents shot and killed Samuel Weaver and his mother Vicki Weaver as they sought to serve warrants on their father and husband, Randy Weaver, for a misdemeanor weapons statute violation. An avowed “white separatist,” Weaver had moved to the isolation of Ruby Ridge in the Idaho mountains to raise his family separate from the rest of the deteriorating society.

Reaction to Ruby Ridge from the political right was swift, both on the scene and in its aftermath. Within two months, Christian Identity Pastor Pete Peters organized what was to become one of the most critical meetings of the white supremacist movement in years—a meeting that would give shape to a new and widespread phenomenon, the militia movement that would sweep the

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53. JAMES COATES, ARMED AND DANGEROUS: THE RISE OF THE SURVIVALIST RIGHT 52 (2d prt. 1988); see also FLYNN & GERHARDT, *supra* note 20, for a comprehensive treatment of The Order.

nation by mid-decade.

In late October of 1992 Peters hosted a “meeting of Christian men” in Estes Park, Colorado that brought together 160 of the nation’s leading white supremacists and “various conservative writers, leaders, and ministers” from thirty states.<sup>54</sup> Neo-nazi Louis Beam was there; David Duke was invited, but did not respond. That Peters could pull together such a gathering was an indication that his own Identity star was rising in the constellation of the nation’s white supremacist movement . . . and that Christian Identity ideology was, indeed, the glue binding that movement. In clear Identity tones, Peters himself wrote in his Special Report on the gathering, “The second most remarkable aspect of the meeting was how men of such strong, masculine, and independent thought and will did work as one in service to their King. There were no major confrontations and the words of Judges 20:1 happened at this meeting: ‘Then all the sons of Israel . . . came out, and the congregation assembled as one man to the Lord at Mispah.’”<sup>55</sup>

“In service to their King,” the men worked in committees, including the Sacred Warfare Action Tactics (SWAT) Committee. It was in the SWAT Committee that plans for leaderless resistance were discussed and developed;<sup>56</sup> it was here that energy was given to birth the militia movement that began to sweep the nation within months of the Estes Park gathering. The Militia of Montana, one of the first to be organized, was headed by John Trochman, an Identity believer whose travels had taken him to the Aryan Nations compound and who, to this day, is a popular speaker at gun shows and other far-right events. As the militia phenomenon spread east, it provided the Identity-driven white supremacist movement a vast new pool of potential recruits among gun owners, anti-government zealots, and others concerned about their rights as sovereign citizens. Caught up in the new frenzy of “citizens’ rights” organizing, many who joined the militia movement had no inkling that Christian Identity had played such a pivotal role in its formation.

By 1994 the renewed movement had also spawned its own “legal system” in common law courts that convened citizens grand juries across the nation to issue “judgments” on public officials, financial institutions, and the IRS—smacking again of William Potter Gale’s deep-seated hatred of the “Zionist Occupation Government.” These courts wreaked havoc with legitimate legal institutions as they drew on spurious British common law precepts to advance

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54. SPECIAL REPORT ON THE MEETING OF CHRISTIAN MEN HELD IN ESTES PARK, COLORADO OCTOBER 23-25, 1992 CONCERNING THE KILLING OF VICKIE AND SAMUEL WEAVER BY THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT 3 (1992) (published by Scriptures for America, LaPorte, Colo.).

55. *Id.* at 4.

56. *Id.* at 17-18.

their ideological and political agendas. They were closely linked to the militias, and constituted another arm of “a system of parallel institutions . . . intended to be the embryo of an exclusive white Christian republic.”<sup>57</sup>

C. *We are Not Racists: Mid-Decade Shifts and Denials*

By the mid-90s key Identity pastors had begun in subtle ways to distance themselves from the Christian Identity label, which by then had become rightly tarnished in the public eye by the anti-Semitic, racist, and violent characteristics of the ideology. In fact, many of them took off in a dead run away from Identity, reasserting their claim as “Christian Israelists” or airing some other innocuous-sounding name for their beliefs. For decades Dan Gayman and his Church of Israel had set the standard for such an approach, as had countless “Israelite” congregations across the country where the faithful worshipped quietly and their pastors relentlessly churned out literature and tapes.

Gayman, of course, had earlier lapses that exposed his relationship with the violent wing of the movement. In 1979 he appeared at Richard Butler’s Aryan World Congress, and in the 1980s he received money from The Order, which he later returned.<sup>58</sup> And like the Gayman of today, even Pete Peters has attempted to tone down the rhetoric of racism, reminding his readers that he “does not believe it is proper or Christian for one to utter racial slurs at someone of another race” and to assert that he “. . . has not advocated hatred, injustice, or ill treatment of other races. . . .”<sup>59</sup> He does, however, hammer away relentlessly at race mixing and at the “anti-Christ Jewish controlled media,” and espouses understandings of racism that attempt to make whites the true victims of hate.

With regard to homosexuality, Peters has staked out a claim that far outdistances his Identity colleagues in print. In his “Death Penalty for Homosexuals,” he goes to great lengths to give credence to what he perceives as the biblical call to put homosexuals to death. “Is it not apparent that the Bible Scriptures advocate discrimination, intolerance, and the DEATH PENALTY concerning homosexuality? Then is not the Title of this writing true?”<sup>60</sup> No matter how much he tries, Peters seems innately unable to

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57. DEVIN BURGHART & ROBERT CRAWFORD, *GUNS AND GAVELS: COMMON LAW COURTS, MILITIAS & WHITE SUPREMACY 2* (1996). This is one of the most comprehensive overviews of the common law court movement available.

58. Max McCoy, *Ex-pastor, Family Denounce Church*, THE JOPLIN GLOBE, Feb. 4, 2001; Coates, *supra* note 53.

59. PASTOR PETER J. PETERS, *A JUST LOOK AT RACISM*, *supra* note 35, at 4, 13.

60. PASTOR PETER J. PETERS, *Intolerance of, Discrimination Against and the Death Penalty for Homosexuals is Prescribed in the Bible*, SCRIPTURES FOR AMERICA (2d prtg. June

distance himself from the violence of the ideology he proclaims.

The attempted makeover by Gayman, Peters, and others is replete with piteous claims of oppression and persecution. The 1996 ministers' conference sponsored by Peters and attended by numerous other leaders in the "Israel Identity" movement aimed at "turning the tide of hatred" against "True Israel."<sup>61</sup> Complaints about media investigations and treatment are rife, but are usually worn as badges of honor. But no matter how Identity leaders position themselves, no matter how many times they claim they are not racists or anti-Semites, they cannot escape the foundational beliefs that drive them, or the violence that is an incessant undertone of their ideology.

In his letter to ministers in Quincy, Illinois in the fall of 2000, James W. Brueggemann of Stone Kingdom Ministries in Asheville, North Carolina outlined his beliefs in detail in an attempt to counter "certain accusations" made against him as an Identity leader. As he sought legitimacy in two pages, he could not but play his true hand in his conclusion: "We believe that a prayerful study of the holy Bible and a general knowledge of world history . . . provides convincing evidence that the Anglo-Saxon, Celtic, Germanic, Scandinavian, and related peoples (often called simply 'the Christian nations') are the true racial descendants of the tribes of Israel."<sup>62</sup>

Richard Kelly Hoskins, a Virginia-based investment broker who has been a leading Identity strategist for decades, takes the ideology to the violent edge in *Vigilantes of Christendom*, a 1990 book that by mid-decade had circulated in the ranks of the far-right. Even as "Christian Patriots" organized their militias, Hoskins' book was reinforcing a quiet, unorganized shift toward a violent and deadly "Phineas Priesthood" of individual white warriors committed to violent acts to preserve their God-given rights and the purity of their race.

The book is, in essence, a mandate for racist and anti-Semitic violence and killing. Hoskins uses the story of Phineas in the Book of Numbers as the basis for establishing a contemporary priesthood of enforcers called by God ". . . to their dangerous work,"<sup>63</sup> even as Phineas had shown his own zeal for God by killing Zimri, a prince of Israel, for bringing a Midianite companion into the encampment of the Israelites. The book is full of stories about true believers whose stands for righteousness seek to rid the body politic of invading aliens, even as white blood cells do for the human body. "Survival,"

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1992).

61. *Ministers' Conference*, *supra* note 5, at 7.

62. Letter from James W. Brueggemann, Stone Kingdom Ministries, Asheville, North Carolina, to the Christian Ministers of Quincy, Illinois 2 (Sept. 25, 2000).

63. RICHARD KELLY HOSKINS, *VIGILANTES OF CHRISTENDOM: THE HISTORY OF THE PHINEAS PRIESTHOOD* viii (1990).

Hoskins writes, “depends on the regenerated white blood cell, a cell rigidly judging everything and everyone by the ancient rules that ensure survival, a cell no longer misled, wooden, and ineffective. It is the day of the Phineas Priest.”<sup>64</sup>

#### VII. TAKING STANDS: COMMUNITY ACTION TO COUNTER THE CHRISTIAN IDENTITY MOVEMENT

Had James W. Brueggemann checked out Quincy, Illinois before he planned his October 2000 “Feast of Tabernacles Prophetic Bible Conference” in that community, he would have learned that its religious and civic leaders had successfully prevented a Pete Peters “Bible seminar” from coming to Quincy in 1999, and that they had a low tolerance level for Christian Identity gatherings. In spite of his October letter attempting to soften his message, Brueggemann did not shy away from billing the conference as a Christian Identity event in his late summer invitations.

When Quincy clergy learned of the scheduled event, they moved into action once again and notified religious and civic leaders of a community meeting to discuss the proposed event. On a warm midweek afternoon in September, some seventy pastors, community, civic and lay leaders and concerned citizens gathered to learn about Christian Identity and to consider their response to the October conference. By the end of the afternoon, the conference was cancelled as participants overwhelmingly expressed opposition to it. The owner of the facility hosting the event, who also attended the meeting, declared that it would not be held in his conference center. Once again a Christian Identity event had been stopped in Quincy.<sup>65</sup> As they had written to the community when Peters sought a venue in their community, “We have joined across many faith traditions and differences to unite in our opposition to his presence in Quincy, and in our commitment to build a community that respects and holds dear all of God’s peoples. Though we sometimes struggle with our own diversity of beliefs and backgrounds, we are of one voice in saying boldly and publicly that we do not welcome these hateful and violent views or those who promote them.”<sup>66</sup>

#### A. *Community Response: Exposing Identity*

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64. *Id.* at 64.

65. See Rev. Timothy White, *Hate to Get Involved? The Biggest Mistake a Community Can Make*, BREAKING NEW GROUND, Winter 2000; FROM HATRED TO COMMUNITY (1999) (a flyer printed and distributed by the Quincy Ministerial Alliance, Quincy, Illinois).

66. FROM HATRED TO COMMUNITY, *supra* note 65.

Today there are hundreds of “Israel Identity” congregations, ministries, organizations, and pastors spread across 46 states, with countless followers who attend services, subscribe to literature, and participate in seminars and conferences.<sup>67</sup> With innocuous names like New Covenant Christian Church, Our Savior’s Church, or New Jerusalem Fellowship, these gatherings and groups of Identity believers fan the flames of this American heresy and spread its word of white, Christian superiority. Pete Peters, James Brueggemann, and a passel of other Identity pastors and teachers traverse the country with their Bible seminars and conferences, meeting in hotels, camps, and conference centers that—often unwittingly—provide place and space for the believers to gather and to spread their word to newcomers.

Christian Identity must be exposed for what it is—a racist, anti-Semitic ideology that foments hate and advances a pseudo-theological rationale for white superiority. It is also, indeed, the glue that binds the white supremacist movement in America.

Community response to Identity activity begins with exposing it to the light of day. For example, when Militia of Montana leader John Trochmann came to Illinois for a series of public presentations in 1998, religious and community leaders exposed his Identity roots by providing information to local media about him. Press stories and editorials followed, making it clear that he was not welcome. Nor did Quincy leaders hesitate to “name the names” of Identity leaders and their beliefs as they exposed the community to the proposed teaching events led by Peters and Brueggemann. Particularly because there is a concerted attempt to obscure the racist and anti-Semitic nature of the ideology, this exposure of its basic tenets and practices is critical in communities where Identity believers are—or seek to—be active.

Such exposure does not deny the First Amendment right of Identity believers to speak freely about their beliefs. But even as they have a fundamental right to do so, those who oppose their beliefs have a fundamental responsibility to counter them, whether it be in public or private settings. Nor should such exposure be confused with publicity. All too many communities quickly slide into paralysis buying into the notion that media exposure of Identity and other white supremacist activity simply provides “free publicity” to the groups and their beliefs. To the contrary, when communities remain silent in the face of such activity, they invite it to take root. Floyd Cochran, a former Aryan Nations leader who left the movement and has since devoted his life to anti-racist teaching and organizing, is unequivocal in his call for community action. In speeches across the nation, he tells youth and community leaders that in his former, racist organizing efforts, he and his

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67. VIRGINIA CHRISTIAN MINISTRIES, *THE DIRECTORY OF THE COVENANT PEOPLE (ISRAEL IDENTITY)* 1-7 (1997 ed.).

cohorts relished working in communities that said or did nothing in response to their recruitment efforts.

*B. Community Response: Educating about Identity*

On the heels of the Oklahoma City bombing, Kansas church leaders knew that something had to be done to educate their members about Christian Identity. The ideology had slowly and quietly crept into communities and congregations by the mid- 90s, and was having an impact. Following a series of five education and training workshops held across the state by Kansas Ecumenical Ministries, the Interfaith Rural Life Committee, and the United Methodist Rural Fellowship, United Methodist Conference leaders produced a teaching video about the ideology and the white supremacist movement that, with other educational materials, they and their colleagues took into congregations across the state, reaching thousands of church members over the course of several years and helping dampen the movement on the prairies.<sup>68</sup>

Community response to Identity must be grounded in education about this ideology and its masking of racism and anti-Semitism through its pseudo-theological system. Church members especially need to know about this heresy so they can address it head on for what it is. Civic leaders must know about it so they can provide leadership in the larger community to stem Identity. Youth must know about it so they are not enticed by Identity attempts to soften its image and make it palatable and attractive to them.

Religious and human rights groups across the country have taken to the road in recent years to provide countless seminars, workshops, and conferences on Christian Identity. Through these efforts, thousands of community leaders have learned about Identity, and the education process is continuing. The Montana Association of Churches (“MAC”) developed a strong and comprehensive education program that put a full-time staff person into churches and communities across the state, and developed and widely distributed an important policy and teaching tool on “Distortions of the Christian Gospel.” Recently, MAC and other ecumenical leaders from the Western U.S. launched a region-wide effort to spread this commitment through a series of education and training conferences on “When Religion Teaches Hate.” The churches of Quincy followed their first community action aimed at Pete Peter’s proposed Bible seminar with a community-wide education forum on Identity that drew a large gathering of leaders.

The more people know about Christian Identity the more they will be equipped to slow and counter its racist and anti-Semitic ideology and

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68. RECLAIMING COMMUNITY IN KANSAS-THE VIDEO: ALTERNATIVES TO DESPAIR AND VIOLENCE (Kansas East Conference, The United Methodist Church, Topeka, Kan. 1995).

manifestations. As quirky and odd as Identity may seem, and thereby be more easily dismissed, this engine that drives the racist and white nationalist movement in the U.S. must be bared far and wide, that communities might know its composition and substantive parts, and be equipped to curb its appeal and advance.

*C. Community Response: Organizing to Counter Identity*

Exposure and education must be coupled with organizing if Christian Identity is to be effectively countered. At the first gathering of Quincy ministers to discuss and respond to Pete Peters, the head of the Quincy Ministerial Alliance and three other pastors were delegated to meet with the manager of the local motel where Peters' seminar was scheduled. With respect and concern, they told the manager about the seminar and made clear whom they were representing. The manager had no idea that such a seminar was to take place in his facility, and was utterly appalled by the prospect. Upon examining the reservation documents for the meeting, he discovered that an area resident had reserved the facility under a different group name, with no indication whatsoever that it was an Identity seminar. Without hesitating, the manager cancelled the event at significant cost to his motel, given that participants had already booked many rooms.

In the Rockies and the Pacific Northwest, organizing to counter Identity has been a mainstay of many communities for well over a decade, resulting in a strong, region-wide network grown under the auspices of the Northwest Coalition for Human Dignity. Spurred by leaders of Idaho's Kootenai County, home to Richard Butler's Aryan Nations compound, citizens of the region began a long, challenging, and sometimes violent-ridden effort to counter the Identity movement in their midst. An Aryan Nations bombing at the home of Bill Wassmuth, then pastor of St. Pious X Catholic Church in Coeur d'Alene, made it clear that their organizing was having an impact and a cost. Wassmuth joined others in the region to found the Coalition in 1989, and served as its director for ten years. With countless organizing successes along the way, the Coalition played a key role in advancing and supporting the lawsuit that finally broke Butler and the Aryan Nations in 2000, following an armed attack by some of its security forces on a woman and her son whose car backfired as they drove by the compound. Without the level, breadth, and success of the organizing work by citizens in communities across the region, it is highly unlikely that the lawsuit against the Aryan Nations would have succeeded.<sup>69</sup>

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69. See TOM ALIBRANDI WITH BILL WASSMUTH, *HATE IS MY NEIGHBOR* (1999); ROBERT CRAWFORD, S.L. GARDNER, JONATHAN MOZZOCHI, & R. L. TAYLOR, *THE NORTHWEST*

Exposure and education is but the foundation for active and effective counter-response in communities beset by Christian Identity and related racist, anti-Semitic, bigoted, and homophobic ideologies and violence; the moral voice of those communities must be firm and vocal, and must lead to organized action in the public arena to counter that activity. To do anything less is to provide fertile ground for the proliferation of organized hatred and violence.

VIII. DIRECTIONS FOR A NEW CENTURY: CHRISTIAN IDENTITY  
AND THE “NEW WHITE MINORITY”

For well over one hundred fifty years the basic beliefs of British Israelism first expounded by Jonathan Wilson have survived, persisted, and flourished in spite of all scientific, historical, anthropological, political, social, and cultural advances to the contrary. For the past half-century in the U.S., Christian Identity has shaped the ideology of the organized white supremacist movement, and provided it “theological cover” for its racist and anti-Semitic beliefs, its predominant anti-government tenor and actions, and its often violent and deadly manifestations. Identity leaders have helped cultivate a culture of hate disguised in the language of the Christian faith, and have consistently adapted to shifting political conditions. They have been successful opportunists, capitalizing on government mistakes and economic downslides and dislocation. They are unlikely to go away in the new century, compelling us to look ahead to develop new strategies to counter this American heresy.

A. *The Road Ahead: A Resurgent Identity for a  
“Vanishing People”?*

As British Israelism was an ideology for an era of empire, so Christian Identity has been an ideology for an era of unraveling. Even though the U.S. has maintained, indeed strengthened, its status as a global superpower since the end of the Second World War, it is no longer the homogenous, white, Christian nation that many (erroneously) perceived it to have been at its founding or over the course of two centuries since. The belief that white cultural and economic dominance was unraveling at the hands of those seeking to destroy the Adamic race has been fuel to the racist and anti-Semitic fire of the Identity message for half a century.

Now it is clear that in addition to the perceived erosion of white cultural and economic influence and power, whites will drop below fifty percent of the U.S. population by the middle of the twenty first century. Moreover, the

increasingly mixed racial composition of the population is unlikely to slow, further reinforcing the beliefs and fears of those racialsists who hold such deep convictions about white racial purity. Increased immigration especially by workers from south of the U.S. border is yet another factor in the growing hysteria about the unraveling of “white America,” and cause for a growing, anti-immigrant movement being organized by racist and other groups among mainstream citizens. White nationalist prospects for a growing, deepening movement thus become more viable in the century still before us.

This is fertile ground for Identity in the new century. It seems only a matter of time before Identity leaders begin to shape their aging message anew in ways that will attract whites who feel they are under assault and who have a propensity for a racist theological justification for their perceived plight as a vanishing people. As such, a resurgent Identity could readily provide the theological rationale for a minority, white nationalism that picks up the old, fading drumbeat of an earlier white supremacist plan for an Aryan homeland in the continental United States. Indeed, U.S. population predictions feed directly into the Identity line that whites are threatened by the “hordes” of non-white, non-Christian peoples who are becoming the political majority. Dan Gayman has already begun to call the alarm, writing in the new century of the “Christian remnant . . . at risk in every nation of the Anglo Saxon world.” He believes there now rages a culture war waged by “the children of Satan” (i.e., the Jews) “that seeks the absolute demise of the Caucasian race.”<sup>70</sup>

#### B. *Taking Identity Seriously: Action by Christians is Imperative*

While Christian Identity must be countered at every turn by all community leaders, it is a *fundamental responsibility* of the larger Christian community to take action to counter it.<sup>71</sup> The heretical distortion of the Christian faith is an affront to those who proclaim it, and such a distortion cannot and should not be taken lightly or ignored by any Christian leader. Identity leaders’ attacks on the Christian community outside their own fold—from fundamentalists to liberals and most everyone in between—are indicative of their cavalier and damning dismissal of all but their own white followers, and of their exclusivist claim to salvation by race, not grace.

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70. Pastor Dan Gayman, *A Vision for the Culture War*, THE VISION, Apr. 2000, at 1; Pastor Dan Gayman, *The Culture Warlords of Our Time*, THE VISION, Apr. 2000, at 2-3.

71. See David Ostendorf, *Countering Hatred*, THE CHRISTIAN CENTURY, Sept. 15, 1999, at 861-63; *Passion for Justice: Race- and religion-based hatred and the destruction of community*, THE PARK RIDGE CENTER BULLETIN, May/June 2000, at 7-8, 17.

While strong action has been taken by a handful of Christian leaders, agencies, and institutions, a concerted commitment to counter Identity and the organized hate movement has been notable by its absence. In the contemporary period—dating to the mid-1980s—the publication of Leonard Zeskind’s aforementioned work on Christian Identity in 1986 by the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA was an important breakthrough in alerting Christian leaders to the dangers of the ideology. That same year the Iowa Inter-Church Forum took an early lead not only in expressing its opposition to Identity, but also in supporting and advancing education, training, and organizing commitments to counter it at the state, regional, and national levels.

In the midst of a deep and widespread socioeconomic crisis in its countryside and cities, Iowa church leaders called Identity by name because they saw its influence spreading as adherents plied their hatred and scapegoating among displaced and disaffected people. In their document, “On Behalf of Caution, Justice and Hope” they declared that “Persons with financial problems should be wary of those who preach simplistic, conspiracy theories or perverted biblical and Christian theologies,” and specifically mentioned the dangers of Identity, the Posse Comitatus, and “the extremist philosophies and actions of those individuals and organizations that promote violence, anti-Semitic, or racist responses to the Iowa economic crisis.”<sup>72</sup> The Forum carried its concern to communities throughout the state, working jointly with farm and rural groups and organized labor to actively oppose the hate movement, and made its commitments known nationally with a press conference in New York City, in cooperation with the American Jewish Committee.

The integration and integrity of strong public statements coupled with effective counteraction is also reflected in the 1996 “Declaration on Distortions of the Christian Gospel” by the Assembly of Representatives of the Montana Association of Churches. Using strong language, the Assembly repudiated “. . . as false any teaching that suggests that the Gospel of Jesus Christ proclaims racial, gender or ethnic superiority or advocates violence toward rather than love of neighbor. Saying ‘yes’ to the Christian Gospel inevitably means saying ‘no’ to its distortion.”<sup>73</sup> The Association carried out its commitments to counter these distortions by putting staff on the ground in communities across the state for some three years, conducting workshops, seminars, and leadership development trainings with thousands of local

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72. IOWA INTER-CHURCH FORUM, ON BEHALF OF CAUTION, JUSTICE AND HOPE, Jan. 20, 1986 (statement of the Iowa Inter-Church Forum, Des Moines, Iowa).

73. DECLARATION ON DISTORTIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN GOSPEL (Assembly of Representatives, Montana Association of Churches, Oct. 29, 1996, Billings, Mont.).

church and community leaders.

At the national denomination level, the United Methodist Church and the United Church of Christ have both taken solid stands and actions to counter Christian Identity and the organized hate movement. United Methodist trainings and education events on Identity have been a hallmark of the denomination's outreach and education commitments since the mid-1990s. In 1997 the United Church of Christ adopted a resolution on "Faith and Community in the Midst of Extremism" that emerged from local and state church leaders who had taken leadership roles in confronting the white supremacist movement.<sup>74</sup>

While highly significant and effective in the ongoing commitment to counter Christian Identity, these actions have not been part of a larger, more cohesive commitment to address and stand against this American heresy by the nation's Christian leaders. If Identity is to be effectively countered in the twenty-first century, such a commitment is both necessary and critical, and could be key to a renewed effort by church leaders to address the deeper and even more insidious realities of racism and anti-Semitism that relentlessly and persistently pervade community life throughout contemporary society.

### *C. The Theological Imperative for Democratic Community*

The development and practice of the Christian faith in the U.S. is inextricably linked with the shaping of the nation's body politic, yielding both benefit and cost. From the colonization by the early Europeans to the rise of slavery; from the populist movement of the late nineteenth century to the entrenched power of the Protestant establishment in the mid-twentieth; and from the Social Gospel movement to the Christian Coalition, the numerous manifestations of Christian faith, theology, and practice have helped mold the social, economic, cultural, racial, and political landscape. But then again, so have other faith communities.

The unfolding American experiment has always been threatened by a certain arrogance of faith pushed and pursued by Christians who believe that this is and should be a distinctly Christian nation. In this regard, Identity Christians who take this level of arrogance to unparalleled depths are bit players in a larger Christian nationalist movement that continues to ply its beliefs in the religious and political realms. This is not to say that persons of faith should refrain from influencing public policy or politics. It is to say that those who would equate their faith with the success of any political order or

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74. Resolution on Faith and Community in the Midst of Extremism, 97-GS-33 (1997) (adopted by the Twenty-First General Synod of the United Church of Christ).

party, or use their faith to secure, maintain, or justify social, racial, cultural, and economic dominance, contribute to the destruction of democratic community and edge that political order toward a raw, exclusivist theocracy which they alone control and define in the name of a deity who looks distinctly like them.

Whether there is a theological imperative for democratic community—a distinctly God-driven mandate to create a more just, equitable, and inclusive community of differing peoples—is an open-ended question for persons of faith to discuss and debate. I firmly believe that there is such an imperative and that the Christian faith is an integral component of its creation. At the very heart of such a concept of democratic community is justice, a tenet central to all the monotheistic faiths.

Let us have this discussion and debate. But do not for a minute believe that Christian Identity or any other theological system grounded in precepts of racial superiority will want to join in. Identity already has its own racist, exclusivist, and anti-democratic truth. It is a distinctly American heresy that will, unless effectively exposed and countered, continue to bind an abhorrent white supremacist movement in a nation still slowly plugging along the difficult, winding road to a more inclusive democracy grounded deeply and inextricably in social and economic justice and racial equality.