

Christian Identity Movement

History, Beliefs and Practices

Identity: “Christian Identity”(or “Identity”) is a diverse and loosely organized movement based on an elaborate belief system that promotes white supremacy and anti-Semitism. Adherents generally embrace the view that Anglo-Saxon whites are the supposed ten lost tribes of Israel (British – Israelism). As a “doctrinal” system of various ideas drawn together, Christian Identity reached its most definable form in the United States in the 1970s. Many Christian Identity groups reject paramilitary activities, but some Christian Identity adherents are members of what has been called the “American Patriot Movement” comprised of groups advocating anti-government political actions, in some cases with the use of arms (paramilitary). Having connections with the often loosely tied but highly committed Christian Identity network are groups such as the following: the Ku Klux Klan, the Covenant, Sword and Arm of the Lord, Aryan Nations, the Church of Israel, Bible Restoration Ministries, Posse Comitatus, and various militia groups.

Founders: Instrumental in developing the teachings of Christian Identity in America were C. A. L. Totten, Howard Rand, and William J. Cameron—editor of Henry Ford’s *Dearborn Independent* (published 1921-1927) who promulgated anti-Semitic views.

Statistics: No reliable statistics on adherents to this movement are available, though as recently as 2003 one agency has identified 31 organized groups in the U.S. (see <http://www.splcenter.org/intel/map/hate.jsp?T=11&m=2>)

History: In the United States the movement emerged on the West Coast in the 1930s and 40s, having its roots in certain aspects of 19th century British or Anglo-Israelism. British-Israelism was founded by John Wilson in England in the 1840s with the publication of his *Lectures on Our Israelitish Origin* (for a history of these developments see Michael Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right: The Origins of the Christian Identity Movement* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994]).

Texts: Bible. Identity believers commonly read the following: *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (a highly disputed work published in Russia in the 1900s) and *The Turner Diaries*, a 1978 novel by white supremacist William Pierce.

Beliefs and Practices:

Beliefs of individuals involved in the Identity movement vary, but they generally subscribe to five basic tenets:

- White people (Aryans) are the Israelites of the Old Testament.
- The Jews are literal descendents of Satan.
- Adam and Eve were not, as mainstream Christianity teaches, the first people. They were the first *white* people.
- All non-Whites (blacks, Asians, Middle Easterners, etc.) are descendants of pre-Adamic races and make up an entirely different species than Caucasians.
- Armageddon, which will be race war between whites and non-whites, is fast approaching. (This summary is taken from Richard Abanes, *American Militias* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996], 155.)

A Lutheran Response

In response to the anti-Semitic views such as those present in Christian Identity, Lutherans emphasize that God “wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4), both Jews and non-Jews. The Gospel is “the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then for the Gentile” (Rom. 1:16). Jesus taught that “salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:22) and He sent his disciples first “to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 10:6; cf 15:24). Jesus the Messiah and our Savior was a Jew and gave up His life on the cross for all that “whoever believes in him shall not perish have eternal life” (John 3:16). Jesus has left all of his followers with the command to love all people, including also their enemies (Matt. 5:44).

In response to racist views, Lutherans affirm St. Paul’s teaching that God created out of one man *all members* of the human family, established their allotted place in human history, and desires that all seek Him. He made “from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17:24, 26). No human being, however distinguishable from a human standpoint, is any less fully God’s creature—created in His image (Gen. 1:26-27; 9:6). God sent His Son Jesus Christ, who became flesh and so identified Himself fully with every member of the human family, to be the Savior of all, in whatever nation or culture they may be found (John 1:14; Rom. 1:3; Matt. 1:1-17; 1 Tim. 2:3-6; Acts 10:35-35). Jesus Christ has removed all barriers that stand between human beings, making peace through His cross (Eph. 2:13-16). In Him “there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:28-29). In summary, the Scriptures know no “pre-Adamic” races that we must label as Satan’s seed. “*All human beings* have sinned in Adam (Rom. 5:12), but are at the same time the objects of God’s redemptive work in Christ (Romans 3).

For Further Reading....

Richard Abanes. *Rebellion, Racism & Religion*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996.

A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *Racism and the Church*, February 1994. (www.lcms.org/ctcr/)

A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *Render Unto Caesar...A Lutheran View of Church and State*, September 1995.

Michael Barkun. *Religion and the Racist Right: The Origins of the Christian Identity Movement*. Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994.

Encyclopedia of American Religions, 5th ed., s.v. “Christian Identity Church,” 539.

“The Christian Identity Movement: A Religion of Hate,” *The Lutheran Witness* (May 2000), 8-11.

Links and Websites

<http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/>

<http://www.americanreligion.org/cultwtch/identity.html>