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Political Eschatology

A Theology of Antigovernment Extremism

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This article explores apocalyptic theology in four American extremist religions: Christian Identity; Nordic Christianity and Odinism; violent, "freewheeling" fundamentalism; and Creatorism. It is argued that violent eschatology interacts with criminology in the sense that politicized religions produce criminal behavior and, at times, terrorism. A brief history of the relationship between religion and racist violence is presented as well as an analysis of the social factors that produce political eschatology. The article concludes with an examination of religious terrorism and technological weapons. Mass destruction is the greatest threat of religiously motivated terrorism.

Religious violence in the name of a holy cause is nothing new in the history of conflict, and terrorism in the new millennium will be influenced by resurgent fundamentalism and religious doctrines of violent intolerance. This will be especially true when religious dogmas embrace eschatological or "end-of-time" theology. The purpose of this article is to explore criminological aspects of eschatology as it is expressed in domestic, right-wing, racist violence and extremism. Two methodologies are employed: historical-descriptive analysis and theological explication. After defining some basic parameters, the article begins by placing right-wing extremism in the context of American history. This is followed by a description of recent events that have spurred the growth of the radical right. A theological discussion follows the historical segment. It is composed of an analysis of commonalties among right-wing religions, an examination of factors that must be present to form a theology of hate, and a critique of the mythology of hate.

It is legitimate to ask if a theological analysis of terrorism is criminologically valid. After all, criminology deals with the science of human behavior, whereas theology deals with an investigation of a divine realm outside objective experience. On the surface, it would appear that theology and criminology cannot be satisfactorily combined. Yet, beneath the surface lies a conjunction that invites a combination of methods. Religious behavior is a factor that shapes social constructs, and it may be positive or negative, social or antisocial. Theological

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constructs interact with criminology when they are the bases for negative human behavior and when they influence moral, conforming actions. The theological analysis in this article focuses on racist religion as a motivation for violent behavior. In essence, it is an attempt to explain the ideology of hate in religious terms. As such, it presents a valid topic for criminological analysis.

DEFINITIONS

Before beginning the historical and theological analyses of right-wing extremism, it is necessary to define basic terms and parameters. The term *eschatology* derives from the Greek word εσχατος, a concept dealing with the end of all material and purpose in time and space. In the hellenized version of the Hebrew Bible, eschatology is usually interpreted as the "day of Yahweh"; that is, a final judgment and the realization of God's purpose for creation. This Jewish idea influenced early Christian writers, but the meaning of God's final presence fluctuated in early Christian dogma (Kittel, 1964, p. 697). Christians have expected God's final judgment for 2,000 years, yet they have not agreed on the form it will take. Crossan (1999, pp. 257-287) describes four commonly held eschatological frameworks: ascetic, apocalyptic, ethical, and political. Ascetic eschatology refers to the process of self-denial, whereas the apocalyptic version envisions God's destruction of the existing order. Ethical eschatology, according to Crossan, is quite different. It calls for followers to embrace radically moral behavior in recognition of God's imminent reign. Crossan says that political eschatology is frequently ignored today because it combines expectations of religious judgment with political action. People fear political eschatology. Lewy (1974, p. 40) agrees, arguing that linking political beliefs with an end-of-time theology is a prescription for violence. Given the variety of meanings attached to eschatological expectations, it is not surprising to find that American right-wing extremists have developed their own philosophy of the "end of the age" in various apocalyptic theologies. As Lewy implies, some of these theologies are indeed quite dangerous.

As the new millennium conjures prophecies of doom in some circles, it also brings the threat of increased terrorist violence. There are people who would like to violently usher in the new *eschaton*, and religious terrorism has increased over the past decade (Hoffman, 1995). An eschatological philosophy is tailor made for individual terrorists who have rejected both the material world and the norms of social behavior. It provides a cosmic battlefield where forces for good are called to fight some unspeakable evil. The consequences are dramatic; indeed, they are cosmic in proportion. All deterrents to violence have been rendered meaningless by the promise of the new *eschaton*. When violent eschatology is politicized on a cosmic battlefield, Armageddon's warriors need no further justification to bear arms. They fight for a holy cause, and all actions are justified.

The term *right-wing religion*, as used in this article, refers to belief systems that incorporate some form of hatred or racism in their basic doctrines. There are four prominent forms of these theologies in America today: Christian Identity, Nordic Christianity or Odinism, freewheeling fundamentalism, and Creatorism. These theologies are extremist religions based on the demonization of other racial, religious, or national groups. This article neither refers to mainstream conservative American religious movements nor attempts to critique Christian fundamentalism. Fundamentalists and conservative Christians differ from their racialist counterparts in that the conservatives base their value system on universal love, they believe that God's actions in history have yet to take place, and they feel they will be raptured into heaven prior to a general tribulation (Barkun, 1997, pp. 105-119; White, 1986). The militant extremists examined in this article believe they must fight to create conditions conducive for the *eschaton*.

Christian Identity is a theology that grew from a 19th-century concept known as Anglo-Israelism. Its basic tenet is that the ancient tribes of Israel were Caucasians who migrated to Europe shortly after the death of Jesus. Whites are actually the descendants of the chosen tribes of Israel, and Whites are asked to identify with the Israelites of old. Christian Identity is strongly anti-Semitic, claiming that humans originated from "two seed lines." Whites are directly descended from God, whereas Jews originated from an illicit sexual union between the devil and the first White woman. Non-White races evolved from animals and are categorized as subhumans. Identity Christians believe that biblical covenants apply only to the White race and that Jesus of Nazareth was not a Jew but the White Israelite son of God. Christian Identity views are championed by Aryan Nations, a variety of prominent Identity pastors, Posse Comitatus, and the American Institute of Theology.

Nordic Christianity or Odinism is a hybrid form of Christianity and old Norse religion. It exists in two forms. On one hand, Nordic Christianity combines a pantheon of Nordic gods under the triune deity of Christianity. Odin, Thor, and other Nordic gods serve Christ by militantly protecting the White Norse race. Pure Odinism, on the other hand, ignores Christian concepts. It simply involves the resurrection of old Nordic mythology and the acceptance of the Nordic pantheon. After enjoying a rebirth in 19th-century Germany, Odinism migrated to the United States through the neo-Nazi movement. Both forms of Nordic religion call for the militant defense of race, bloodlines, and homeland.

Another form of militant, right-wing Christianity can simply be called freewheeling fundamentalism. This form of religion rejects both the blatant racism of Christian Identity and the hybrid nature of Nordic religions. The freewheelers are fiercely patriotic and use religion to reinforce social beliefs, values, and behavior. They tend to believe that the federal government is not mystically evil but that it is opposed to the reign of God. They also believe that agents of the government are in conspiracy to destroy America's monetary system and national sovereignty. Many of these groups oppose racism, and some claim that they are not anti-Semitic. Freewheeling fundamentalism is the religion of the patriot movement and the gun-show circuit.

The last form of religion discussed in this article is called Creatorism, a religion originating with the World Church of the Creator (WCOTC). Founded by Ben Klassen, the WCOTC is secular, deistic, and racist. Klassen's purpose was to divorce White people from weak, theistic religions, claiming that such religions were ridiculous expressions of utopian ideals. The Creator, Klassen said, placed things in motion and left people on their own. Klassen's slogan was "Our race is our religion." Creating his own mythology in tracts on naturalistic health and in *The White Man's Bible* (Klassen, 1986), he called on White people to fight Jews, non-White races, and Whites who disagreed with racist philosophy. His successor, Matt Hale, who has taken the secular title Pontifex Maximus from Julius Caesar, endorses conflict to protect the White race. The cry of Creatorists is "RAHOWA," an acronym for "racial holy war."

A HISTORY OF RIGHT-WING RELIGIOUS HATE

In 1995, when reports of the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City began to flow from the media, many Americans were surprised to hear of a twisted religion called Christian Identity. Some of them asked about its origins and questioned the belief system of its strange ideology. Was it a new racist religion? Did it have a theological base? Were Christian Identity churches included in mainstream Protestantism? The answer to these and many other questions can be found in the history of ethnocentrically based right-wing religions.

When the first Congregationalists landed at Plymouth in 1620, they brought a feeling of Protestant determinism to the shores of the new world. Hudson (1981, pp. 36-41) states that the Congregationalists hoped to create a new city set on a hill to shine a religious light for the entire world. Albeit unintentionally, the light soon refracted into a multiplicity of scattered divisions. Such continual divisions characterized early American religion.

Marty (1984) states that America has been a land of many religions despite the dominant influence of Protestantism on the popular culture. Native Americans had their own forms of religion, and each group of immigrants came to America with its unique mores, culture, and religious values. Every religious congregation became, in Marty's words, a Pilgrim in its own land, but this did not sit well with the established original Protestant settlers. Beginning in the 19th century, groups of "native" Americans, primarily Protestant, began to form protective associations to dispel the influence of immigrant groups and "foreign" religions (White, 1986). The emergence of the Know Nothings just before the Civil War serves as an appropriate example. An urban, Protestant movement, the Know Nothings formed a secret anti-Catholic society to discourage emigration from Ireland.

The Know Nothings could not compete with the hate-filled religions that emerged after 1865. The most notorious group in the immediate post–Civil War period was the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). The Klan has undergone three distinct phases in its history, starting with an organizational period after the Civil War (Chalmers, 1987). The 1920s brought a conservative attempt to gain mainstream political power, and the Klan entered its current phase after World War II, emphasizing rhetoric, political violence, and fragmentation. The Klan's initial ideology did not lay the foundation for a unified movement, but one factor has remained constant in KKK history: It is a religious organization, and Klansmen base their hatred on the rhetoric of American Protestantism. As a result, the ideology of the Klan and the theology of Christian Identity go hand in hand (Sargent, 1995, pp. 139-143).

Other extremist, right-wing movements also embraced religious rhetoric. The radical grangers of the far West and other agrarian movements of the 19th century laced their political positions with religious phrases. Xenophobic religious zealots began appearing in the 1930s, calling for an uncompromising ethnocentric adoration of the United States and a blind acceptance of religious doctrine. The Depression witnessed the continued blossoming of militant Protestantism, and elements of the Roman Catholic church joined the fray. Marty (1984, pp. 373-389) argues that the clash between modern and traditional theology provided an environment conducive to linking conservative Protestants and Catholics.

At issue, Marty (1984) states, was the clash between the modern world and the traditional one. Traditional values were challenged by modernity, and all forms of American Christianity had to meet the modern world in one way or another. World War I created a momentary illusion of religious unity in America, but the Jazz Age and the Roaring Twenties brought an end to the superficial unification. A dividing line formed, Marty argues, between traditional values and emerging morality. In separate works, Berger (1980, pp. 56-60) and Berlet (1998) arrive at similar conclusions. The traditional dividing lines between Protestants and Catholics began to fade in the Great Depression as Christians began to argue over the fundamental concepts of religion. Both Catholics and Protestants produced champions who defended traditional fundamentals, while each side also produced those who embraced modernization. As the Catholic and Protestant conservatives moved closer together, the extremists in each camp were not far behind.

Father Charles E. Coughlin rose to fame in the 1930s through the medium of radio. His message was one of xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and blind patriotism. Although Catholic, his words resonated with fundamental American Protestants. Dr. Theodore Stoddard, for example, joined the fray with a rash of racially motivated, anticommunist rhetoric. He called for selective Nordic breeding to eliminate both racial impurity and communism. Other Protestants turned their concerns to Judaism, blaming the Jews for not only being "Christ killers" but for ushering in the age of modernity (Marty 1984, pp. 390-400). Right-wing extremism was ripe for a champion.

Such a figure emerged in the person of Wesley Swift (Holden, 1986). A California radio preacher, Swift uncovered a 19th-century British doctrine called Anglo-Israelism. In a nutshell, Anglo-Israelism claimed that White people in the British Isles were descended from the tribes of ancient Israel (Barkun, 1997, pp. 1-14). The house of David was, in fact, the ruling house of Scotland. According to this doctrine, the other White nations of northern Europe were the true Israelites and the actual heirs to God's promises to the Hebrew patriarchs. Barkun (1997, p. 60) says that Swift modified the doctrine of Anglo-Israelism to fit the United States so that American Whites could lay claim to being Israelites. He encouraged Whites to identify with the ancient Israelites, giving rise to the notion of Identity or Christian Identity. Two of the people influenced by Swift's message were William Potter Gale and a young engineer named Richard Butler. Gale went on to create a militant antitax group known as Posse Comitatus, while Butler left a corporate job to found the most influential Christian Identity church in America, Aryan Nations.

Conspiracy theories also emerged in the 20th century. The American extremist right held that Christianity was under attack by a secret group of secular scientists known as The Order of the Illuminati. Berlet (1998) argues that Adam Weishaupt, an 18th-century Bavarian professor of canon law, was frustrated by the lack of intellectual activity in the priesthood. As a result, he formed a secret society called the Illuminati in 1775. The purpose of his secret society was to promote knowledge and rational discourse within the church, and branches of the Illuminati spread throughout Western Europe. Skeptical of any society that criticized religion and the social order, the Bavarian government banned the Illuminati in 1786. The Illuminati, however, were too entrenched to be eliminated by the actions of a single German state. Branches appeared in several European cities, and the organization spread.

Holden (1999) points out that the extremist right resurrected fear of the Illuminati after World War II, claiming that it was a secret group of intellectual elitists who systematically attacked Christianity. Today, many members of the patriot movement and other extremist groups believe that the Illuminati operate against White American Christians. They cite the pyramid on the back on the dollar bill as evidence that the Illuminati operate secretly in the American government.

Many sources of conspiracy exist in extremist minds. Berlet (1998) points to the Freemasons as one such source. Masonry had been at odds with the established church in Europe since the 1700s, and some members of the church charged the Masons with devil worship. Such a charge was too tempting for the radical right, and fear of the Masons began to spread in the mid-20th century. Fear of socialism, communism, and economic control also provided Protestant and Catholic extremists with "evidence" that groups of conspirators were plotting to destroy American rights. Berlet also points to the demonization of Judaism as a prime source for conspiracy theories.

Animosity between Judaism and Christianity originated in early Christian apologetics, and the history of Christianity is darkened with anti-Semitic strains. Yet, the American extremist right gave anti-Semitism a new twist. As Anglo-Israelism gained ground in the religious right, new "proof" of a global conspiracy emerged with the publication of *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*. Originally published as a French satire, Czarist police used *The Protocols* as an attempt to trump up evidence against Russian Jews. American industrialist Henry Ford's agent, a fierce anti-Semite named William Cameron, published *The Protocols* in English and distributed it to Ford workers (Barkun, 1997, p. 34). It is still cited by radical religious leaders as proof of a Jewish conspiracy against Christianity. Such conspiracy theories provided for the ideological underpinnings of right-wing religion following the World War II (White, 1997).

RECENT HISTORY OF ANTIGOVERNMENT EXTREMISM

American right-wing extremism fell out of vogue when left-wing violence grew in the 1960s and 1970s, but it experienced a rebirth around 1981. The rejuvenation came as shifting economic conditions threatened the social status of working-class Whites. Sapp (1985) describes the resurrection in terms of three distinct trends: White supremacy, religious extremism, and survivalism. The racial aspect of the movement solidified with the ideological unification of White supremacy under the banner of the Aryan Nations. Richard Butler, a disciple of Wesley Swift, formed a compound in Hayden Lake, Idaho, and his Aryan fortress provided the ideological soil to unite various Klan, Nazi, and other White supremacy groups. Butler became the most important actor in the American racist camp.

Sapp (1985) believes that religion played an important role in the right-wing resurgence, and, once again, he points to Butler. The Identity pastor Butler founded the Church of Jesus Christ, Christian in his White supremacy compound. As his power spread among the racists, his church became a beacon to unite Identity ministers throughout the country. Robert Miles of Cohoctah, Michigan, joined Butler with his own Mountain Church of Jesus. James Wickstrom preached an Identity message from the Sheriff's Posse Comitatus. Even William Pierce, the agnostic author of *The Turner Diaries*, joined the trend by sending his fictional protagonist Earl Turner through a religious experience when he encountered *The Book*. Christian Identity was the dominant force in the contemporary period of right-wing extremism.

Sapp (1985) cites survivalism as the third aspect of the rebirth of the extremist right. Spawned by fears of an impending race war and the collapse of government, survivalists retreated to heavily fortified compounds to ready themselves for Armageddon. Sapp also notes that extremists practiced a type of "dualism"; that is, participants in one type of group tended to share membership in another kind of group. For example, members of White supremacy groups could be found in survivalist camps or in Identity churches. Survivalism gave the extremist right its most militant potential.

Despite regeneration in the 1980s, right-wing extremism was in trouble by 1989. Smith (1994), in one of the best examinations of domestic terrorism available to the public, explains why. Right-wingers were simply not effective. The two groups that practiced the most violence, The Order and Posse Comitatus, actually turned other extremists away from the movement because they were appalled by actual murder. Like most potential terrorists, the majority of right-wingers were happier when practicing right-wing rhetoric. Ideology was safe, but violence was another matter. From a religious view, the hate-filled theology of Christian Identity had the same impact (White, 1998, pp. 217-224). Identity preachers called on their congregations to despise non-Whites and Jews. The call for hatred confused many potential followers, even though they believed in their own ethnic superiority. As a result, some Christian extremists evolved into freewheelers, and they broke from Identity congregations to form independent fundamentalist groups. By 1991, it seemed that right-wing extremism would become a thing of the past. Unfortunately, three issues reanimated the extremists (Stern, 1996, pp. 58-60).

After James Brady, President Ronald Reagan's press secretary, suffered a crippling brain injury in the assassination attempt on Reagan, Brady and his family became champions of gun control legislation. A bill named in his honor and subsequent federal gun control legislation sent an alarm throughout the extremist right. Guns, from the extremist perspective the one thing that could save the country, were under attack. As racists, millennialists, Identity theologians, and other extremists closed ranks, they found that they were on the fringe of a mainstream political issue. By 1991, they were taking theology to the gun show circuit to seek converts.

Two other sources of rejuvenation came in the form of armed confrontations with the federal government. In 1992, Randy Weaver failed to appear in court on a federal weapons violation charge. During the attempt to serve Weaver with a bench warrant, Weaver's son and a U.S. marshal were killed. Weaver barricaded his family in a mountain cabin in Ruby Ridge, Idaho, and challenged the government to come and get him. The situation was exacerbated when a Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) sniper killed Weaver's wife. Former Green Beret Lieutenant Colonel James "Bo" Gritz came to the scene to negotiate with Weaver, but the attention he drew helped turn Weaver's standoff at Ruby Ridge into a rallying point for the extremist right.

Closely related to the Weaver incident, at least in the minds of the extremist right, was a Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) raid on the Branch Davidian compound at Waco, Texas, in 1993. Armed with probable cause and a search warrant, ATF agents attempted to raid a religious cult compound to seize illegal firearms. They were met with overwhelming firepower and driven back after suffering more than a dozen casualties, including four agents who were killed. Although ATF agents successfully negotiated a cease-fire and managed to retrieve their wounded officers, FBI agents quickly came to the scene and assumed control. Three months later, the FBI assaulted the compound, only to find that the cult leader, Vernon Howell (a.k.a. David Koresh), had soaked the building with gasoline. More than 70 people were killed in the ensuing blaze, including all the children in the compound.

The Branch Davidian compound had little to do with the racist right, but it had all the elements the extremists loved: guns, a compound standing in the face of federal agents, and religion. Shortly after the failed FBI attack, John Trochmann revealed a new creation: the Militia of Montana. It was an organization, he claimed, designed to protect constitutional rights. Within months, militias popped up all over the United States, each with its own commander. The survivalists of the 1980s reemerged in the form of paramilitary groups, and survivalism has become the dominant theme of extremism at the turn of the millennium.

COMMON THEOLOGICAL ELEMENTS OF RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM

As the extremist movement intertwined racism with religion, common elements appeared in the message. One of the most prominent features of the extremist right is its rejection of modernity. It favors biblical literalism over modernism, and it remains centered in Protestantism despite the influence of some Catholic extremists. By the same token, it should not be described as fundamentalism or confused with conservative Christianity. The xenophobic religion of the extremist right does not accept the Christian call for universal love only; it accepts the idea of love for one's own kind. As a result, right-wing extremism is defined by hate. One does not simply love, one loves in conjunction with hate. For example, one loves Christians because one hates everyone who is not a Christian. One loves Whites because one hates everyone who is not White. Religion is defined by exclusivity.

Barkun (1997, pp. 104-108) also notes that racial extremists in the movement have another profound theological difference with American Christian fundamentalists. Both fundamentalists and extremists tend to be premillenialists; that is, they believe that Jesus of Nazareth will return prior to a 1,000-year reign of peace described in Revelation. Most fundamentalists contend that the Second Coming of Christ will unfold according to biblical prophecies, and believers will experience a rapture prior to Christ's return. Extremists, especially in the Christian Identity movement, believe that prophecies have already been fulfilled and that no rapture will take place. As a result, believers will be forced to endure a 7-year tribulation before the Second Coming. Extremists believe that they must be prepared for the tribulation, and survivalism is a common theme in extremist theology. They are called to prepare militantly for Christ's return.

Another factor emerging from the history of the extremist right is the belief in a conspiracy of evil forces. Each group of extremists endorses some concept of conspiracy, and although the source of conspiracy changes, the belief in conspiracy has remained historically constant. In the 1930s, Father Coughlin preached about an antireligious conspiracy of satanic origin, and after World War II, Wesley Swift and others endorsed this view. Reflecting the mainstream culture, preachers pointed to a conspiracy of communism. As conspiracy theories emerged in the second half of the 20th century, right-wing extremists began to develop a list of potential conspirators that included local governments that fluoridated water supplies, U.S. industrial leaders, international economic groups, the U.S. government, and, eventually, the United Nations. Christian Identity ministers could not make peace with either the Roman Catholic church or with conservative Protestants. They added televangelists and the Vatican to groups of conspiracy theories. In such a world, anything that is not in the extremist camp is potentially involved in a conspiracy of evil.

The most common theme running through the extremist right is anti-Semitism. Regardless of who is blamed for the conspiracy against American values, all right-wingers seem to agree on one point: They find Judaism at the base of the problem. Christian Identity sees Judaism as the result of a cosmic battle between God and the Devil. Even extremists who walked away from religion, such as William Pierce, found Jews to be contemptible. Many claimed that Judaism was behind the periodic economic crises of capitalism because they believed that Jewish bankers controlled the money supply. Christian Identity ministers even claimed that Jewish bankers and the Pope worked in collusion.

It is legitimate to ask how such an extreme, almost nonsensical philosophy of hatred could become popular. The answer can be found in the social structure of extremist groups. In many instances, they tend to be lower-working-class Whites with little formal education. They tend to follow the precepts of traditional, literalized religion, and conspiracies of bankers, Jews, communists, and the United Nations seem to make sense. Similar to members of the old Know Nothing movement of the 19th century, they believe that immigrants and racial minorities are at the base of their decreasing economic status. Blood hatred is endemic to right-wing theology.

A final commonality can be found in the utter endorsement of firearms. The only ultimate protection for White, working-class men, in extremist ideology, is the gun. It will stop a variety of social ills and protect true Americans even as the United Nations attempts to trample constitutional rights. Guns are the mainstays of American society. Finch (1983) sums it up well by describing the right-wing movement as "God, guts, and guns." Gibson (1994) describes it as a displaced desire to fulfill the role of the warrior male. Regardless, the extremist right is a full participant in America's love affair with guns.

Theological commonalties in the extremist right separate the realm of God from the realm of evil. Berlet (1998) says that the right wing sees dichotomies between Christ and the Antichrist, between spirituality and materiality, and between fundamentalism and modernism. The nature of such separations gives rise to religious conflict. God is wholly in partnership with Christ, spirituality, and fundamentalism against the Devil and the dark forces of the cosmos. This is a dualistic, Manichaean struggle between right and wrong. In this atmosphere, Christianity must take a stand against Judaism for the sake of creation, and Christians must stand for the constitution in the face of socialism, economic conspiracies, or the New World Order. This process does not simply separate one camp from the other, it calls the chosen into a holy war with drastic consequences. If the holy warrior loses, God's creation is lost.

A THEOLOGY OF TERRORISM

Theology creates neither violence nor terrorist behavior, but it can provide an atmosphere that justifies an attack on social structures. Three circumstances must be present to motivate believers to move from thought to violent action: (a) believers must perceive a terminal threat to their religious values and attitudes; (b) a theology embracing cosmic salvation, universal love, or worldly peace must be transformed into a dogma of nationalistic, racial, or some other ethnocentrically based protectionism; and (c) the true believers among the faithful must embrace violence as a means for preserving the faith. When these three circumstances are present, terrorism becomes part of a theological process.

PERCEIVED TERMINAL THREAT TO RELIGIOUS VALUES AND ATTITUDES

Walter Laqueur (1996) argues that the structure of terrorism has evolved throughout the 20th century, and the new millennium will witness yet another metamorphosis as religion becomes one of the dominant factors in terrorist violence. Eschatological religious movements are sweeping the globe and affecting violent fringe elements. Referring to this process as "apocalypse soon," Laqueur points to the presence of eschatological references in mainstream politics, and he believes that religion will become the primary influence on terrorist behavior. The danger in the process, Laqueur argues, is that eschatological terrorists want to "give history a push."

Although Lacqueur's (1996) primary unit of analysis is international terrorism, his conclusions are applicable to right-wing domestic extremism. Economic changes and global politics have created conditions that threaten the status of White, working-class men. Despite the economic boom of the 1990s, uneducated White men have not prospered in the global economy, and they lack the educational tools to do so (Hamm, 1994, pp. 105-149). Economic displacement is a real threat, and their anxiety has been exacerbated by heated debates in mainstream American Christianity over such issues as the authority of the Bible, the nature of Christ, and the role of culture in religion. The extremists feel that their world is falling apart, and they are looking for a place to stand. Yet, not every threatened group embraces an extremist theology. Why is the right wing so prone to idiosyncratic theologies? Why do some people embrace ethnocentric religion as a means of social salvation? Martin Marty and Peter Berger have separate but complementary answers.

Marty and Appleby (1991, 1993) argue that the movement toward intolerant fundamentalism is part of an international trend. In a lengthy project that resulted in a five-volume series on fundamentalist religions, Marty and Appleby (1991, pp. vi-xii) find that the retreat to traditional, militant religion is a global phenomenon. They argue that fundamentalism is a defense against forces of change and that people will defend themselves by grabbing the traditions of the past. Militant fundamentalists fight for God, and they fight under God's leadership. Religion becomes the glue that provides group identity and cohesion. It copes with a confusing social situation by rejecting all threats. Only the fundamentals are safe; everything else is relegated to the realm of the unholy.

Berger (1980, pp. 3-29) makes the same argument from a slightly different vantage point. He argues that the modern world is in collision with traditional values. People cope with this situation in one of three differing ways: rejecting change, coping with change, or seeking new ideologies that preserve tradition within change. Those who reject change may turn to militant protectionism. The logical extension of Berger's argument is that violence can become a method for protecting the traditional world. By applying Berger's thesis to the theology of the extremist right, the logic of intolerance becomes apparent. Right-wing extremism is trying to recapture some idealized element of America's past. Extremists long for the days of White American Protestantism, and some of them will fight for it.

The extremist right looks at change through the spectacles of political eschatology. In other words, there are cosmic consequences if they fail to restore White America. Change does not simply represent social evolution, it is a direct confrontation with evil. In right-wing theology, an incarnate evil force is struggling with a creating deity for control of the world, and the Devil has the same power as God. When threatened with modernity, change, multiculturalism, taxes, or any number of other concepts, extremists cannot compromise. Fanatics who cannot compromise are willing, as Laqueur (1996) says, to give history a push.

Carl D. Haggard, commander of the United States Special Field Forces Militia, provides an example of this logic (Bushart, Craig, & Barnes 1998, p. 219). Haggard believes that the U.S. government has declared war on Christian men and women. He claims that he has no concern with racism or multiculturalism but that he fears the government is out of control. Haggard fears centralized government power, and his faith tells him to expect individual freedom. There are hundreds of Identity Christians, freewheelers, and others who espouse the same beliefs with a few twists. Most of their actions are rhetorical, and most of them retreat from actual violence. Other extremists, such as Timothy McVeigh, feel they must take action. Former Identity pastor Kerry Noble (1998) says the primary motivation for action is religious faith.

TRANSFORMING UNIVERSALITY TO ETHNOCENTRISM

For religion to play a dominant role in violence, it is necessary to transform a transcendent message of universality into ethnocentric protectionism. In the case of American Protestantism, there is a tension between two poles. On one hand, Christians are told to embrace everyone. The apostle Paul (Gal. 3:28-29, New Revised Standard Version), for example, states that there is neither Gentile nor Jew, slave nor free, nor women nor man; all are one in Christ. He argues (Rom. 8) that the Christ event provided cosmic unification. Some theologians (Fox, 1988, pp. 129-154; Kung, 1995, pp. 782-789; Rowe, 1994, pp. 127-152) argue that this call varies little from many of the world's religions, and it has roots in secular, Western philosophy. Kung even argues that such logic is the basis for unification and understanding among three sister religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. On the other hand, Christian communities have not historically embraced everyone. It is harrowing in some circles—indeed, it is frequently blasphemous—to include those who do not believe, behave, or worship in a particular way. American Protestantism, and most other religions, exist somewhere in the tension between these two poles.

The growth of violent Christian extremism in the United States involves a willingness of some groups to embrace the pole defining orthodox behavior and to subjugate it to ethnocentric rather than transcendent norms. Universalism is out of the question from this perspective. God's love is only applicable to those who believe, look, think, and act like members of the ethnic group. Right-wing love is reserved only for its own kind. This is the logic behind the extremist right's "Christian patriotism." Right-wing theologians have called for the death of lower-case *c* Christians, and White, militant patriots argue that patriotism is reserved only for those with the proper Christian beliefs (White, 1986, 1997).

The WCOTC serves as a perfect example of ethnocentric transformation. The creed of the church is "our religion is our race," and even a cursory review of WCOTC writings reveals the emphasis on love of one's own kind. On the church's Web site, Hale (1999) writes that the Creator makes a distinction between his loved ones and his enemies. In addition, the Creator expects followers to use love and hate in a constructive manner. Whites are to be loved, all other people are to be hated. Hale goes even further in the "Sixteen Commandments":

> Remember that the inferior mud races are our deadly enemies, and the most dangerous of all is the Jewish race. . . . The guiding principle of all your actions shall be: What is best for the White Race? . . . Do not employ niggers or other

> coloreds. . . . Destroy and banish all Jewish thought and influence from society. . . . Throughout your life you shall faithfully uphold our pivotal creed of Blood, Soil, and Honor. (Hale, 1999)

Ben Klassen (1986) states that Christianity is a suicidal religion indulging in a world of fantasy and make-believe. Nature's religion, on the other hand, calls believers to life by telling them to fight for their survival. A passage from his *The White Man's Bible* is quoted on the WCOTC Web site: "When I say 'our' survival, I am talking about the White Race, since I am not a bird, or an alligator, or a nigger, or an Indian." Such attitudes clearly indicate the nature of right-wing extremism. In a process of ethnocentric transformation, a potential call for universal love is transformed into ethnocentric love. The by-product is hatred for anyone outside the group.

Bruce (1993, pp. 50-67), writing in the Marty-Appleby project, provides a description of the process of ethnocentric transformation. Examining the conflict in Northern Ireland and comparing it to the rise of the mainstream religious right in the United States, Bruce finds two differing trends in fundamentalism. In Ireland, for example, the struggle focuses on ethnic identity and fighting associated with the birth of a political entity. If one is labeled *Catholic*, it does not necessary imply that one's life is subjugated to Catholic theology. Being Catholic can mean that one is fighting for ethnic identity against Protestants. The same principle is applicable to Protestantism in Ireland. Ethnicity takes precedence over religious affinity, and religious identification becomes part of ethnic identity. A religious label in Ireland is synonymous with ethnic identification. Bruce finds the opposite situation in America's Christian right. Mainstream fundamentalism in the United States is not related to ethnic identification because of the American tradition of religious pluralism.

American extremism, however, is not in the same position as mainstream Christian conservatism. Right-wing extremists violently advocate the protection of their ethnic identity, making them more akin to Bruce's (1993) concept of emerging nationalism in Ireland. Ethnicity and political perspectives dominate the right-wing call to religion. Any transcendent experience designed to unite theological expressions is out of the question for right-wing extremists. Their purpose is not to seek compromise or even find their own enclave in a pluralistic environment. The purpose of the extremist right is to destroy the opposition. This becomes the basis for a call to arms.

TRUE BELIEVERS AND THE DOCTRINE OF NECESSITY

The perception of a threat and ethnocentric protectionism do not necessarily produce religious violence. Extremists need not turn to their weapons. They might, for example, withdraw from society or practice nonviolent forms of confrontation. Indeed, most extremists follow these paths. Violence is an extreme action that is embraced only by a few hard-core believers. The central question is, Why do some extremists cross the line from rhetoric to violence? H.H.A. Cooper (1977) provides the best answer in one of the early works on modern terrorism.

All terrorists must feel justified in their actions, and religious zealots are no different. Cooper (1977) believes that terrorists are motivated by the same factors that influence everyone else, and they look for similar rewards for their behavior. Like most individuals, terrorists want neither to engage in violence nor to harm innocent victims. Terrorists, however, have a problem. They cannot accept the world as it is. Even though they know they will kill people by engaging in violence, terrorists reluctantly accept this burden because they cannot tolerate the status quo. Terrorists justify violence by convincing themselves that the injustices of society outweigh the amount of harm caused by their actions. Violence becomes necessary to save society from cosmic evil. Cooper refers to this as the "doctrine of necessity."

Cooper's (1977) theory applies to the religious warrior. Most of America's extremists are rhetorical. They call for violence, they go to Identity meetings and KKK rallies, they carry guns with various militias, and they declare "war" on the federal government. Smith (1994) points out that these "militants" quickly retreat from organizations whenever real violence takes place. Yet, there are those who differ from the extremists described by Smith. A violent few have planted bombs, driven through the streets killing minorities, ambushed police officers, attacked homosexuals, and entered day care centers to shoot children. These terrorists act from necessity. To them, maintaining the status quo does more damage than murdering innocent people. In an age when weapons of mass destruction are available to many disenfranchised groups, this becomes a frightening scenario.

RESTATING A MYTH

The theological danger of right-wing political eschatology is profound, perhaps even more profound than its adherents comprehend, and it is laced with potential violence. The reason is simple. In rejecting the dominant mythology of the age, they are restating the basis of human existence in terms of exclusivity and hate. In other words, they are restating mythology.

Eliade (1968) defines mythology as the sacred stories that bind a group together. The truth of the story is not in question, Eliade says; rather, the myth contains the social truths that a group accepts as normative. Campbell (1990) defines this in terms of common elements. All myths have certain isomorphic properties. The same types of characters, images, and actions manifest themselves in the stories of various religions. A central question for Campbell (1985) focuses on religions based on love and those based on conflict. Mythology and violence can combine in ethnocentric religions.

To be sure, the history of religion is replete with examples of violent mythology used to justify ethnocentrism. Gottwald (1979), for example, traces the social development of ancient Israel in terms of its settlement of Canaan. According to his thesis, two groups of monotheistic Israelites, a group in the north worshipping El and a migrant group from the south loyal to Yahweh, joined forces for the political domination of Canaan. They cast their political struggle in religious terms, while sometimes conquering and sometimes coexisting with the Canaanites. Bright (1981, pp. 144-146) reinforces this view, claiming that the Israelites looked back on their struggle for Canaan and wrote its history through theological eyes. The result was an ethnocentric myth based on conquest.

The structure of modern mythology provides an atmosphere conducive to the birth and growth of new myths. Campbell (1988) states that our age has lost touch with the myths of the past and that we are searching for a grounding of our existence. Spong (1999) says it another way: Christianity (and by implication, Judaism and Islam) is based on mythological concepts that predate the Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment, Darwin, and Freud. From Spong's perspective, the West is in a state of religious anomie. The myth must be restated, or it will die. This need not be a frightening or destructive process. Borg (1991) believes that it is possible to shape a new myth from the old structure in a very gentle fashion. Unfortunately, this is not the only alternative. Just as monotheistic Israelites pitted a militant God against the baals of the Canaanites, an emerging combative mythology can claim the hearts and minds of its people. In the case of right-wing eschatology, all deities are exceedingly violent.

It is beyond the scope of this article to critique completely the mythology of the extremist right, but it is worthwhile to present examples. Each of the four theologies discussed in this paper attempts to restate the mythological foundations of Christianity in violent terms. Christian Identity attempts to accomplish this by adopting Hebrew arguments of Jewish exclusivity and by embracing militant texts of the Hebrew Bible. For example, the Phinehas Priesthood, a nebulous, "leaderless" organization, justifies its existence by pointing to Numbers 25:1-16. In this text, a Hebrew priest kills an Israelite man and a Midianite woman for intermarrying. Phinehas priests cite this passage as God's call to purify the White race. Identity Christians use this passage to restate the Christian myth with a militant passion. Ironically, it is worth noting that Moses married a Midianite woman (Exod. 2:21). Extremists are not shy about removing biblical passages from their historical and social contexts.

The freewheelers of the patriot movement have also tried to create a mythology of violence by quoting passages out of context. A favorite quotation comes from Luke 22:35-38. In this passage, Jesus tells his followers to sell their cloaks to buy a sword as a symbolic act of spiritual struggle. This passage repeatedly appears at gun shows and was even quoted in The Covenant, the Sword, and the Arm of the Lord's *Defense Manual* (Covenant, the Sword, and the Arm of the Lord, 1982). When the disciples tell Jesus that they already have two swords, Jesus lets them know that they missed the point. Jesus' admonishment, however, is not cited on the gun show circuit. Other partial passages from Joshua, Judges, Daniel, Matthew, and Revelation are used to transform Christianity into a militant religion. John and Matthew are also frequently cited for their anti-Jewish rhetoric. As the Christian myth is restated in terms of hate, many followers believe that this is simply basic Christianity (Bushart et al., 1998, p. 107). They have no idea that by removing concepts from their social, historical, and theological foundations, they are proclaiming a new religion.

Klassen (1986) takes up similar lines in *The White Man's Bible*. In a tract entitled, *Never Again Through the Serpent's Eyes*, Klassen asks readers to imagine a pioneer woman in a cabin with her young children. A rattlesnake has entered the cabin and threatens to strike one of the children. Klassen poses a debate over the issue. From the liberal humanitarian view, he says, the woman should consider the situation from the snake's point of view. He has just as much right to strike the children as the children have to exist. Of course, Klassen concludes, this is foolish. The only sensible answer is to kill the snake. Theologically, the snake and the mother are in natural, eternal conflict. Nature tells her to destroy any species threatening her children. In his final point, Klassen argues that other races and religions are representative of other species.

Of course, Klassen knew that he was replacing mythology in the WCOTC. The same can be said of Nordic Christianity and Odinism. When Thor strikes the sky with his mighty hammer or Odin calls warriors to Valhalla, Odinists are blatantly substituting an ideological call to violence for a religious call to love. Warrior gods replace Christian archetypes, and the race is called to defend itself. A theology of peace will never serve the extremist right, and they seek to restate mythology in a call to violence.

THEOLOGICAL DANGERS

It is difficult to describe the feeling of grace to those who have not had a religious experience of peaceful revelation. Indeed, to many modern skeptics, the nature of religion seems to be bound in social conflict. The results can be seen in Ireland, where Protestants and Catholics still wage war on each other. It is also apparent in the Balkan Peninsula as ethnic hatred and ethnocentric religion result in the modern massacres. Media commentators speak about violent Islamic fundamentalists from the Middle East, and few Americans can forget the devastating scene in Oklahoma City where Identity extremists killed more than 200 people. In the wake of the new millennium, religious zealots seem to be peddling social conflict as they anxiously await the final struggle of Armageddon. To those who have not experienced peaceful transcendence, religion may seem to be a dark force written in a theology of blood.

This essay has examined the dark side of religious behavior. Religious conflict will dominate the early stages of the new millennium, and it will continue to appear in domestic extremism. Religious violence, especially in the form of terrorism, is a result of politicized eschatological expectations. Yet, religious conflict has swirled around the periphery of human experience in struggles ranging from dirty little wars to cataclysmic, long-term massacres. Why should it merit continued review today, especially with respect to right-wing extremism? Chip Berlet (1998) provides one of the best answers.

In an examination of the apocalyptic paradigm, Berlet (1998) argues that the extremist right's capacity to restate mythology in terms of a cosmic struggle between good and evil is a prescription for violence. Evil is conspiratorial in nature. Extremists believe that secret groups of elites or parasites from lower classes have plotted together to secretly control history. Right-wingers make illogical leaps from evidence to "prove" conspiratorial links, and they simplify social conflicts by blaming problems on a demonized group. They construct theological worlds that are impervious to outside criticism. Such groups have histories of violence.

Walter Laqueur (1999, p. 78) points to the potential for increased violence. The world of terrorism has been limited in the past by the technology available to terrorists and the reluctance of terrorists to use massively destructive force. The world has changed, Laqueur believes, and terrorism is increasingly dominated by religious fanatics. They have access to nuclear devices, chemical and biological weapons, and terminals for computer attacks. Religion gives terrorists the motivation to use such weapons.

Religious doctrines serve as the cement holding right-wing extremism in place. Among its four theological orientations (Christian Identity, Nordic Christianity or Odinism, freewheeling fundamentalism, and Creatorism), beliefs differ, but religion is the basis for claiming ethnic, racial, and national superiority. Other religions are demonized, and the ethnocentric proclamation of theology becomes the basis for violence and terrorism. Extremists have divided the world into the City of God and the City of Satan, and the fundamentalists are God's warriors. With access to weapons of mass destruction, Armageddon beckons warriors who have developed a mythology of hate. Political eschatology is not an abstract theological concept; it is a dangerous reality of the new century.

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