

Christian Identity

By Phillip Arnn and Rob Bowman

Publications: Books include *Your Heritage, America Free, White and Christian*, and *The Kingdom of God - Our Heritage*. Periodicals include *Posse Comitatus Intelligence-Update*, *America's Promise Newsletter*, *The Way*, and *Scriptures for America Worldwide*.

Organizational Structure: Numerous independent groups.

Group Names: Elohim City, America's Promise, The Church of Jesus Christ Christian/Aryan Nations, Kingdom Identity Ministries, Posse Comitatus, Stone Kingdom Ministries, Christian Conservative Churches, Church of Israel, Scriptures for America/LaPorte Church of Christ, and numerous others.

Unique terms: Identity, Anglo-Israelism, Seedline.

HISTORY

The public perception of Identity has been shaped by media coverage of skinheads, neo-Nazis, and hate crimes against minorities. However, the Identity movement is far more diverse, embracing a growing number of disaffected people in America's heartland. The term "Christian Identity" expresses their belief, supposedly based in Christianity, that the "identity" of the White race is that it is God's chosen people.

The doctrinal seed of Identity was the theory, first popularized by John Wilson's book *Lectures on Our Israelitish Origins* (1840), that the "ten lost tribes of Israel" taken captive by the Assyrians in the eighth century BC had been assimilated into the pagan cultures of Europe and especially Britain. Thus, people of Anglo-Saxon descent were identified as heirs of the promises made to Israel in the Old Testament.¹ Anglo-Israelism was originally not an anti-Semitic doctrine; its advocates typically viewed the Jews as legitimate descendants of Israel along with the Anglo-Saxon peoples. Not all Anglo-Israelites today are anti-Semitic, nor are they all part of the Identity movement.

In the hands of anti-Semites the doctrine of Anglo-Israelism was transformed into an ideology of hate. Leading the way was William J. Cameron, Henry Ford's media spokesman and the editor of Ford's newspaper, *The Dearborn Independent*. Beginning in July of 1920, Cameron ran a series of widely distributed, defamatory articles called "The International Jew."² *The Independent* was based on a fraudulent document titled *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*. The articles were required reading at Ford dealerships across the country and were published in book form. Under public pressure Ford later repudiated the book and closed *The Independent* in 1927.³ Another merchant of hate, Reuben H. Sawyer, was a Ku Klux Klan member who transformed Anglo-Israelism into a virulent racist theology by linking Judaism with Bolshevism.⁴ A number of Klan leaders have adopted Identity theology.

A series of California conferences beginning in the late 1930s brought together the emerging leaders of the Identity movement. One man, Gerald L. K. Smith, organized and gave voice to the next generation of Identity leaders. Smith called for, "the deportation of all Zionists, abolition of all 'Jewish Gestapo organizations,' shipping all black people to Africa, and liquidation of the United Nations."⁵ Many of Smith's co-workers went on to form their own Identity organizations. William Potter Gale, who died in 1988, was one of

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the founders of the Posse Comitatus. A number of Posse members have had run-ins with law enforcement, the most notable being Gordon Kahl, a tax protester who died in a shootout with authorities in 1983. The Posse believes there is no Constitutional governing power greater than the county sheriff.⁶

Dan Gayman is head of the Church of Israel in Schell City, Missouri. He is best known for his work in the “seed line,” or “serpent’s seed” doctrine. Today Gayman is content to preach Identity, non-violence, and apocalyptic survivalism.

Another leader in the Identity movement is Richard Butler, founder of The Aryan Nations at Hayden Lake, Idaho. Butler’s annual Aryan Nations Congress assembled “racialists” (as they prefer to be called) from across the land. Aryan Nations has been active in outreach into prisons. Its publication, *The Way*, was influential in the formation of The Aryan Brotherhood, an Identity prison gang. A number of Butler’s followers left his compound in the early 1980s and joined Robert Mathews to form the infamous group, The Order. In the 1990s, Butler has lost his leadership role due to strong rhetoric without accompanying action.⁷

The “Christian” Identity movement is small in number and lacks central organization and leadership. However, its publications, internet presence, and cable broadcasts reach countless numbers of unseen believers. Its influence is accountable for numerous hate crimes by individual adherents.

DOCTRINES

In general, Identity groups profess to be Christians of a generically Protestant perspective. It is unclear what most Identity followers believe about such essentials as the Trinity or the atonement. What unites these groups is their hostility toward others, notably Jews, Catholics, and people of other races (especially Blacks).

Anglo-Israelism: Identity followers believe that Anglo-Saxons, or more broadly Whites, are the true people of Israel, the true inheritors of the promises made to Abraham and his descendants. For example, *Kingdom Identity Ministries* teaches:

We believe the White, Anglo-Saxon, Germanic and kindred people to be God’s true, literal Children of Israel... This chosen seedline making up the “Christian Nations”...of the earth stands far superior to all other peoples in their call as God’s servant race....and are the “Christians” opposed by the Satanic Anti-Christ forces of this world...⁸

Pre-Adamite Theory: Identity advocates claim not only that Whites are the true Israel, but also that Whites are the true descendants of Adam. People of all other races are said to be descended from human beings created before Adam. These pre-Adamites are equated in Identity teaching with the “beasts of the earth” that God had made before Adam (Genesis 1:24-25). For example, Bertrand Camparet of *Aryan Nations* writes: “God had millions of the pre-Adamic Asiatic and African peoples around. . . . If these Negroes and Mongoloids were all that God wanted, he already had them.”⁹

Serpent’s Seed Doctrine: Most Identity believers hold that Cain was the offspring of Eve and Satan (represented by the serpent). According to this “two seed lines” doctrine, as it is also known, Cain and his descendants intermarried with the pre-Adamites, resulting in a “mongrel” race now known as the Jews. For example, the *Aryan Nations* Web site states: “WE BELIEVE that there are literal children of Satan in the world today. These children are the descendants of Cain, who was the result of Eve’s original sin, her physical seduction by Satan.¹⁰” Likewise, the Web site of *The Posse Comitatus* asserts:

Most, that call themselves jews [sic] today are in fact of the race of Lucifer through his son Cain. Cain was inherently evil from the beginning because he was of Lucifer’s seed. Eve was beguiled by Lucifer and did, in the carnal sense, lay with him and begot Cain. It was a pair on the ground, not an apple on a tree! Eve was deceived by Lucifer and was lead (sic) to believe that she was laying with Yahweh God.¹¹

Armageddon as an Imminent Race War: God’s warning that there would be enmity between the woman’s seed and the serpent’s seed (Genesis 3:15) is interpreted as forecasting

conflict between Whites and non-Whites, especially the Jews. According to Identity belief, there is a centuries-old Jewish conspiracy to control the world. The United States government, the United Nations, and all major social entities are regarded as Jewish puppet organizations. For example, Colonel Jack Mohr of *Crusade for Christ and Country* has stated:

We know they have intimidated and imposed their will on our own government and every government in the nations of Christendom, through their dominance of finance, government, church, education, and the media.¹²

The Identity movement claims that resistance by Whites to this global conspiracy will eventually result in Armageddon. They typically view America as a kind of new Promised Land and as the place where the Whites' final stand against the Jews and other races will take place very soon. At an *Aryan Nations* meeting, Thom Robb, a KKK leader, put it this way:

There is a war in America today and there are two camps. One camp is in Washington, D.C., the federal government controlled by the anti-Christ Jews. . . . [T]heir goal is the destruction of our race, our faith and our people. And our goal is the destruction of them. There is no middle ground. We're not going to take any survivors, or prisoners. It's us or them.¹³

BIBLICAL RESPONSE

Since advocates of the Identity teaching use the Bible to justify their racist views, it is important for Christians to understand what the Bible actually says about these matters. It should be kept in mind, however, that the principal motivations of the Identity movement are political, economic, and emotional.

Anglo-Israelism: The Bible does not support the idea that the ten tribes of the northern kingdom of Israel were "lost" when they were conquered by Assyria. The northern kingdom was destroyed, but a remnant of the people of Israel were preserved (Amos 9:9). Some Israelites fled into the southern kingdom of Judah before and at the time of the Assyrian onslaught, a fact confirmed by archaeological excavations showing that Jerusalem's population swelled at the end of the eighth century B.C.¹⁴ Other Israelites returned to the land years later, either to Judah or the north. "I will bring them again also out of the land of Egypt, and gather them from Assyria; and I will bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon; and place shall not be found for them" (Zech. 10:10).

In the New Testament period the people of Israel, not only of the ten tribes but of all twelve, were scattered, but they were not "lost" or missing in unknown parts of the world. Thus, James could address his epistle "to the twelve tribes scattered abroad" (James 1:1). Paul could refer to the resurrection from the dead as "the promise to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly serve God day and night" (Acts 26:6-7). Anna, the prophetess at the Jerusalem temple who recognized the infant Jesus as the Messiah, was "of the tribe of Asher" (Luke 2:36). Obviously, the tribe of Asher was not lost, nor was it to be found across the continent.

Pre-Adamite Theory: The theory that all non-Whites are descended from a pre-Adamite race of human beings is flatly contradictory to the Bible's teaching. Genesis states, "God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Genesis 1:27). It was "man" as such (that is, mankind, including both "male and female"), not the White man, that God created in his image. That this includes people of all races and nations is clearly affirmed by Paul: "The God who made the world and all things in it . . . He made from one every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth" (Acts 17:24, 26).

The Identity theory that the non-white races are referred to in Genesis as "the beasts of the earth" (Gen. 1:24-25) is, therefore, utterly false. The term refers generally to land animals and is never used in the Bible to refer to humans of any race.

Serpent's Seed Doctrine: The idea that Eve had sexual relations with the serpent, or Satan, or that the serpent was in any way responsible for the conception and birth of Cain, is

totally foreign to the Bible: "And Adam knew his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the Lord" (Genesis 4:1). Here the Holy Spirit explicitly identifies Adam as the biological father of Cain, and makes it clear that Eve regarded Cain's birth as a blessing from God.

Of course, race is completely irrelevant to a person's standing with God. For example, "For you are all the Children of God by faith in Christ Jesus....There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26-28). Also, "after this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands" (Revelation 7:9 and Revelation 5:9).

Armageddon as an Imminent Race War: Contrary to popular opinion, Armageddon in the Bible does not refer to a kind of "World War III" between rival groups of people. In the Book of Revelation, Armageddon represents the gathering of the demonically inspired powers of the nations of the earth, where God brings his wrath on them (Rev. 16:14-21). Nowhere in the Bible is the final judgment of the wicked presented as a battle between peoples of different races.

The Identity teaching does not merely result in a particularly radical (and often violent) form of racism. It utterly negates the gospel of grace. The message of Christianity is that God graciously extends salvation to people irrespective of anything which they might imagine would make them superior to other people. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). The ultimate conflict in this world is not between Whites and non-Whites, but between God and Satan, between righteousness and sin. Our fight is not with "flesh and blood"—with human beings, of any race—but with the spiritual forces of evil that wage war against our souls (Ephesians 6:12). The Identity doctrine perverts Christianity from a redemptive theology into a racist ideology. It is therefore not truly Christian.

RECOMMENDED READING

American Militias by Richard Abanes. Abanes documents the infiltration of racism and religious extremism into the movement and offers suggestions for public response to help defuse the volatility. 296 pages.

Cults, New Religious Movements, And Your Family by Richard Abanes. A good overview of modern aberrant religious movements as well as old religions just now gaining influence in the United States. There is a good section on the Christian Identity Movement. 317 pages

Notes

- ¹ Richard Abanes, *Rebellion, Racism and Religion: American Militias* (InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 1996): 157-9.
- ² Jeffrey Kaplan, *Radical Religion in America* (Syracuse, New York, Syracuse University Press, 1997) 1.
- ³ James Ridgeway, *Blood in the Face*, (New York, Thunder's Mouth Press, 1990): 38-43.
- ⁴ Richard Barkun, *Religion and the Religious Right: The Origins of the Christian Identity Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994): 24-5.
- ⁵ J. Gordon Melton, "The Identity Movement," June 16, 1997, <http://www.americanreligion.org/cultwtch/identity.html> (accessed 1999).
- ⁶ Don Black, "The Watchman Has Been Shut Down," <http://www2.stormfront.org/watchman/index.html> (accessed 1999).
- ⁷ Kaplan, 5-6, 55-6.
- ⁸ See "Doctrinal Statement of Beliefs," <http://www.kingidentity.com/doctrine.html> (accessed 1999).
- ⁹ Bertrand Camparet, *The Cain-Satanic Seed Line* (Hayden Lake, ID: Aryan Nations, n.d.), 5, quoted in Abanes, *American Militias*, 163.
- ¹⁰ *The ARYAN NATIONS* website, <http://www.nidlink.com/~aryanvic/index-E.html> (accessed 1999).
- ¹¹ "Racial Identity," Veritas Vos Liberabit, <http://www.posse-comitatus.org/p2.html> (accessed 1999).
- ¹² Jack Mohr, *Seed of Satan: Literal or Figurative?* as quoted by Viola Larson, "Identity: A 'Christian' Religion for White Racists," *CRI Journal* (Fall 1992): 23.
- ¹³ Thom Robb, in the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*, 22 July 1986, 9A, quoted in Abanes, *American Militias*, 167.
- ¹⁴ Magen Broshi, "Part of the Ten Lost Tribes Located," *Biblical Archeology Review*, 1 (September 1975): 27.



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