

The Role of Religion in the Collective Identity of the White Racist Movement¹

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This paper applies the concept of identity to the white racist or separatist movement, typically referred to as the white supremacist movement in many mainstream publications. While similar racial identity and shared perceptions of the meaning of racism bind the movement together, there are other important concerns that potentially divide the movement but also have served to attract members to it. One of these potentially divisive areas, the differences in religious views, is explored here through an analysis of the white separatist literature and interviews with movement members. Three belief systems of movement members—Christian or Israel Identity, Church of the Creator, and Odinism—are examined. All three contribute to strengthening the racial identity of white racists, but are at the same time potentially antagonistic to each other. It is suggested that this religious divide will be a key issue in influencing the future development of the movement.

In the social movement's literature the importance of developing a sense of consciousness and identity among movement members is recognized by McAdam's (1982) political process model, the framing process (Snow et al. 1986), the interpretation of reality (Klandermans 1991), and the new social movements approach that has been extended by Taylor and Whittier (1995). McAdam (1994) acknowledged that the resource mobilization and political process models have not devoted much attention to the cultural or ideational dimensions of collective action. "Mediating between opportunity and action are people and the subjective meanings they attach to their situations" (McAdam 1988:132). The "new social movement theorists" examine individual motivations and the shared "identities" of participants in the movement. While this has typically been applied to newly defined social identities, cultural meanings, and supposedly new ways of viewing the world, Taylor and Whittier (1995:353) argue that collective identity is an important concept for all social movements.

New social movements tend to offer subcultural orientations that challenge the dominant system. Those using new social movements' frameworks often assume that people seek collective identity due to "an intrinsic need for an integrated and continuous social self," and this is especially the case when ethnic, separatist, and nationalist movements are analyzed (Johnston et al. 1997:279). Johnston et al. (1997:292) point out that new social movements have typically been regarded as creative forces of change identifying directions for cultural innovation, but there may be another face that examines collective identity associated with totalitarianism: "Surely the rise of nationalist movements and ethnic hatred also go to the core of how social actors think about themselves."

According to Gordon (1978:109–10), competing ethnic models focus on the elements of race, religion, and national origin or nationality background. These are key ways people identify themselves and foster a "common sense of peoplehood" (Gordon 1978:111). Although religion may be viewed as an individual matter, it is mainly a shared experience that links one human being to others; bond and tradition are major concepts associated with religion (Isaacs 1975:145). While religion and race can be crucial to the construction of one's individual identity, they can also be used to foster collective identity in various social movements. According to Yinger (1985:168),

"religion is one of the crucial defining characteristics in ethnic identity and one of the rallying points in ethnic conflict." Bonds between members are particularly strong when a subethnic group shares a distinctive religion that is fundamental to its identity. However, when a subgroup has different beliefs, religion may be a force for disunity rather than a powerful cultural bond (Lopez and Espiritu 1990:202).

The leading question in this paper is whether and how different religions help unify and/or disrupt the white racist or separatist movement. Within this movement the key means of identification seem to revolve around the concept of race. This paper will briefly consider the movement's use of the concept of racialism to foster white pride and group identity and will then examine how differing religious views in the movement may reinforce the importance of whiteness for the group but might also make it difficult to maintain one strong united racial collective identity among all people in the movement. Each religious belief system in the movement has been constructed and reconstructed in ways that would reinforce movement supporters' identity with the white race.

I draw upon data I collected from movement supporters as well as observations from other social scientists. Since 1992 I have attended more than 20 public and private events of the white separatist movement. A few of these lasted more than one day. Numerous movement people were interviewed at these events. I also have interviewed movement members in their homes or in public places. In addition, I corresponded with many movement members and sometimes interviewed them over the phone or received completed questionnaires from them. More than 130 people have been interviewed during this research. While the sample is by no means a random one, interviews were conducted with most of those considered to be main leaders. In addition, for more than 15 years I have collected and examined the literature of various white racist groups. I will qualitatively examine the roles of racialism and religion in the white separatist movement, relying extensively on the interviews and my examination of white power literature. I will also consider standard social scientific literature as well as make occasional reference to views of people in organizations opposed to the white separatist movement. In this paper they will be referred to as counter or anti-movement groups. (See Dobratz and Shanks-Meile (1997) for their concerns with these "watchdog" groups.)

RACISM AND RACIALISM

The development of racial pride is key in distinguishing whites who belong to this movement from whites who do not. Ferber (1997:205) has suggested that "the construction of white racial identity, and the maintenance of white privilege, is the central project of the contemporary white supremacist movement. The construction and maintenance of racial boundaries is essential to the production of white identity in white supremacist discourse." Billig (1978), in his research on the National Front, an openly racist party in Great Britain, believed his interviewees confused culture and race (as a biological concept) in their discussions of their belief systems. Billig (1978:164) pointed out that the sociopsychological view of racism "has in fact ignored the most central feature of racialism, namely the meaning of race to the racist."

Movement members tend to define the term "racist" positively as one who expresses love of their race. For example, Nocmar, a young man who belonged to a movement group called Clan Rook, responded to my questionnaire: "It in no way means hate for any other race, it simply means a love for my own race. Also that I am conscious of my race and proud of it, as should anyone about their race." A National Socialist, who indicated he did not wish to be identified, observed: "Loving your own race—our Aryan Race—and putting the survival and self preservation of our 'folk' above all else. The White Race First!"

One of my respondents, Jack Wikoff, editor and publisher of *Remarks*, noted the importance of consciousness as a means to unify the movement: "The white racial nationalist movement is made up of individuals and groups of widely varying ideals. It is not monolithic. Nevertheless, we are all contributing toward a higher consciousness of race, being, and identity. . . . Some day our

collective consciousness will create effective political unity.” According to the movement’s point of view, their primary emphasis is on the preservation and/or the uplifting of the white race. The “14 Words” of David Lane, a member of the Silent Brotherhood who is imprisoned, characterize the sentiment of the movement: “We Must Secure the Existence of Our People and a Future for White Children” (Lane 1999:14). Racial consciousness has been constructed in the movement to serve as the basis for creating a white identity. How religion contributes to the construction of white identity will be considered in the next section.

RELIGION WITHIN THE MOVEMENT

Three religious belief systems, Christian Identity, World Church of the Creator, and Odinism/Wotanism, have especially helped reinforce pride in the white race and the development of white ethnic identity.²

Christian Identity

The beliefs of Christian Identity (Identity) are indeed complicated and not all Identity supporters agree on all aspects of the religious tenets. Barkun (1997:x–xi) identified three core beliefs of much of Christian Identity: (1) white “Aryans” are the offspring of the tribes of Israel according to the Bible; (2) Jews are the children of the devil, a relationship that is traced back to the sexual relationship between Satan and Eve in the Garden of Eden; and (3) the world is rapidly approaching a final apocalyptic struggle between good and evil with Aryans battling a Jewish conspiracy to try to save the world. Bock (1995:36) pointed out that Identity supporters comprise a small proportion of fundamentalists and an even smaller part of Christianity. Melton’s *The Encyclopedia of American Religions* (1989) classifies Christian Identity under British Israelism, which is part of the Adventist Family.

Identity has a rather unique interpretation of the Bible and biblical history. According to “This is Aryan Nations” (n.d.a.): “The Bible is the family history of the White Race, the children of Yahweh placed here through the seedline of Adam.” The Adamites (descendants of Adam) are the Aryans while Pre-Adamites are creatures (possibly the beasts of the field) that came into existence before Adam and are not Aryan people. People of color are pre-Adamic suggesting a lower form of species. “Adam,” or Aw-Dam, means “to show blood in the face, flush or turn rosy” according to *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance to the Holy Bible* (Aho 1990:97). According to the Identity belief system, only Aryans can blush so they must be the descendants of Adam. For many in Identity, Cain is believed to be the offspring of Eve and the devil, suggesting the existence of the seed line of God’s own children and the separate existence of the satanic seed line (Comparat n.d.:32). Jews may be regarded as the children of Satan because the liaison between Eve and the devil gave birth to the Jewish race.

Illustrative of the diversity of beliefs, not all Identity believers support this idea of dual seed lines. For example, *Jubilee*, considered by Crawford et al. (1994:318) as “the flagship publication of the Identity movement,” disagrees with the two-seed-line view. *Jubilee’s* (1996:19) definition of Christian Identity³ is: “Anglo Saxon, Scandinavian, Germanic and kindred people (Christians) who have learned their true identity as descendants of Jacob (Israel). Contemporary Jews are descendants of Esau (Edom) and were *not* the offspring of ‘Satan and Eve.’ Blacks and other non-whites are creations of God and to be treated with respect as strangers in the land.”

Kaplan (1993:34) argues that all of Identity proclaims a revolutionary ideology because “the very act of proclaiming the truth as they know it is the ultimate revolutionary act.” However, in one faction the revolution is an internal one characterized by “political quietism” and withdrawal, while in the other it is militant and forceful and includes resort to the use of weapons. Leonard Zeskind (1999:12), a U.S. correspondent for *Searchlight*, a British countermovement publication, called Christian Identity “White Nationalism’s Theology.”

Church of the Creator

The Church of the Creator (COTC), founded by Ben Klassen in 1973, is dedicated to the survival, expansion, and advancement of the white race. It is classified by Melton (1989) as in the Liberal Family with liberalism challenging the dictates of Christian orthodoxy. COTC calls its religion Creativity, which Kaplan (1993:38) labels “an odd blend of rewritten Christianity, health faddism, and histrionic racism.” Klassen (1973:283) himself rejected Christianity, claiming the Bible was written by Jewish scriptwriters, and that to accept Christianity is a “cowardly flight from reality.” According to Klassen (1973:273), Creativity sees the laws of nature governing the universe, and nature does not approve of miscegenation or mongrelization of the races.

Klassen committed suicide in 1993, but before his death he encountered problems in trying to find a successor to run the organization. Ultimately, in 1996, Matt Hale became Pontifex Maximus of the World COTC (WCOTC) (Hale 1996). Hale told Borow (2000:98) that “Nothing gets to people’s hearts like religion. Politics is a transitory thing; religion is permanent. Religious what’s in people’s hearts.” Hale and his organization received a great deal of attention when Benjamin Smith allegedly went on a July 1999 shooting spree across Illinois and Indiana that resulted in three deaths (including Smith’s) and the wounding of nine people. After the shootings, Hale said that Smith was a former member of WCOTC who resigned or did not renew his membership shortly before the shootings.

Hale (n.d.), in his audiotape “Creativity Not Nazism,” argued that the Nazi movement was a political one while the Creativity movement is based on racial faith. A racial faith eliminates split loyalties. “Creativity is rooted in American soil and in the pioneering of early Americana.” The values associated with the conquering of the American West and the desire to spread the message of Creativity to all whites are important aspects of the religious beliefs of WCOTC. Hale told me in our interview: “Creativity adamantly proclaims that the White race must survive. It must expand We don’t believe in the supernatural. In fact, supernatural is a contradiction of terms. Really. There is nothing above nature Creativity is a religion that uplifts people tremendously. It gives people a purpose in their lives in which they formerly lacked . . . our belief that every White man, woman, and child has a duty towards their race, towards their people.” Thus whiteness and the importance of uniting racial and religious beliefs are also key ingredients of the WCOTC.

Odinism

Creativity is not the only religion in the movement that challenges Christianity; another religious belief system variously referred to as Wotanism, Odinism, or Ásatrú does as well. Social scientists consider Odinism to be a form of neopaganism that is trying to reconstruct ancient European pre-Christian religions (Adler 1986:233). Melton (1989) placed Ásatrú Free Assembly in the Magick Family under Witchcraft and Neo-Paganism. Adler (1986) and York (1995) examined Odinism under Norse or Nordic paganism. Alice Rhoades, an editor of a journal of Northern European paganism, believed: “There’s been a general assumption that the Norse religion is connected with the Nazis because the Nazis used Norse symbols. And neo-Nazis sometimes get attracted to Odinism, because the trappings are the same” (cited in Adler 1986:274). The pamphlet “Why Ásatrú,” obtained from Stephen McNallen of Ásatrú Folk Assembly (AFA) indicates that Odinism is the original religion of northwestern Europe and that the customs of the Germanic tribes (currently English, Germans, Scandinavians, and Dutch) are closely related to the practices of the Celts (currently Irish, Welsh, and Scottish).

In contrast to most neopagans, the majority of the supporters of Odinism do not believe in universal religions, seem to be politically conservative, and may not be comfortable with feminism, diversity in sexuality and life style, or anarchism (Adler 1986:277). York (1995:126) maintains that Odinists, unlike most other neopagans, support neotribalism, emphasize racial purity, and

the family unit. Kaplan (1993:36) describes Odinist ideology as “explicitly anti-Christian, . . . often anti-Jewish, and exclusivist in terms of racial minority groups,” but he recognizes there are differences in thought and practice among Odinists, a key distinction being between racialists and nonracialists. Sometimes, though, the line between the two groups is blurred because of the difficulty of “separating ethnic pride from racial mysticism” (Kaplan 1993:36).

The Odinist Fellowship stresses the role of identity and consciousness of whites: “Although every race and ethnic group is threatened by cosmopolitanism and homogenization, our chief concern must be for our own Folk, an endangered minority. We support the awakening of racial consciousness for all peoples as a bulwark against assimilation” (cited in York 1995:126). Ron McVan (1997:59) of *Wotansvolk—14 Word Press* points out: “Our hope, our strength, unity and destiny will never be assured until we begin to rebuild that collective, ethnic focus of mind and spirit found in the cohesive customs of our ancient roots. The man makes history, the woman is history, but the right order of a people is forged by the creative force of an awakened folk-consciousness.” Flowers (1981:289), drawing on Jung’s ideas, noted that the Ásatrú gods weren’t perceived “as independent transcendental beings, but rather as exemplary models of consciousness, or archetypes, which serve as patterns for human development.”

HOW RELIGION CONTRIBUTES TO THE WHITE RACIALIST VISION

Given that there are now these three main religious belief systems in the movement, as well as several other ones, a crucial issue concerns what effects these views have upon the white power or separatist movement. More specifically, do these views contribute toward the development and growth of the movement, do they hinder the movement, or do they do both? Kaplan (1998:103) suggests “religion, broadly conceived, offers the most promising path toward realization of the white nationalist dream.” He draws upon the idea of the “rapid evolution of a fluid set of synergetic religious beliefs that are serving to bind together a disparate group of adherents based on primordial concepts of race and nation” (Kaplan 1998:117). For example, he points out links of Odinism and of Identity with National Socialism, arguing that National Socialism can be viewed as a religion because it often reveres a particular messianic individual, sees the world in Manichaeian terms, and views victory as regaining the lost golden age. He stresses the importance of the various international connections that have been made by people with the synergetic (mixed) religious views.

Barkun (1998) examined the close relationship between militias and “New World Order” conspiracy theories. New World Order literature gave militias a *raison d’être* and militias spread the New World Order ideas to new groups and individuals. Barkun (1998:62) maintained that the “generic New World Order conspiracy theory” and the idea of stigmatized knowledge, which “overlaps a domain of religious belief,” may “open new possibilities for the development of racist doctrines” (p. 68). Racialists can attempt to recruit from nonracialists who believe in New World Order conspiracies. For Barkun, racism and anti-Semitism have entered the arena of stigmatized knowledge. Barkun looks for “bridging mechanisms” that can connect doctrines of the radical right to elements of society from which they would typically be excluded. For example, conspiratorialism can be connected to occultism, New Age spirituality, alternative science, and related areas. More generally, Snow et al. (1986:467) used the concept of “frame bridging” in the social movements literature to refer to “the linkage of two or more ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames regarding a particular issue. . . . This bridging is effected primarily by organizational outreach and information diffusion through interpersonal or intergroup networks, the mass media, the telephone, and direct mail. . . . Indeed for many SMOs today, frame bridging appears to be the primary form of alignment.”

Groups or individuals that share similar beliefs about race and/or religion can be linked together structurally by various forms of communication, such as email, chat rooms, etc. Frame bridging is often used for mobilizing and recruiting and could be seen as a positive force for a social

movement. Various movement supporters have praised the benefits of communicating on the Internet and provided advice on how to use it. For example, Sister Lisa Turner (2000:np) of WCOTC urged all Creators to get online, proclaiming the need "to spread the Creed of Creativity. . . . [T]he Internet is an incredibly powerful tool for bringing more women into our Cause and the Church. Women in particular have felt isolated and scattered around the country or the world, thinking they are alone when it comes to having racial feelings or racial identity, and the Net has crushed the artificial barriers put up by JOG [Jewish Occupied Government] to keep both our men and women separated."

The countermovement group Anti-Defamation League (1999) has clearly recognized the movement's use of the Internet, stating "Bigots of all kinds recognized the Internet's power and rushed to use it to rally their supporters, preach to the unconverted, and intimidate those whom they perceive as their enemies." While acknowledging that potential for recruitment through right-wing Internet activity, Back et al. (1998:74) caution that "there is little authoritative evidence about the effectiveness of these means of recruiting young people to the far right or the degree and extent of computer-assisted international right-wing networking." Furthermore, they point out that the Internet is being used by countermovement organizations and thus provides "an important new forum for the dissemination of arguments against racism, either in direct response to cyber-racism and cyber-fascism or as part of wider forms of anti-racist mobilization."

Religion may certainly be beneficial for recruiting people to the white racist movement, and the different religious views provide alternatives from which people can choose. In my interviews some recognized the value of having the diverse beliefs and saw factions in the movement as helpful. For example, David A. Neumann, Imperial Wizard of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan in Michigan, argued: "I believe that factions represent the specific ideals of the particular memberships. I believe that this in fact is beneficial as people gravitate where they fit in best. This helps to keep people within the movement, and the leadership of separate groups can then work together to co-ordinate." William J. Murray of SS Action Group acknowledged the importance of recruitment as well as the idea that factions make it more difficult for the government and others to disrupt the entire movement: "I don't think there are too many factions. There are as many factions as there are ideas, and this diversity is not necessarily bad. No one person or group has all the answers. Another point is that it is better to be de-centralized due to the repressive nature of our government. It makes it harder to bring us down when you have so many groups to attack."

Christian Identity supporters, for example, try to recruit members from other types of Christian beliefs, most likely from fundamentalism but not necessarily. (See Aho (1990) for an extremely interesting discussion of this.) As Emerson et al. (1999) have pointed out, the religious cultural tools of white conservative Protestants influence their views on racial inequality, such as how they explain the gap between whites and African-Americans in more individualistic terms and less in structural ones. Emerson et al. (1999:414) suggest the explanations of white conservative Protestants are not only a defense "of socioeconomic privilege, but more fundamentally, of identity, culture, and worldview." Wilcox and Jelen (1990) also argued that evangelicals of all types are less tolerant than other Americans, at least in part because of the evangelical doctrine itself. Woodbury and Smith (1998), in their review of literature on conservative Protestants in America, noted a study that finds that the attitudes of liberals and conservative religionists have converged since the 1970s, including racial attitudes becoming more liberal and less polarized. However, it could be that the white conservative Protestants who did not move toward the center in these attitudes may be particularly fertile ground for white separatists to explore.

This idea could be supported by John Murphy of the Bedford Forrest Brigade, an independent Florida-based Klan, who described to me the Christian ties of his Klan, but also pointed out the new appeal of Odinism: "We are Christians of virtually all denominations. We tend to be fundamentalist. There is some dissatisfaction lately with 'Judeo-Christianity.' The politically correct trend seen in some churches, as endorsement of homosexuality and relative moralism, has renewed interest in Odinism and similar religions as the true religion of the European

people. Christianity provides us with the moral framework of our groups, as well as, the spiritual outlet.”

In my interviews of movement supporters I asked about the role religion plays in the movement. Most of the people who replied believed that religion was very important although they offered a variety of different explanations for that. In response to my open-ended question of why it was important, about one-third expressed the belief that religion could help unite people in the movement. For example, John C. Sigler III, aka “Duck,” a Christian Identity Hammerskin, identified certain advantages of a shared religious belief: “When politics, social goals, and religion are united into one, you have social revolutionaries of fanatical devotion realizing that death only brings glory. When men fight in the name of God, nothing on earth scare[s] or weaken[s] them.” Raymond Barrett, who has explored various religious beliefs, indicated: “For some, religion is a source of inner strength. It strengthens one’s sense of direction, purpose, and often, devotion. . . . Ásatrú is a part of my Northern European heritage. If my Race dies, Ásatrú dies along with it. Ásatrú is my blood, my breath, my soul. How important *is* my Racial soul?” This sense of collective identity joining political beliefs, race, heritage, blood, and soul potentially gives strength to the individual and to the movement.

Certain movement supporters qualified their beliefs about religion making a positive contribution. For example, an anonymous Odinist National Socialist indicated that religion was only somewhat important in the movement and “only to the extent that a lot of ‘Identity’ people support our Aryan cause.” Gene Sotelo of American Front believed that religion played a role in the movement, but it wasn’t important to him. He explained: “For some, it gives them a ‘green light’ to be racist (identity). For others, it’s a way to get back in touch with their roots or express their anti-Christian (Odinist, COTC) views.” Eric Davidson of Panzerfaust Records, who characterized himself as anti-Judeo-Christian, saw Christian Identity serving as a kind of bridge for those in the movement who may have grown up with a Christian upbringing: “I’m not speaking for everybody, but I think it’s helped them kind of bridge their earlier religious experience with their racial ideology.”

A skinhead from Missouri feels the potential benefits of religion are unfulfilled for the white power movement: “We could use religion as a powerful weapon in our propaganda arsenal if it was done properly. Unfortunately it never has been used correctly yet and I’m not really confident that it ever will be but it definitely could be. As far as I can tell we must simply focus on race as the primary objective and let each person choose his/her religious identity.”

The tension and potential for disunity in the movement due to differing religious views will be discussed next, as will attempts to proselytize.

TENSION INVOLVING THE MOVEMENT

The recruitment process may result in conflicts between Christian Identity and other Christian beliefs. Bock (1995:36) alluded to the National Council of Churches adopting a resolution “to the effect that Christian Identity is not a valid expression of Christian beliefs.” Some religion-based groups have opposed Christian Identity and written articles or put out videos critical of it. For example, the Kansas Area United Methodist Church, in cooperation with Kansas Ecumenical Ministries Rural Concerns Committee, developed a video and curriculum entitled “Trouble in Our Community: The Truth About the ‘Christian Identity Movement.’” The countermovement group, Center for New Community, does faith-based organizing and is working on a publication entitled “Christian Identity: An American Heresy.” As new areas of potential recruitment for white separatists are identified, countermovement organizations respond.

Within Ásatrú there have been debates about the roles of race and politics in the various kindreds. The Ásatrú Alliance, a free association of independent kindreds, drew up bylaws in an effort to avoid conflict on the “racism” issue. While its first bylaw declared “ÁSATRÚ IS THE ETHNIC RELIGION OF THE INDIGENOUS NORTHERN EUROPEAN PEOPLES,”

the fourth one stated “THE ALLIANCE IS APOLITICAL; IT IS NOT A FORUM FOR, NOR SHALL IT PROMOTE ANY POLITICAL VIEWS OF THE ‘LEFT’ OR ‘RIGHT’” (*Vor Trú* 1993:37). This form of the “racism” issue seems to be partially framed in the debate over whether Ásatrú is universalistic (new age Ásatrú) or an ethnic or tribal religion (traditional Ásatrú). The secretary-treasurer of the Alliance, Valgard Murray (1995:34), personally believes that Universalist Ásatrú “denies the existence of the Folk Soul and also the rights of ethnic Europeans to self-determination.”

Recruitment can also divide non-Christian movement groups from Christian groups. Racialists’ disenchantment with certain aspects of Christianity could facilitate their movement toward Odinism, as already noted by one movement person. Another, Frank DeSilva, a public figure and member of the Silent Brotherhood, believes there is a transition from Christianity to neopaganism occurring in the movement: “Religion is for the race-culture that created it. In consequence to this, the movement is becoming predominately non-Christian. Catholicism becoming increasingly more non-white, as the Vatican reinforces its ranks with non-Europeans, it is increasingly becoming more familiar to hear about one or another group forming on the lines of the ‘new paganism’. I prefer to call it Natural Law, as an ‘idea’, but as religion, it may take many names.”

Many in the movement indicate that the role of religion in the movement is problematic. They suggest there is some kind of tension over religion or that this tension may foster disunity. “Aryan Man” strongly believed religion was disrupting the movement: “It’s screwing a lot of our chances up. Because people put too much emphasis on it . . . whether you call God Odin or Wotan or Yahweh or Jesus—I don’t think it makes a lot of difference cause I think all those names . . . they’re the same. It’s just people trying to interpret it. Different ways of arguing about it and it’s a tool. I think it’s another tool of ZOG [Zionist Occupation Government]. I think the hierarchy sits back and laughs at our squabbles about religion.”

“Nocmar” of Clan Rook felt religious differences could be considered later so as not to disrupt the movement now: “Religion remains to be a major obstacle to total unity, unfortunately. . . . To some groups religion is very important and therefore must be respected by other groups. The main emphasis is on the fact that we are all fighting for the white race and we should not single out our one difference and dwell on it. There will be time for that after we have won.” Nocmar’s concern is also illustrated in the repeated calls for unity in the movement. For example, Jeremy, who was a second lieutenant of Aryan Nations, stressed the need for groups and individuals to join together despite their religious differences: “Politically they’re basically the same and religiously they are drastically different. And I believe that all white, European Aryans wherever they live who have National Socialist or similar beliefs—irregardless of their spiritual beliefs should all band together because we’re all in the cause for the same goal being—you know—white unity and Aryan brotherhood and a national state of our own.”

Nathan Pett, who published *Hail Victory* and *Fenris Wolf*, maintains that religion is a personal matter and should not play an important role in the movement. At the same time, though, he stressed his strong personal support for Odinism:

I’m an Odinist and I really wish that all this Christian Identity stuff would just like fade away . . . me and a lot of my friends just think that it’s the stupidest thing around—Christian Identity. I mean, I believe Christianity is Jewish. I mean, in nature—Jesus Christ was Jewish—it comes from Middle East—it’s a Middle Eastern religion. I don’t think it’s for us as a racial movement—why should we take a Jewish religion if we’re so anti-Semitic? It doesn’t make sense. So, Identity tries to go around and say that Jesus was Aryan and all this stuff. That’s bullshit. I mean, it really is. I have no desire to try to pretend like my ancestors are wearing sandals, walking around in the desert, riding camels and you know—speaking Hebrew to each other. It didn’t happen. My ancestors were from northern Europe and they lived a different lifestyle than that. And that’s what Odinism is. It’s about my ancestor’s religion and that makes sense. To other people, whatever they want to do that’s fine. You know. I don’t think it should be anything that divides people . . . never let religion divide white people—it should be a personal thing.

A skinhead from Missouri emphasized that religion has played a role in almost anything, but, like Nathan Pett, argued for the virtues of Odinism over Christianity:

Christianity will be a part of our culture for a long time to come and politically we must be ready to deal with that. I would hope to see, amongst the youth, a rebirth of the Odinist religion which is a much more combative religion that can help instill a fighting spirit in our people. This has been lost and the guilty and sympathetic views of Christianity have warped us into a weak people. We will need to be hard hearted in the future if we really want to put our words into action. I don't feel that religion is necessary as a tool for morality as each person can figure out their own values but we should all follow the Odinist tenant that says: Do right and fear no one.

These quotations from the interviews illustrate the conflict between Christians and non-Christians within the white separatist movement. An examination of movement literature also reveals the lack of consensus on the issue of religion. Aryan Nations' "Platform for the Aryan National State" (n.d.b.) gives citizenship to Aryans only (Article I). True positive Christianity is encouraged, and other religious practices, such as Talmudism (Judaism) and devil and heathen religions, should be stopped (Article IV). Thus it appears that ultimately different religious beliefs like Odinism and WCOTC will not be tolerated in their future Aryan state.

Aryan Nations Youth Action Corps (n.d. [ca:1999]) noted the "misconceptions" about Identity Christians in the movement and identified various myths about them, including "Identity followers hate other White Activists." Yet in explaining this, an undercurrent of religious tension seemed to exist, in part because of the desire to spread the message of Identity Christianity:

Myth #1: Identity followers hate other White Activists: Absolutely a lie! That is for Yahweh God alone to judge who has transgressed the Life Laws. As long as race is the common bond and goal, and as long as our comrades who do not believe quite the same as us are being productive towards our common goal, we will never turn our backs on anyone. I doubt there is more than a handful of Identity followers who do not know a good number of non-Identity activists that are just as willing to work with as [sic], as we are with them. The only duty required of us by Yahweh God is to inform our kindred of Yahweh's Word. (Aryan Nations Youth Action Corps n.d.:2-3)

A September 1998 exchange on the Internet Stormfront listserver, which involved discussions about religion in the movement, also illustrated this tension over recruitment, religious beliefs, who shapes the movement's direction, and related issues. We begin with the debate in process:

Tim [replying to Leon]: "I agree with you that for those of us who are Christians, it is very hard to imagine ourselves walking lockstep with the neo-pagans. In fact for me it is impossible. It really worries me the way white people are being led into these pagan religions with the fairy tale myths about the "Aryan" past . . . I used to believe that the hostility of some white nationalists toward Christianity stemmed from their belief that Christianity was merely another Jewish plot. But now I believe that it stems from their desire for complete control. If you listen to these pagans closely enough, you get the distinct impression that they are not nearly so interested in white nationalism as they are in having 99% of the white population as their sheep with them as the only, and unquestioned, shepherds.

L9: Heathenry is a vital, living spiritual practice that can help us today and guide us into the future. It is odd that in some ways we have the same concern about joining forces. I have always resented the Christian "need" to convert me to "save" my soul. Sorry guys, my soul is just fine as is . . . My only hostility towards Christianity is the fact that A) Christians have been very hostile towards me in telling me that the choices I have in the new White Homeland are: 1) convert 2) live outside the Homeland or 3) die. Fortunately I have found White Nationalists who do not hold these beliefs, and value my ability to contribute to the movement regardless of religion or philosophy. B) Christianity is a Mideastern Desert Wargod religion that does not speak to me spiritually.

DMD: Pagans are like Christians: a very diverse group. Most simply want to be left alone. If you are worried about them, they are worried about you. Christianity has the track record for theocracies, not paganism . . . Use of the terms "sheep" and "shepherds" is classical Christian terminology, it is not pagan. I suspect you are guilty of a little psychological projection . . . The solution to this pointless religious dispute is to retain that which our founding fathers gave us: a secular republic. Render unto Caesar (the state) what is Caesar's and unto god what is God's . . . bashing someone's religious belief (or lack of it) when he agrees with 90% of your political goals is just plain stupid. Suicidal, in fact.

DE [to Tim]: I'd like to point out to all the Christians on the list, that we (the "dennigrated" "Pagans") respect your rights, as Aryans, to worship anyway you choose. All we ask, is that you do the same.

Movement leaders too have viewed religion as a major issue confronting the movement. Klassen (1991) compared Creativity with a number of other religious belief systems. He condemned Christianity because it "promotes the idea that we are all equal in the eyes of the Lord (except the Jews are more equal than all others and are his overwhelming favorite) and therefore race-mixing is just great" (Klassen 1991:23). He saw his own religion, Creativity, on the other hand, following the Golden Rule, which is "What is good for the White Race is the highest virtue; what is bad for the White Race is the ultimate sin" (Klassen 1991:23). While Creativity and Christian Identity have a great deal in common regarding racial attitudes, Klassen (1991:75–76) was particularly critical of two Identity beliefs he believed were based on pure fantasy: "(a) They strongly espouse Jewish Christianity as portrayed in the Old and New Testaments, and (b) the peculiar twist that the 'Ten Lost Tribes of Israel' wandered into, and populated Europe, something not even remotely suggested by either the Old or New Testament, and most emphatically repudiated by all authentic history to which we are heir in today's civilization." Instead, Klassen (1991:76) maintained that Creativity was "based on Logic and Common Sense, the Eternal Laws of Nature, and a critical study of past history."

Klassen (1991:103–04) seemed somewhat more positive toward Odinism, but criticized it by asking three questions: "(a) of all the thousands of myths and folklore with which the White Race is so richly endowed, why should anyone want to choose that of the Norse? (b) what, precisely, is the 'Aryan soul,' and what group represents it, and what meaning, if any, does the word 'Aryan' have? and, (c) instead of asking 'Can we still say God?' a better question in this enlightened and scientific age might well be: do we still need to play with imaginary spooks, White or otherwise?" Klassen (1991:110) concluded that "Creativity is more militantly pro-White, and more militantly anti-Jew, anti-nigger and anti-mud. It is the unswerving goal of Creativity to not only fight for the survival of the White Race but to expand our numbers until we inhabit all the benign territory of Planet Earth."

Lane (1999:223) stresses the need for white separatist states and religion both and says: "What we must understand today if we are to survive as a race is that we must have geographic nations and a religion which are exclusively ours." While Lane is critical of Christianity, he doesn't endorse COTC, although he thinks some of its ideas are useful. Lane (1994a:36) believes that "the best religion for our folk today is almost certainly Odinism. Odin . . . is the best representation of All-Father, the Creator for the White race today."

In addition to the differing religious views, some in the movement, such as Tom Metzger of White Aryan Resistance (WAR), do not identify with any religion. WAR (n.d.) is critical of religion, saying it is based on faith and has been destructive to the white race. Both Christianity and Judaism are perceived to be occult control mechanisms over the people. According to its position paper (WAR n.d.), "You cannot serve two masters; one being the Judeo-Christian myth, and the other being in favor of the White eugenics idea. For yet a little while, we must have patience with those among us that have been unable or unwilling to throw off the subversive middle eastern cult religions. However, time is running out, and the albatross of Christianity will surely destroy our reformation, if not subdued."

TRYING TO FIND COMMON GROUND

In his autobiography, Lane (1994b:30) indicated that he hoped to heal some of the divisions between Christian Identity believers and Odinists by showing they may have similar roots. At the April 1996 Aryan Youth Assembly at Aryan Nations, Mrs. David Lane (Katja) gave her imprisoned husband's speech, which called for unity:

For the sake of unity we must find and embrace a common denominator. That denominator is the self-evident truth that nature and nature's laws are the work of the Creator, no matter what name we use for God or what our perceptions of God may be. . . .

Friendly debates about the names for God, about religious symbols or rituals, or parables and allegories used in religious teachings are understandable and acceptable. But the moment such debate detracts from nature's highest law, which is the preservation of our own kind, then the debate violates divine law. Let nature's laws mediate any dispute. If that does not work, then put the dispute aside until we have accomplished the 14 WORDS. Does anyone really care what name the colored races use for God after we are extinct. (Lane n.d.:1-2)

The importance of nature and the saving of the white race could serve as a basis for common ground of all three religious views. The desire to preserve the white race as embodied in Lane's 14 Words is likely to provide the basis for a master frame of social movement organizations. According to Snow and Benford (1992:138), master frames are broad modes of punctuation, attribution, and articulation that "may color and constrain those of any number of movement organizations." Movement groups and their members would tend to conform to these general frames.

Some in the movement seem to be arguing that the statement "My race is my religion" should be incorporated in the master frame. William J. Murray, who was a state leader of SS Action Group, also saw religion as divisive and wanted religion to be an individual concern: "Because of the diversity of religious beliefs in this Movement, there has been a great deal of infighting. I believe we should all agree on one thing, and that is that our Race is our religion!" Pontifex Maximus Matt Hale of WCOTC, in reply to my question about the expression "My race is my religion," said he believed that Ben Klassen had coined this expression. Hale proclaimed: "Our basic view is that a religion that promotes one's people is a good religion and one that denies is a bad religion. Now there are some sincere Christians out there that believe that Christianity promotes the white race and certainly while we disagree with them, we can appreciate them. However, generally it's been my experience that Christians have divided loyalties that they are so concerned about a heaven or hell or god or whatever that they are not necessarily putting their race first. So, in that sense, religion is important in the movement. People need to get their priorities straight."

Religion could be a means to preserve the race or, as Matt Hale told me: "We view religion as the tactics and the embodiment of the struggle for our people." For Eric Davidson of Panzerfaust Records, the statement "My race is my religion" means that the person who says it is "somebody that simply puts race ahead of everything else." Commander Jeff Schoep of the National Socialist Movement felt the same way, indicating that "my race is my religion" means "that the various religions are side issues. Race is the most important." For Wotansvolk (1995:4), the connection between race and religion is significant, but race seems to have priority: "Any form of religion or belief system that does not spring naturally from the soul of the race, that is not born of the blood, will ultimately destroy the threads which link men with nature and kinsmen with kinsmen. A race without a mythos and belief of the blood drifts aimlessly throughout history."

However, others within the movement, including some believers in Christianity in general and, more specifically, Christian Identity adherents, question the statement "My race is my religion." For example, Michael Teague, Church of Jesus Christ Christian/Aryan Nations Headquarters Staff Leader and head of security, told me that while lots of organizations use that statement, "I would say that my religion is my race. Instead of my race is my religion. Yahweh God is my race. We are sons and daughters of the most high God. . . . As far as myself being Christian Identity . . . it's the whole basis of my racial beliefs."

Pastor Tom Hallimore of Kingdom Identity Ministries also did not like "My race is my religion," "because I think it hints at self-worship. To a certain degree, I agree with the statement where they say your skin is your uniform." Earlier in the interview he had indicated that Klassen and COTC were engaged in "self-worship. They don't worship the Creator. They worship themselves.

And then you get the Odinists. And basically they like the pageantry and the regalia of—you know—a lot of times it's a Nazi movement and it—they've taken up an ancient pagan term and adopted whatever suits them. But there is no person that they're actually worshiping and trying to submit to his laws." Hallimore distinguished Christianity as being from God but that religion is of man. In Christianity "you've got the willingness to fight for your country, for your race, for your family—but even greater is the willingness to fight for your God. And that encompasses all the other three."

Commander Michael L. Hanson of the Nationalist Socialist White Revolutionary Party indicated his support of positive Christianity. He mentioned Alfred Rosenberg's writings, which maintained that "Race is the collective manifestation of the Soul and the Soul is the individual form of Race. So I would say that one's race is one's soul, but not necessarily that one's race is one's religion." Michael Hoffman II of Independent History and Research does not like religious labels, but did describe himself as a nondenominational Christian and summarized his religious views as classical, orthodox Christianity. He felt that the statement "My race is my religion" suggested "that one is saved by one's race is historically anathema in Christianity but is at the core of Judaism. So for me, it's a Jewish statement."

The division about religion may be illustrative of a broader fault line in the movement. For example, a WAR associate (2000:6) identified a typology of movement supporters when he delineated three different levels of racialists: (1) those in the movement with views on race but those views are "not necessarily primary (including some militias and political and religious groups)"; (2) the most common, "built on sound racial principles and promoting their agendas by legal, largely non-violent means"; and (3) "revolutionaries espousing racial advancement by any means necessary." Religion thus can potentially be a force that affects the primacy of race in the movement. At this point, for much of Christian Identity, religion seems possibly co-equal with race in shaping how many of its supporters think about themselves, while for Odinists/Wotanists and Creativity race seems paramount.

CONCLUSION

Those professing the three different religions invest a great deal of time putting out information on the movement, making links with others of similar racial and religious views, and trying to recruit others into the movement. Advocates of the various religious views and their organizations have developed their own sense of collective identity, have contributed to the meanings of whiteness, and may want to convert movement and nonmovement whites to their beliefs. For all three religions, racial consciousness is intertwined with religious belief. Odinism/Wotanism and WCOTC may well be attracting people to the movement that Christian Identity could not and vice versa. However, these same beliefs may also divide them on the issue of the primacy of race and how it relates to religion. Further, each religious belief system has also experienced opposition from countermovement groups and/or groups that have similar religious beliefs but not the racial ones.

Harper and Le Beau (1993:173) analyzed "social adaptation, a broad summary concept indicating the quality of a movement's relations with its social environment" in marginal religious movements. They distinguished two types of social adaptation, accommodation and problematization. In problematization, the movement "becomes recognized as a 'social problem'" and attracts hostility. High problematization involves both popular and official opposition. Thus while each of the three religious groups discussed in this paper is trying to recruit members, they are also experiencing external opposition that is countering and stigmatizing them. For example, Matt Hale graduated from law school and passed the bar exam, but has not been allowed to practice law. Some suggest the Ruby Ridge tragedy, in which a U.S. Marshal and two members of Randy Weaver's family were killed, was at least partially related to Weaver's religious views and his attendance at Aryan Nations.

However, Harper and Le Beau (1993:188) argue that long-term viability of a marginal religious movement is based more on its religious doctrine and ability to handle divisive internal schisms than to external adaptation. While not dealing with exactly the same type of movement, my research illustrates that the internal religious divide in the white power movement is indeed a key issue of internal adaptation, but one that will be influenced by external forces as well. The viewpoint (Lopez and Espiritu 1990) that suggests religion can be a force for disunity when subgroups have different beliefs seems to be partially supported in this analysis. Religion could be a crucial ingredient in a group's identity when the group shares a distinctive religion. However, in this movement, various religious beliefs are competing, and no one common belief has emerged. Jettisoning religion could mean the loss of at least a part of the collective identity and of the potential energy and strength of joining one's race with one's religion. The importance of whiteness is emphasized in each religion. For example, Christian Identity teaches that whites are God's chosen people. Church of the Creator is a very anti-Christian and anti-Semitic religious orientation founded in America and dedicated to the survival, expansion, and advancement of the white race. It is rooted in images of rugged individuals and individualism, and pioneers and cowboys who conquered and settled the West, although it is also interested in attracting members of the white race worldwide rather than limiting it to the United States. Odinism is a form of neopaganism that reconstructs ancient universalistic religions, arguing for a belief system that springs naturally from the soul of the race.

Although Barkun (1989:418) has suggested that "If any belief may be taken to be both central to and characteristic of contemporary 'white supremacism', it is 'Identity' theology," and Zeskind (1999) considered Christian Identity as "White Nationalism's Theology," it is important to recognize that Identity is not the only religious belief professed by members of the movement and thus is not currently part of the master frame for the entire movement. The extent of the centrality of "Identity" beliefs to this movement needs to be examined further in order to understand the unity and dissent within the movement and the development of collective consciousness. Thus while Christian Identity is certainly key to many, it is not to those believing in other forms of Christianity, Odinism, WCOTC, and those to whom religion is not of importance and/or who believe religion is a matter of individual preference. The conflict between Christian beliefs and non-Christian ones can be seen in reactions to a statement such as "My race is my religion." Several in the movement appear willing to have religion be a personal thing and/or want it not to be part of the movement's focus. Many believe the movement will be strengthened by having one race and one religion combined. Some, especially Christian Identity supporters, see religion as co-equal with race and these members may be less likely to accept religion as a purely personal matter. Whether or not the vast majority of movement members could actually come to accept the idea that religion should remain an individual matter is a difficult and unanswered question. Odinist and Creator criticisms of Christianity and vice versa make it extremely difficult to ignore the religious beliefs of others or simply accept them as individual characteristics. Given the complex relationship between race and religion in this movement, the discussion of the possible roles of the various religious beliefs in any master frame continues unabated.

NOTES

1. This article draws upon two papers presented at the American Sociological Association meetings in 1997 and 2000. I'd like to acknowledge and thank my colleague Stephanie Shanks-Meile who participated with me in the collection of much of the data. Our efforts resulted in a joint publication, "*White Power, White Pride!*" *The White Separatist Movement in the United States* (1997). I wish to thank all those in the white separatist movement who helped me obtain data on the movement, the current and former editors of *JSSR*, Ted Jelen and Ralph Hood, and the anonymous referees. Members of organizations opposed to the movement also provided assistance. For further discussion of the meanings and use of the terms white separatist, white power, white supremacist, and racist in naming this movement, see Dobratz and Shanks-Meile (1997).

2. Kaplan (1998:103) supports this also, stating "The primary religious movements [in the radical right] are Christian Identity, the Church of the Creator, and Odinism/Ásatrú" while recognizing there are other beliefs. He considers two "more controversial" groupings, Satanism and National Socialism, the latter at least as a millennial religion. While I believe National Socialism is a significant feature of white separatism, I, like Rejai (1984), view it as a political ideology. As one anonymous reviewer of this manuscript pointed out, Christian Identity and Odinism are families that have many organized groups that draw upon common scriptures, doctrines, and interpretations whereas WCOTC is centralized with one religious organization and leader (Pontifex Maximus). However, given the centrality of these three religions to the core of the movement, all three will be examined here.
3. As noted by an anonymous reviewer of this manuscript, except for comments about nonwhites, much of the definition by *Jubilee* is similar to that of post-1945 British-Israelism.

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