

# The Chosen Ones: A Mythic Analysis of the Theological and Political Self-Justification of Christian Identity

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Christian Identity is a theology and movement that engages in a constructed rhetoric that encourages polarizing speech and, sometimes, by extension even violence. The origins of the modern Identity movement are found in a relatively little known theological movement called Anglo-Israelism or British Israelism. In this belief, Northern Europeans saw themselves as the literal descendants of the lost ten tribes of Israel. Its descendent, Christian Identity, has increasingly constructed a rhetoric that draws its strength and essence from hate and separation. As is the case with most movements, much energy is spent on rhetoric of self-justification. For Christian Identity, that justification is founded on arguments that seek to create a theology that not only gives permission to hate the outside world, but also actually demands, at least rhetorical violence, against the world. We will examine and analyze Identity's self-justificatory and mythic rhetoric focusing primarily on its claim of chosen status.

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## The History of Identity

In this section we want to briefly sketch out a rhetorical history of the theology called Christian Identity. It is not our purpose to write a full treatment of this complicated belief system, but merely to sketch with enough information to make our critical sections understandable.

Christian Identity's roots grow from the much older belief referred to as British-Israelism or Anglo-Israelism. This theology builds upon what is identified as a literal interpretation of the Bible, but which suggests that the ten lost tribes of Israel may be found in modern England, Ireland, Scotland, Holland, Denmark, parts of Germany, parts of France, and by migration the United States, Australia, and South Africa. Proponents of Israelism argue that the people of these nations represent the true lineage of Israel, and are God's chosen people. They engage in extensive genealogical arguments that tie modern northern-Europeans, and royalty in particular, back to David and then back to Seth, son of Adam. British Israelites suggest that they are the true lost tribes of Israel and therefore the chosen few. Thus they lay claim to salvation in the last days.

John Sadler's foundational *Rights to the Kingdom* (1649) was expanded upon by Richard Brothers in the 1780s. Brothers demanded the crown of England upon identifying himself as a descendant of King David, but was instead sent to an asylum (Young, 1990). A central element of Israelism at this stage was the demonstration of the lineage from David and Solomon through Irial Faidh, King of Ireland, and Mary, Queen of Scots to George VI (Smith 1939).

The theory intrigued Scottish writer and orator John Wilson, who published *Our Israelitish Origins* in 1840, the first complete tract on Israelism (Melton 1999).<sup>1</sup> The theory gained limited support in Bible study groups through the 19th century. Notably, Israelists living in England sought to demonstrate the Empire's preeminent role as the leading tribe, though all acknowledged the vital role America would play as well. Anglo-Israelism first found a larger audience after Howard B. Rand's bible study in Haverhill, Massachusetts became the Anglo-Saxon Federation of America in the 1930s. The study group led to a publication and a sizable meeting of believers (Hand 1986).<sup>2</sup>

While Israelism was developing, other groups and individuals in the United States were encouraging anti-Semitism. The most famous American racist group, the Ku Klux Klan, had risen through the 1920s to a crest of three to six million members. The original reconstruction Klan had been a regional movement

interested exclusively in Southern post-Civil War concerns.<sup>3</sup>

“Colonel” William J. Simmons founded the modern Klan on Thanksgiving evening in 1915. The modern Klan reached out nationwide, due in large part to its adaptability. *The New Republic* at the time reported that in the American South the Klan attacked blacks, in California the enemy were Japanese, on the Atlantic Seaboard the Klan harassed the Jewish population, and in the northern mid-west it was anti-Catholic. The original reconstruction Klan had been anti African-American, but not anti-Semitic in any real sense. However, the increase in immigration, the migration of the Klan, and strengthening of the Klan’s “Christian” plank led to an escalation of Jewish hatred in the Klan.

At the same time, industrialist Henry Ford supported publication of a series of anti-Semitic articles in the *Dearborn Independent* (Ridgeway 1990). From these articles, the book *The International Jew* was published and translated into more than a dozen languages (it is found easily now on the Internet). It suggested that an international conspiracy for control of the economy and government was taking place, that Jews controlled the Federal Reserve Board, the liquor industry, the cinema and theatre, and that Jews had created communism (Ridgeway 1990). The editor, Gerald L.K. Smith, would become active in the formation of the Identity movement.

In 1933, William Pelley, a Klansman, founded the Silver Shirts to evangelize the “work of Christ militant.” The Silver Shirts were modeled loosely after Hitler’s Brown Shirts and advocated the myth of the demonic Jew. Pelley was joined by Gerald L. K. Smith, who founded the Christian Nationalist Crusade and began publishing *The Cross and the Flag* (Jeansonne 1988). Though it operated at a loss, this monthly received good circulation in right-wing circles.

The Klan had been reactive in its hate. It chose its objects of derision based primarily on proximity. As the members felt threatened by modernity and its accompanying challenges, it sought relief in attacking those others closest to it. Ford had in his own way sought what could be called an intellectual explanation for societal ills. Pelley was primarily attempting to emulate Hitler in almost cult-like worship.

Wesley Swift, a Methodist preacher, is thought to have adopted Israelism while attending Kingdom Bible College in Los Angeles (Barkun 1994). Moving from evangelical fundamentalism and picking up on the racist element intrinsic in Israelism, he discovered a theology that dovetailed with his personal racial prejudice and hate. He became involved with the Ku Klux Klan in the 1940s. Swift met Gerald L. K. Smith in Los Angeles at about the same time, beginning an association that lasted some two decades (Barkun 1994). Smith had previous associations with Pelley, Huey Long, Father Charles Coughlin, and Henry Ford. And, he had written to Hitler himself (Barkun 1994; Ridgeway 1990). Swift founded his own church just after World War II, later named “Church of Jesus Christ, Christian,” (to differentiate it from Jesus Christ, Jew). Swift’s church in-

corporated Wilson's Israelism, Swift's own Christian background, the Klan's hate, and Smith's anti-Semitism.

William Potter Gale, a military man serving on General Douglas MacArthur's staff during World War II, spent time at Yale in 1946, where he is said to have met a Russian history professor who claimed that the Russian Kazars, not the Jews, were the true Israelites. Gale retired from the military in 1950, moving into right-wing politics in California shortly thereafter. Ordained by Wesley Swift in 1956, Gale began preaching the Identity message. Richard Butler, one of Pelley's Silver Shirts and a member of the Ku Klux Klan, was impressed with the message. Gale introduced Butler to Swift, who later made Butler president of the Christian Defense League (Barkun, 1994).

Together, Gale, Butler, and Swift became the architects of the theology of Identity. They and their followers also continued in Klan-related and paramilitary activity. Gale founded the California Rangers in 1960, and maintained his relationship with other hate groups. He published the *Identity* quarterly and a pamphlet which outlined his conception of Identity belief. He also founded the Posse Comitatus, a group that recognized no higher authority than the county Sheriff, and later challenged the Federal government on behalf of farmers who had been foreclosed upon in the 1980s.

Richard Butler started a church in what, at least at times, might be thought of as the headquarters of the movement, Hayden Lake, Idaho (Gruidl 2000).<sup>4</sup> Thom Robb, who is currently the National Director of the Knights of Ku Klux Klan, preaches Identity doctrine in Harrison, Arkansas (Pendergraft 2000). Bob Miles ran the Dualist Mountain Church in Cohoctah, Michigan until his death a few years ago (Hand 1986).

While Identity believers would like to return America to a state of racial purity, they recognize several realities. First, no Congress is going to legislate everyone except Aryans out of America. The government will not side with the Identity conception, they believe, because it is subject to control by Jews. This means that change favorable to the movement is not likely to occur peacefully, but instead demands a use of force.

They also acknowledge that armed overthrow of the United States government is not possible outright, of course, and even advocating this can result in preemptive action from the government. Identity followers have learned this lesson firsthand. In the late 1970s and through the mid-1980s, a group called The Order or The Silent Brotherhood had specific plans to overthrow the government. Although they did do some damage, and may have been able to do more, most or all members were arrested and the leader, Bob Matthews, was killed (Gerhardt 1989).<sup>5</sup> A residual effect of this action has been a newfound vigilance on the part of government and police against radical separatist groups. The standoff at the Branch Davidians' compound in Waco, Texas in the spring of 1993 may have followed from this sense of vigilance. And, the Okla-

homa City bombing in 1995 sprang in many ways from Waco.

An alternative to violence or reliance on a change in government is the creation of a White Aryan Bastion. Various groups locate the land differently, but most often it is set in the Pacific Northwest, where the land is imagined to be Edenic: pure, rough, and peaceful, and more importantly, where few minorities may be found. From Idaho to eastern Washington and Oregon and back to Montana and even the Dakotas, the Aryans would be in a mythic safe-haven, a place of retreat and happiness. Many believers already live in these areas; though many more do not.

This retrenchment has also resulted in a softening of the group's external rhetoric. The Soviet Union, long vilified as actively evil in mainstream discourse, has ceased to exist as an overwhelming threat. However, many Identity writers believe that communism (as a force of international Judaism) is merely in hiding, possibly within the United Nations and the New World Order (NWO), which have for them become the manifestations of Satan's evil. The U.S. government's collusion with the United Nations and participation in organizations such as the World Trade Organization provide evidence that America is at risk of being overtaken by some unknown forces of evil at any moment.

## Identity, Ideology and Theology

When the founders of Identity discovered British Israelism, they determined that a special revelation of God's truth had been made. Thus the doctrines were not developed to provide intellectual backing for a rhetoric of hate. Nor are the theological elements of Identity faith developed in a conscious or manipulative manner. Identity ministers are predisposed to a set of ideological beliefs, and are likely to have socialized prejudices which have been more felt than understood. The faith functions as a mythic construct to offer explanation for the way that the world appears to be (to those who become adherents).

It might seem odd that a Christian community would build itself so strongly on hate, but they surely have. In this section we will focus on the rhetorical theology of Identity to highlight the mythic rhetoric of the movement.

The first question to address is, "Why Christianity?" Wouldn't it be more logical, given a focus on hate, rather than religion, to abandon the dead weight of Christianity and instead develop a separate free standing political movement that could work to further the groups' societal goals? Identity links itself to Christianity for two basic reasons: the societal foothold of American Christianity and the richness of Christianity's hermeneutical resources.

Identity as a community must function within a larger social context, and America has essentially a Christian national ideological formation. This is not to suggest that non-Christians and non-Christian beliefs have not contributed to formation and maintenance of America, but Christianity has historically

been predominate as a theology, and a principle. Inclusive of the Judeo-Christian heritage as a whole, it seems clear that no other religion or religious tradition has the same level of influence or acceptance.

This tradition helps Identity in a number of ways. By using a well-established religion, the organizational foundations - churches, ministers, community acceptance -- are automatically in place. Americans are predisposed toward acceptance of that which is Christian, or at the very least they view it as normal. While many of Identity's ideas are shared by, for instance, American Nazism, Nazism is repellent to the established ideas of Americanism by virtue of organization and association, limiting the potential for its success. Identity, however, links itself with the philosophical notion of Americanism - its very heritage. This link between Christianity and Americanism is also understood by the Ku Klux Klan, and many Klan members are beginning to move toward Identity. It is far easier for a fundamentalist Christian to slide into racist Christianity than it would be for that same Christian to join a Nazi movement.

More important, we think, is the hermeneutical structure of Christianity. That is, Christianity as a theology is hermeneutically predisposed to a variety of interpretations. This is probably true of all religions which are based on a mythic sacred, or historic, text, but especially so of Christianity. Christianity is a rather ambiguous religion based on a rather ambiguous text. Because the Bible (both Jewish and Christian) is often confusing, adherents typically rely on an authority to interpret it. To the degree we accept the authority, we accept the interpretation the authority provides. Thus, Roman Catholics accept the doctrine of a succession of Popes. Jews rely on individual rabbis or teachers. So too do Identity followers accept the interpretations of their ministers.

In fact, the very existence of different denominations within Christianity is attributable, at least in part, to different interpretations of the Bible. Even where social situations have been the catalyst for formation of new denominations, the dissenters have almost always incorporated a variation of their interpretation to differentiate themselves. Most important is that the Bible itself has allowed for those interpretations. Thus charismatic members of the Assembly of God church may claim a "right" interpretation at the same time High Church Episcopal and liberal Lutherans do.

Similarly, Identity basis its beliefs on its interpretation of the Bible. The Bible is the sacred text that leads the searcher to discover the sacred truth of Identity. Indeed, Identity ministers constantly exhort the followers, or would be followers, to read the historic truth in the text. Using a variety of Identity discourse from disparate sources, we next turn to how Identity employs mythic images of space and time to justify its ideological position. We will focus primarily on how Identity discourse treats the events of the creation myth, which is logically prior to all other interpretations. Without it, Identity's self-justificatory rhetoric falls apart, but with it, a foundation is created that can be built

upon in almost infinite ways. We will be dealing mostly with foundational Identity writing from the 1950s through the 1970s, but we will try to indicate some sense of growth in the doctrine. In addition, there is a temptation to paint with a rather broad brush when outlining these beliefs, but it must be noted that there are significant camps within Identity. We will address what is often termed Seedline Identity.

## The Creation Story and The Chosen

The Bible begins with the beginning; the story of the creation of the heavens and the earth, in very familiar language. This sweeping story is framed within a myth, and all proceeds from this account. There is, however, little detail provided, and readers are left to fill in the holes in the story, especially in the scientific age. The standard scientific religious response is to indicate allegiance to the scientific paradigm and to translate the Genesis narrative as poetry, to be read mythically rather than literally. That is, to the extent the theory of evolution is accurate, it does not contradict but rather enhances the creation story. Biblical literalists claim allegiance to Genesis, but still must fill in holes in the textual account. In like manner, Identify attempts to resolve interpretive problems within the text. Identity minister Bertrand L. Comparet gives his solution to the conflict when he writes:

Many people have become agnostics because of the supposed conflict between the Bible and science. In truth, there is no conflict at all between a correct translation of the Bible and really proven science . . . One of those supposed conflicts is between the fact that science knows that human beings have lived on the earth for longer than the few thousand years covered by the Bible, and the common belief that the Bible says that Adam was the first man. But the truth is that the Bible nowhere says that Adam was the first man; yes I know that most of the preachers say that, but the Bible doesn't. It merely says that Adam was the first WHITE man (Comparet n.d.-a).

Comparet deals with a major lacunae within the Genesis creation story: the double telling of the narrative. Genesis 1 tells the story of the creation of humankind, but then the story is told differently in Genesis 2. In Genesis 1, people are created on the sixth day, and little detail is provided. Gen 1:26-27 says:

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the

sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

But in Gen 2:6-8, reads:

But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground. And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed.

This creation of man comes seemingly after the seven days of creation. In the five verses preceding the above, it is written:

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and had made. These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God had made the earth and the heavens. And every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew: for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, there was not a man to till the ground (Gen 2:1-5).

This is a significant interpretive problem, but one with which standard theology has dealt by identifying Genesis 1 with the Priestly account and Genesis 2 with the Judean source. Monogenerative belief, the predominate interpretation, suggests a single event recounted two times, via different versions of the same story, while duogenerative belief suggests two creations, each recounted once in a single, linear account.

Identity theology, however, sees descriptions of two separate events: the creation of two different races. Use of this interpretive device answers a few difficult questions: Where do blacks, Asians, Hispanics, and others come from? If all humans come from Adam, then all share a common parentage. But, by



separating the creation stories, this theology has a ground for separating whites from other races. Indeed, who were the prehistoric people of whose existence we have scientific evidence? If the first account tells the story of the creation of a pre-Adamic race, then it is these people whom science has identified as having existed for thousands, perhaps millions, of years. The pre-Adamic race inhabited caves, left artifacts and remains, and drew images on cave walls. Comparet writes, "Therefore, we do find buried ruins of cities older than Adam, and skeletons which can be dated by the carbon 14 process as many thousands of years older. But the Bible itself tells us of this" (Comparet n.d.-a).

Identity minister Clyde Edminster, editor of the semi-monthly newsletter *Christ is the Answer*, answers a question from a reader about where blacks come from. He writes:

The Negro was created by God in Genesis 1:26-28, male and female and commanded to be fruitful and multiply of which he has been most prolific ever since. The Negro is one of the many species of the colored races (Red, Yellow, Brown, Black, etc.) created in Genesis 1:26-28 when God created the human family as a package deal. Each race was created with its own unique characteristics that it still remains today. Adam's race, the white man was the only exception, he was formed by Yahweh-God as a single man, on a higher plane at a much later date than the colored races. Therefore, the history of the white race only goes back six thousand years while colored races go back much further (Edminster 1973).<sup>6</sup>

The people of that first creation, however, are not God's people. They are God's creation at some levels, of course, but upon seeing how these pre-Adamic or "mud people," as many Identity followers call them, lived, God realized that he needed a special group for his fellowship. Thus God decided to create a special people who would be his chosen, his race, his followers. The rest are less human, even sub-human or "beasts," and have served only to cause trouble (or perhaps as a means of punishment to wayward Aryans).<sup>7</sup>

Next, where do white people come from? The Creation story thus explained makes Identity believers a special people. There is no doubt which race descended from Adam. Comparet explains, "The Hebrew word, *aw-dawm*" (rendered Adam in English) is from a root word meaning 'to show blood in the face' or 'of a ruddy complexion' — a word obviously not applicable to the dark races. . ." (Comparet n.d.-a; Savage n.d.; Statement n.d.). The translation is correct, but is commonly identified with the red soil from which Adam was supposedly formed. However, the mythic Identity connection forms for the followers a sense

of special, sacred community.

Along with a special people, God created a special place for them to live. Eden represents the quintessential sacred space. It is a place where all things are right, where there is no sin, where there is perfect harmony with the land, and where we are safe from danger. According to Identity, Eden was a real place with a geographical locale, not simply a metaphor for a pre-sin or innocent world. It was a special, carved-out place, and not coincidentally the place of the birth of the Aryan race.

William Potter Gale, a leading Identity minister until his death in 1988, identifies the location of Eden. He begins by calling up the Biblical text:

And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads. The name of the first is Pison: that is it which compasseth the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; And the gold of that land is good: there is bdellium and the onyx stone. And the name of the second river is Gihon: the same is it that compasseth the whole land of Ethiopia. And the name of the third river is Hiddekel: that is it which goeth toward the east of Assyria. And the fourth river is Euphrates (Gen 2:8-14).

Gale dismisses the common notion of the Eden within the Tigris - Euphrates basin as unworkable because those rivers merge into one another, and the text says the river divides into four. "We are compelled to look elsewhere . . . On the Pamir Plateau in central Asia, between the Tien Shan mountains on the north and the Hindu Cush on the south, we find such a source" (Gale n.d.). Gale traces the formation of the Aryan people and language to this exact location.

Comparet writes, "The Garden of Eden was not a plantation of ordinary trees and shrubs. God did nothing so foolish as to make a special creation, just to have a man to wield shovel and pruning shears, when He already had millions of pre-Adamite peoples available for that sort of work" (Comparet n.d.-a). Eden gave the Adamic people a protected sanctuary, removed and set apart from the sub-human people of the first creation. Adam and Eve lived in perfect safety as God's people — until the serpent entered.

Identity treats the entry of the serpent, the villain, into Eden in a number of ways. The Seedline theory seems to suggest that Satan came in the guise of

one of the mud people of the first creation, and not a serpent as such. Comparet explains, "The word mistranslated 'serpent' is the Hebrew word 'naw-khahs' which literally means 'enchanter' or 'magician' . . ." (Comparet n.d.-a).<sup>8</sup> By entering into Eden, Satan defiled the Garden. The sacred space lost its purity with his entrance, and from there the doors were open to pollution. Women are subservient and corruptible, according to Identity, so Satan went to Eve and tempted her. The story is in place in Genesis, but the act between Eve and Satan is retranslated. The Bible records the story as follows:

Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the Garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil (Gen 3:1-5).

This above passage makes is understood to indicate that the "enchanter" was smarter than the other beasts (people) of the field. In the text, Eve is tempted to eat of the tree of knowledge of Good and Evil, and she does eat the fruit. But for Seedline Identity, the story is not about eating fruit nor about knowledge as self-awareness, but about sex and the Family Tree. This retranslation is not unique to Identity, but they do create a unique twist. Comparet writes, "It is certain that the one who seduced Eve was no mere scaly snake wriggling along the ground. Yes, I said 'seduced' Eve, for that is what she admitted, in the original Hebrew" (Comparet n.d.-a). Satan defiled Eve by teaching her about sex, impregnated Eve with Satan's child, then left Eve and the garden.

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it as pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. And the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons (Gen 3:1-7).

Eve goes to Adam, and gives to him the knowledge of sex. Adam impregnates her again (presumably after the birth of Cain, although there is some corrup-

tion here); thus they have two children, Cain and Abel. The oldest, Cain, is the son of the Devil, while Abel is the true son of Adam.

Not all Identity people believe that the story concerns sex. Clyde Edminster has shifted his views a bit over the years.<sup>9</sup> And, retired Army Lt. Colonel Gordon (Jack) Mohr, a well-known Identify leader, believes this Seedline theology is in error. "The alienation between God and His formed creatures Adam and Eve," he writes, "came through disobedience, not through a sexual union with a super-angel" (Mohr 1999).<sup>10</sup>

Still, the Seedline belief helps explain the familiar but difficult to understand story of Cain and Abel's offerings. Cain's offering is unacceptable to God. It is not unacceptable because of the offering itself, or even Cain's attitude, but because he had eaten of the fruit of the land. In other words, he had mixed with the mud people. After killing Abel, he was banished. The text indicates that he went off from his parents and found a wife, but that he feared death. From where did this wife come, if only Adam and Eve were alive, and from whom does Cain fear death? Charles Weisman in "Was Adam the First Man? An Analysis of an Argument Against Pre-Adamic Men & Races," argues, "The statements clearly indicate other people already existing at the time of Adam, Eve and Cain. Yet those who always apply a literal interpretation of the Bible say that Adam and Eve were the first humans on earth" (Weisman 1997). Identity theology argues that pre-Adamic people lived all around Eden, so it is from among them that he finds a wife, and it is from them that he fears death.<sup>11</sup> Cain goes to live among these people after his banishment, and because he is half-white and half-Satan, he has superior intelligence and comes to be revered. He becomes the ruler of the mud people, and from him all variety of civilizations are developed. Other traditions support the idea that he becomes a ruler. Even the text says:

And Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden. And Cain knew his wife; and she conceived, and bare Enoch: and he builded a city, and called the name of the city, after the name of his son, Enoch. And unto Enoch was born Irad: and Irad begat Mehujael: and Mehujael begat Methusael: and Methusael begat Lamech. And Lamech took unto him two wives: the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah. And Adah bare Jabal: he was the father of such as dwell in tents, and of such as have cattle. And his brother's name was Jubal: he was the father of all such as handle the harp and organ. And Zillah, she also bare Tubalcain, an instructor of every artificer in brass and iron: and the sister of Tubalcain was Naamah (Gen 4:16-22).

Adam and Eve then conceived another child and named him Seth. It is through Seth, Identity argues, that the true lineage of God's people, the white race, the chosen people emerges. The Bible already supports the idea that David and subsequently Jesus were from Seth. Through Cain comes the lineage of the Jews, the children of Satan, the rulers and manipulators of the Mud people. It should be clear here, then, how Identity can claim that Jesus is not a Jew. The Jews are seen as pretenders. There are various devices used to explain how the Jews came to be thought of as God's chosen. For instance, Comparet argues that after the Babylonian exile, the people known today as the Jews took over the identity of the Hebrews. He makes much of the switch to the Talmud and the Synagogue at this point in time (Comparet n.d.-b). Non-Seedline writers often suggest that the Jews were really a nomadic tribe from southern Russia - Khazars - who blended with wanderers during the diaspora. Regardless, according to Gale, the Jews are not descendants of Abraham and David - but Jesus was.

Of, course, most Christian churches do not teach this message. Those churches, Identity believes, are wrong. In "Ten Truths Your Pastor Should be Telling," Church of Israel minister Dan Gayman outlines what a good pastor should be telling his flock. Here are two of those 'truths':

(1) Has your Pastor told you that white Nordic peoples are the Israel of the Old Testament and that the promises and covenants belong to them and to no other race?

(2) Has your Pastor told you that the people commonly called Jews by most Christians, are in reality, the very synagogue of Satan and are the progeny of Cain from Genesis to this very present hour? (Gayman 1973)<sup>12</sup>

As in mainline Christian theology, sin is viewed as a kind of pollution. For Identity, this pollution occurs first between races and their Gods. Race-mixing, pollution of racial purity, is, perhaps, the major sin. Pollution of land, of sacred space, is also a sin. This notion builds upon textual material and established myth to create an explanation for the danger in which the modern Adamic people constantly find themselves. Eden was, according to Identity, an actual space, but it was also a mythic construction of safety. Without Eden, that protective and sacred place is gone. Thus the race must construct a portable sacred space which depends upon remaining pure and Edenic, true to their generations or race. The consequences for race mixing are grave: Nicole Brown Simpson, they might say, received her just reward for marrying a black man, no matter who her murderer was.

In a pamphlet entitled "God Commands Racial Segregation," Bertrand Comparet argues that God "repeatedly warns us against any mixing races - and

especially against intermarriage and mongrelization.” He argues that “Noah was saved because he was pure-blood, while those around him were mongrelized,” and then later, “Mongrelization is the sin for which Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed” (Comparet n.d.-c).<sup>13</sup>

Therein lies an important difference between Identity and more mainstream Christianity. Christianity generally suggests that humans sin because Adam sinned and his original sin is with everyone.<sup>14</sup> In Identity belief, our sin is based on Adam’s sin, but that sin was in allowing the Garden to become polluted, by sinning against the Family Tree. When this is coupled with the idea that the Jews are the actual descendants of Satan, a strong sense of dualism is created. Dualism has always flirted around the edges of Christianity, for on the one side is God, the all-powerful, the Creator, and on the other is the devil, Satan, the fallen angel. Following God is the path to Salvation, while the devil, the evil tempter, seeks people to turn away from God in sin. Though of this notion develops textually from the Bible, some is appropriated from Zoroastrianism. Identity uses the dualistic element of Christianity to create a war, a battle between God and Satan, or God’s chosen people and the children of Satan, the Aryan Identity believers and the Jews. Gale writes,

In John 8, Jesus says to these people, ‘I am from above and ye are from beneath; I am from My Father and ye are of your father, and your father is the devil; he was a liar and a murderer from the beginning and your father’s works will ye do.’ In Matthew 23:23, Jesus says, ‘Ye serpents, ye generation (race) of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell’ (Gale n.d.).

Jesus is not, Gale writes, speaking metaphorically, but is indeed identifying the Jews as Satan’s progeny.

“Children of God vs. Children of Satan”, published by an unnamed writer in *Identity* explains, “...it seems strange that many Christians are unaware that Satan has physical children just as God has physical children. In some cases these people have been confused by their Clergy but in all cases it is simply that these people do not do as Jesus Christ said to do — search the Scripture and they DENY JESUS CHRIST!” (1973). The article goes on:

The children of Satan have tried for ages to masquerade as God’s chosen people and to steal the inheritance of the race of Adam of which they are not a part. It is a shame that the true Israel of the Bible, the white Christian people now known NOT as Israel but by the Name of the one and only God JESUS CHRIST — as CHRIST’S SONS

(Christians) DO NOT KNOW THEIR IDENTITY! Satan's children have for ages tried to crush God's people by force and subterfuge, keeping them blind to their true Identity. They have corrupted every government that has permitted them to partake of its blessings . . . (1973).

Because of this dualistic view, anti-Semitism ceases to be pathology and becomes instead a noble duty. The Jews are not just different, they are the blood of the Devil, knowingly doing the work of Satan. They are the agents of the anti-Christ. "Children of God vs. Children of Satan" continues:

God gave us many warnings about these PHYSICAL children of Satan. In Deuteronomy 7:2 - 4, He said, ". . . smite them make no covenants with them; nor show mercy unto them; neither shall thou make marriages with them; they daughter thou shalt not give unto his son nor his daughter shalt thou taken unto thy son . . . for they will turn away they son from following Me that they may serve other gods" (1973).

There are some real questions about which group is being referred to in these verses. The verse immediately preceding the lifted text indicates they being referred to are the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites (Deut 7:1-2a). Nevertheless, Seedline Identity believes it has answered the question of who the Jews are: they are literally satanic and must be destroyed. Thus, hatred of the Jews is far more significant and far deeper than hatred of blacks, because blacks are merely inferior to whites, rather than evil *per se*. The mud people are dimwitted, Identity would say, and they can easily be manipulated by the Jews to do their evil bidding, and they often are.

Getting rid of Jews, then, will purify the land and realize the need for a new Eden. The murder of Alan Berg, the Denver talk-show host, by The Order, was viewed as an act of cleansing. William Gale advocated the murder of Los Angeles Rabbis as a method for cleansing that area. The United States government, controlled by Jews, becomes an instrument of evil. So resistance to the "Zionist Occupied Government" or "Z.O.G." is a duty as well. It is also why Hitler is often revered, although not always.<sup>15</sup>

## The Importance of Being the Chosen Race

We have alluded to the notion of the chosen race. This idea is important to Christianity and is embraced by members of a variety of religious traditions,

Christian and otherwise. Identity expands on the notion of a chosen people to define that people as the Aryan race. This is not unusual - countless examples exist over the course of history in which various peoples attempt to claim the chosen status. Typically, however, the status is claimed in supplement to, rather than in place of, the ancient Hebrews. Christians are, by adoption, an addition to the Chosen people, and much is made in the New Testament about the process of that adoption.<sup>16</sup>

British-Israelism claims a direct connection with the Chosen with its claim that the lost tribe of Israel has begat the northern Europeans; the British, Dutch, Scandinavian people, and perhaps the Germans. Americans are included by lineage from these nations. Anglo-Israelists, however, had no interest in overthrowing the Jews' claim to chosen status. The claim to chosen status became connected to nationalism as the notion of nationalism began to develop, and from the viewpoint of the nation-builders, the adjunct claim to the Jews' makes sense.

The chosen status has had historical implication as nations have believed themselves protected on the one hand, and justified in aggression on the other. It has been taken on throughout American history, from the Puritans' initial connection to the land and their ordained mission for survival, to the projection of the South as the promised land in the early 19th century, to the shared perception of Americans as crusaders for God against the Communist Evil.

The Identity movement suggests that its followers are not merely an adjunct to the Jews as Chosen people, but as stated above, that they alone are the chosen race. The Jews are the antithesis of the Chosen people; chosen not by God, but by Satan, and arrogant in their claim as God's people. The Aryans, Identity argues, are chosen to live out God's will here on earth. As mentioned above, America then becomes the true "Israel," the Promised Land. In "Ten Truths Your Pastor Should Be Telling," Dan Gayman asks, "Has your Pastor told you that America is the 'Zion' of Bible Prophecy and the focal point of geopolitics at the end of the age? Has your Pastor told you that America will be the very seat of Christ's Great Kingdom come to earth?" (Gayman 1973)

W.B. Record writes, "Why emphasize the correct identification of Israel? That's a good question. And it deserves a good answer. Here it is. Israel is the HUB, around which the wheel of TIME has turned, and the pivotal spokes of history have ever pointed toward that central HUB, from the call of Abraham to the present moment" (Record 1969). Record goes on, "The founding and development of these United States of America is one of the great pivotal points of prophecy and of history. It's time we realized that fact, for its later than we think" (Record 1969).

America was the Aryan bastion, the place of a new Eden, but just as Adam was caught off-guard and allowed Satan into the garden, so the white race has allowed America to be polluted by blacks and Jews. There is still a possibility



for purification and redemption because of the chosen status. But how specifically may that salvation be achieved?

Salvation for Identity is not simply based on accepting Christ, but much more. Redemption demands purity of oneself and of one's race. Christians often seek to follow their faith in deeds and actions, so Identity builds on the notion of crossing the desert, to move to the Promised Land, rather than to sit complacently. They recognize that the journey may be a painful one, that the people will encounter many trials on the way to the Promised Land, but the journey is essential. Without the dramatic hardship of the journey, the race will perish and God's people will have failed.

## Conclusion

The Identity movement is a relatively well-developed religious community. It has an established doctrine, an established clergy, publications, and a committed membership. Although it is centered primarily in the United States, its mode of reasoning and argumentation can be found around the globe anywhere were people attempt to create a mythic vision of the world. A major aspect of creating a religious community is the formation of such a unified mythic vision. The Christian Identity group accomplishes this difficult task in a unique manner. By appropriating Christian texts and recasting the creation and the origins of the races, the community is able to justify a set of extreme beliefs and actions. The myths of creation and Eden are recast in a manner which is specifically Christian but at the same time unique to Identity.

In the past few years there have been some significant splits in the movement. The use of the term Identity is being called into question (Gayman 1999; Peters 1999), or the understanding of what it means to be Identity is being reshaped. Raymond Bray, on a website entitled "Christian Identity, True and False," explains:

We, therefore, beg those who would pass judgement on any "Christian Identity" or "Identity Christian" group, that they would first examine what the group is teaching and whether it agrees with the Holy Scriptures. True Christian Identity people are not racist, hate-mongering Neo-Nazis; they subscribe to a purer Christian doctrine than can be found in any denominational church in existence today, a system of doctrine that has love for God and love for one's fellow human beings as its basis. And they practice the things they subscribe to. The Lord's Work, Inc. is among this purer Christian grouping (Bray 1999).

He goes on, "As a closing thought, some of the true Christian Identity congregations now call themselves New Covenant churches. So far, we know of no Neo-Nazi groups using that name" (Bray 1999).<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, potential for harm still stems from this theology. The American Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) *Project Megiddo*, reports that, "Almost uniformly, the belief among right-wing religious extremists is that the federal government is an arm of Satan. Therefore, the millennium will bring about a battle between Christian martyrs and the government. At the core of this volatile mix is the belief of apocalyptic religions and cults that the battle against Satan, as prophesied in the Book of Revelation, will begin in 2000" (FBI 1999). It is unclear whether or not Christian Identity and its kindred beliefs will attempt any significant violence. As the FBI report suggests, "It is important to note that only a small percentage of Christian Identity adherents believe that the new millennium will bring about a race war." But, it goes on to say, "However, those that do have a high propensity for violence" (FBI 1999).

For radical Identity believers, violence, then, is situated within a universe of discourse that sees and defines life as a battle or struggle between forces of evil and good. Most Identity followers would not sanction the killing of abortion doctors or interracial couples, nor would they favor the violent ethnic cleansing of America. Those who do, however, can find spiritual justification and support within its krygma.

This movement is significant for a couple of reasons. First the rhetorical arguments Identity makes, though clearly extreme, are not that far off from other more respectable right wing religious groups. Second, study of these movements helps us to understand the power of rhetoric to build community - even, and maybe especially, when the resulting community is at odds with prevailing norms. Finally, even such extreme examples can help us understand the power of mythic rhetoric in sacred text communities.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See also M. M. Eshelman's *Two Sticks or the Lost Tribes of Israel Discovered* (1887) and W. H. Poole's *Anglo-Israel or the Saxon Race proved to be the Lost Tribes of the Bible*, published in 1889

<sup>2</sup> Among those who attended was Worth Smith, who published *The House of Glory* in 1939. In some instances, Israelism is distinctly non-racist, as Worth Smith writes, ". . . each person shall know that, regardless of color, blood, talents, or other characteristics that one may possess which are different from those of some other people, humanity is One and not many. . ." (Smith 1939). Its implicit racism or attitude of racial superiority, however, would have a strong influence on later development.

<sup>3</sup> Indeed, by the end of the 1860s there seemed to be little reason for the Klan to

continue, while laws were being passed that made it difficult for it to exist (e.g., the anti-disguise law). In 1869, its leader General Nathan Bedford Forest issued an official proclamation declaring the end of the Ku Klux Klan forever. Although it was officially declared dead, local Klans still existed. In many areas, they simply changed their names. In many ways the Klan had actually won its war. According to Mecklin, "the Klan played an important role in the overthrow of carpet-bag rule." Perhaps more importantly, the symbol of the Klan, the romantic image of the hooded savior, was firmly etched on the imagination of the Southerner. Over the next 50 years, the Klan would be flirted with on many occasions, and its values would be more or less accepted by a large portion of the Southern population.

4 The movement has seen geographical growth, accompanied by some increase in membership. Many Identity members live in, or move to, states where the population is relatively homogeneous, even then, they are inclined to separate themselves from others. Some retreat to estates or ranches, others merely avoid minorities in their own communities.

5 Although Bob Mathews shared some beliefs with Identity, he was a self-proclaimed Odinist. Some, for instance author Richard Hoskins, see that as a reason for his downfall (Hoskins 1990).

6 Edminster has softened his views over the years, though still an Identity believer, he is less likely to preach the idea of a chosen race. Michael McFarland and Joy Carney, "Bring on the Apocalypse: *Christ is the Answer* and the End Times Message," unpublished paper presented at the National Communication Association's Annual Convention, November, 2000, Seattle, Washington, USA.

7 Some believe that even the Jews can be used to punish Aryans. Rick Savage writes, "The impostors (self-styled 'Jews') who have attempted to steal the birthright of true Israel (to rule & reign as kings and priests with God - Ex 19:3-6) are, in reality, simply God's punishing rod on His rebellious people (Israel) to return them back to Him and His duty for them. The 'Jews' will continue to be a curse to His true Israel people until they repent (turn back and obey Him). Until God's true Israel people repent, they will continue to suffer the curses for disobedience as outlined in Deuteronomy 28, which includes the worst of the heathen ruling over and devouring them, (Deut. 28:33,43-52)" (Savage n.d.).

8 However, *Strong's Concordance* translates it as "nachash (naw-khawsh'); from a snake (from its hiss)"

9 In 1994, he writes, "We have many people in the Identify movement that also believe Eve was physically seduced by Satan that old serpent who ever he was! In fact I used to believe and teach it myself when I first began my ministry. But I don't believe or teach it any more because the Lord opened my eyes and my spiritual understanding of what actually took place in the Garden (Edminster 1994).

10 It would be a mistake to think that non Seedline Identity followers have an enlightened view of Jews or other minorities. They are, however, less mythic in their understanding of the origins. Mohr, for instance, believes that the Jews or today are usurpers, and probably Khazars. Mohr writes, "It may appear that this article was written in defense of the Jews. IT WAS NOT! I detest them as an International force. I know their leaders are the bitterest enemy of our God, His Son, our King, and of our faith. I know what their plans are for the takeover of this world, since they have clearly told us what they are, over and over again and I have eyes to see how they are carrying out these plans" (Mohr 1999). In *Thank God! My Savior Was*

*Not A Jew!*, Mohr writes, "It is stupidity of the lowest degree to argue that there are some 'good Jews' to whom my criticism does not apply, and that they should not be held accountable for the actions of their racial leaders. In reply, I would have to answer that there is a battle going on now between the forces of 'light and darkness,' between 'good and evil,' between 'Christ and 'anti-Christ.'"

11 One can, perhaps, appreciate the force of this argument when one remembers how much of this strain was constructed during the Cold War.

12 Dan Gayman indicates that his church, The Church of Israel, is not an Identity church. They do, however, share many common beliefs (Gayman 1999).

13 The Flood did not destroy all of the Jews and the Mud people because it was a localized event, according to Gale (Gale n.d.).

14 There are, of course, different explanations of sin in different denominations. Original sin, however, is standard interpretation.

15 See for instance, Jack Mohr's "The Hitler Cult!" (Mohr, n.d.-a) Mohr is also against groups such as Aryan Nations and The Order as they are (or were), he claims, not sufficiently Christ centered.

16 See, for instance, Paul's writings in Romans 11:17-24.

17 Still, even on this web site Bray writes the following as a tenets of his group's belief system. "The beast with two horns like a lamb described in the thirteenth chapter of the Revelation represents the Jew-controlled world-controlling group known as the Bilderbergers and the Illuminati. This group of satanic people are using the United Nations as a means of establishing the "New World Order" in which all mankind will be their slaves. Any assistance and support given to this satanic group will result in spending eternity in hell. Even failing to expose this satanic bunch is in effect supporting them" (Bray 1999).

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