

Soldiers for Christ

Even before 9/11 and the ISIS attacks in Paris in 2015, Europeans and Americans were learning to live with shocking, disturbing incidents of violence laced with the passion of religion. Prior to the 9/11 attacks in New York and Washington DC, however, the religion associated with most acts of terrorism in the West was not Islam but Christianity. For years the United Kingdom was ravaged by violence committed by both Catholic and Protestant sides in the Northern Ireland dispute and Europe was plagued by attacks by Christian activists against new immigrants from Algeria, Morocco, and the Middle East. The pre-9/11 perpetrators of terrorism in the United States include the Christian militants involved in the shootings at a Jewish day care center in California, the bombing of the Atlanta Olympic Games, the devastation of the Oklahoma City federal building, and a rash of abortion clinic attacks. In the years since 9/11 terrorist attacks by Christians have increased, not only in Africa where they are associated with movements such as Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army, but also in the United States and Europe where they are often related to an ugly xenophobic mood of anger toward Muslim immigrants. In the years since 1990 there have been far more terrorist attacks by Christians than Muslims on European and American soil.

My attempt to understand contemporary religious violence around the world begins in Europe and America with these Christian examples. Although much of the world's attention has been riveted to incidents in

the Middle East, I have chosen to initiate my search with a phenomenon that most American and European readers will find both familiar and strange: Christian militancy in the West. What is familiar is the setting; what is strange is the idea that religious warfare exists in some of the most modern of twentieth-first-century societies. Also surprising, at least to some, is that terrorism has been linked to Christianity.

ANDERS BREIVIK, DEFENDER OF CHRISTENDOM

I received a call from a television producer in Oslo on July 22, 2011, some hours after the horrendous attack by a Norwegian, Anders Breivik, in a youth camp near the capital city. For ninety minutes Breivik was able to stalk his victims and shoot at will, killing sixty-seven by gunshot; another two drowned in the sea trying to escape. The youngest was a girl aged fourteen, and most were teenagers associated with the youth wing of a liberal political party that had embraced multiculturalism as a social virtue. Some were shot as they tried to flee, others were pleading for mercy when they were killed. Watching the reports of the atrocity on television, my silent question was one that most other people must have had at that time: why would anyone do such a horrible thing?

This was the question that the television producer asked when he contacted me by telephone, though by then they had information about a significant clue to the answer. A long rambling manifesto had been posted on the internet within hours of the shooting, purportedly written by “Andrew Berwick,” clearly an Anglicized form of the Norwegian name, Anders Breivik, and it was in English. I asked the producer to send a copy to me immediately by email attachment.

What I received was a strange mess. The manifesto, titled, “2083—A European Declaration of Independence,” ran over fifteen hundred pages, and was a bizarre mixture of diary entries, summaries of books and articles, and a paranoid analysis of European history and politics, focused primarily on what the author thought were the evil influences of feminism, cultural Marxism, and especially Muslim culture. The killing, apparently, was in part an attempt to gain public attention for this incoherent, vituperative essay. For much of that night I sat in my study, reading the manuscript and trying to make sense of it all. The item that first claimed my attention was the title, not just the part about a “European Declaration of Independence” (for what? from whom?) but also the date. What was significant about the year 2083? The title of Breivik’s

manifesto, which was posted on the internet on that day, is 2083, the date that Breivik suggested would be the culmination of a seventy-year war that began with his action. Yet seventy years from 2011 would be 2081—why did he date the final purge of Muslims from Norway to be two years later, in 2083?

I found the answer on page 242 of Breivik's manifesto, where he explains that on 1683 at the Battle of Vienna, the Ottoman Empire military was defeated in a protracted struggle, thereby insuring that most of Europe would not become part of the Muslim empire. The date in Breivik's title is the four hundredth anniversary of that decisive battle, and it appeared that in Breivik's mind he was re-creating the historic efforts to save Europe from what he imagined to be the evils of Islam. The threat of Islam is a dominant motif of the manifesto, and Breivik's sense of urgency in stopping what he imagined to be a Muslim tide surging over Northern Europe is palpable. "The time for dialogue is over," Breivik proclaimed. "The time for armed resistance has come."¹

The enemies in this imagined cosmic war were "the cultural Marxist/multiculturalist elites" whom he regarded as the "Nazis of our time," intent on "leading us [i.e., white Europeans] to the cultural slaughterhouse by selling us into Muslim slavery." Breivik says, threateningly, to the "multiculturalist elite," that "we know who you are, where you live and we are coming for you."

The manifesto is an interesting and eclectic document, something of a scrapbook of everything from his instructions for small-scale farming to a syllabus for a course on revolution that he'd love to see taught (complete with extensive bibliography that includes authors such as Immanuel Wallerstein, Theda Skocpol, and Eric Hobsbawm, and recommends as a textbook the book *Theorizing Revolution*, written by my colleague at Santa Barbara, John Foran). It also includes theoretical and historical overviews of European history and political ideas, and an attempt to explain Muslim ideas and Islamic history, skewed in such a way to make it appear as if this major religious tradition was an ideology intent on controlling the world. The manifesto also includes a manual of how to make terrorist devices and conduct acts of terrorism; it advises on costumes that might be worn, such as a policeman's uniform, and how to avoid detection.

Perhaps the most interesting section is Breivik's chronology, day by day, of the weeks preceding his bombing and massacre on July 22. It ends the chronology with this matter-of-fact statement: "I believe this will be my last entry. It is now Fri July 22nd, 12.51." Moments later he

posted the 1,516-page book to over a thousand email addresses on his contact list and to seven thousand followers on his Facebook site along with a link to a video he had made that was posted on YouTube. Then he drove to downtown Oslo to detonate the bomb that killed eight and shattered major buildings that housed offices of the ruling political party. Afterward he donned his policeman's uniform to gain entrance to the Norwegian Liberal Party's youth camp where he coldly murdered sixty-nine young people.

Like many modern terrorists, his violent act was a performance to show the world that for the moment he was in charge. The terrorist act was a call to arms intended for imagined circle of supporters, and a signal that a cosmic war between existential forces of good and evil had begun. Behind the earthly conflict was the battle for Christendom. As the title of Breivik's manifesto indicates, he thought he was re-creating that historical moment in which Christianity was defended against the hordes, and Islam was purged from what he imagined to be the purity of European society. Breivik was not a pious church-going Christian; proud of his Viking heritage, he described himself as "an Odinist," evoking the name of an ancient Norse god. But he also felt that he was defending the heritage of European Christendom and longed to re-create the Knights Templar, the Crusade-era force that fought against Muslim rule. Like his favorite computer game—*World of Warcraft*—Breivik imagined that he was a hero in a great battle of ancient competing forces.

Breivik meticulously detailed what he expected to be the historical trajectory of this war through four stages, culminating in 2083. He expected that the forces of multiculturalism would be tough, and would resist the efforts to combat it. "It will take us up to 70 years to win," but adds that "there is no doubt in our minds that we will eventually succeed."² In the final phase of the great cosmic war, the civil war between the evil multiculturalists and the righteous few, a series of coup d'états throughout Europe will overthrow the liberal forces. Then, finally "the deportation of Muslims" will begin, and European Christendom will be restored.

Breivik hoped that his manifesto would be the call that would awaken concerned Christians in northern Europe to join this struggle and defeat the forces of multiculturalism and the acceptance of Muslims. The main point of his terrorist attacks, Breivik admitted later, was to draw attention to his manifesto and get people to read it. Though he did achieve this goal, there is no evidence that it persuaded anyone who was not already inclined to do so to join Breivik's cause. Rather, the media portrayed him as a somewhat pathetic figure, and on August 24, 2012, he

was sentenced to what amounted to life imprisonment. The charges were “mass murder, causing a fatal explosion, and terrorism.”

TIMOTHY MCVEIGH AND THE OKLAHOMA CITY FEDERAL BUILDING BOMBING

As I was collecting information about Anders Breivik, I experienced a chilling feeling of déjà vu. Some fifteen years before his attack, another young would-be soldier took it upon himself to create a terrible incident of tragic havoc in an imagined effort to save his country from liberal forces. I was thinking of Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh, and the similarities between him and Norway’s Breivik are striking. Both were good-looking young Caucasians, imagined soldiers in a cosmic war to save Christendom. Both thought their acts of mass destruction would trigger a great battle to rescue society from liberal forces of multiculturalism that allowed non-Christians and nonwhites positions of acceptability. Both regretted the loss of life but thought their actions were “necessary.” For that they were staunchly unapologetic. Their similarities even extend to the kind of explosive used in their actions. Both used a mixture of fuel oil and ammonium nitrate fertilizer which Breivik said he needed for his farm operations. The farm, it turned out, was rented largely because it was a convenient place to test his bombs. And then there is the matter of dates. McVeigh was fixed on the day of April 19, the anniversary of the Waco siege. Breivik chose July 22, which was the day in 1099 that the Kingdom of Jerusalem was established during the First Crusades, and 2083—the title of his manifesto—which was the date that evoked the European standoff against Muslim armies at the gates of Vienna in 1683.

The writing of a manifesto is a major difference between Breivik and McVeigh, who was not a writer; instead McVeigh copied and quoted from his favorite book, the novel *The Turner Diaries*, written by neo-Nazi William Pierce under the pseudonym Andrew Macdonald. This novel explains McVeigh’s motives in a matter eerily similar to the writings of Breivik in his manifesto: McVeigh thought that liberal politicians had given in to the forces of globalization and multiculturalism, and that the “mudpeople” who were nonwhite, non-Christian, nonheterosexual nonpatriarchal males were trying to take over the country. To save the country for Christendom the righteous white, straight, nonfeminist Christian males had to be shocked into reality by the force of an explosion that would signal to them that the war had begun. These were McVeigh’s ideas from *The Turner Diaries*, but they were also Breivik’s.

These ideas are also a part of a Christian subculture in Europe and the United States that imagines that Caucasians have been granted superiority by divine right. This is an idea that is central to a specific movement, Christian Identity, that influenced McVeigh and many other American activists, leading to such violent incidents as the standoff at Ruby Ridge and the killing of a Jewish talk-show host in Denver, Colorado. It was also a part of the thinking of Eric Robert Rudolph, who gained notoriety in the 1990s through a long list of violent incidents with which he was implicated, including bombing abortion clinics in Birmingham, Alabama, and Atlanta, Georgia; blasting a lesbian bar in Atlanta; and exploding a bomb at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics. After five years of hiding out in the Appalachian Mountains, Rudolph was finally captured in 2003 and is serving a series of multiple life sentences. What the terrorist incidents in which he is implicated have in common is their relationship to abortion and homosexuality, which many Christian activists regard as immoral. One of Rudolph's supporters told me in an interview that Rudolph's anger at the Olympic organizers came in part because the carriers of the Olympic torch, which passed through the southern United States on its way to Atlanta, skirted one county in North Carolina that had approved an ordinance declaring that "sodomy is not consistent with the values of the community." Rudolph is said to have interpreted this detour in the torch's journey as a pro-gay stance on the part of the Olympic organizers.³ In a broader sense, however, his supporter told me that Rudolph was concerned about the permissiveness of secular authorities in the United States and "the atheistic internationalism" controlling one side of what his supporter, Rev. Michael Bray, calls "the culture war" in modern society.⁴

These concerns are shared by many Christian activists, but in Rudolph's case they are associated especially with the movement with which Rudolph became familiar in childhood: Christian Identity. At one time he and his mother stayed at the American Identity compound led by Dan Gayman, and there are press reports that Rudolph knew the late Identity preacher Nord Davis. The theology of Christian Identity is based on racial supremacy and biblical law. It has been in the background of such extremist American movements as the Posse Comitatus, the Order, the Aryan Nations, the supporters of Randy Weaver at Ruby Ridge, Herbert Armstrong's Worldwide Church of God, the Freeman Compound, and the World Church of the Creator. It is popular in many militia movements and motivated Buford Furrow in his 1999 assault on a Jewish center in Granada Hills, California.

Christian Identity ideas were most likely also part of the thinking of Timothy McVeigh, who was exposed to Identity thinking through the militia culture with which he was associated and through his awareness of the Christian Identity encampment, Elohim City, on the Oklahoma-Arkansas border. Although there is no evidence that McVeigh was ever affiliated with the commune, phone calls he made to Elohim City in the months before his Oklahoma City federal building bombing are a matter of record, including one made two weeks before the attack.⁵ McVeigh once received a citation for a minor traffic offense ten miles from the commune on the only access road to it. McVeigh also imbibed Identity ideas, or concepts similar to them, through such publications as *The Patriot Report*, an Arkansas-based Christian Identity newsletter that McVeigh received, and perhaps most of all from *The Turner Diaries*.⁶ According to McVeigh's friends, this novel was "his favorite book"; it was "his bible."⁷ According to one gun collector who saw McVeigh frequently at gun shows, he hawked the book at bargain prices to anyone interested in buying it, and always had a copy of it with him.⁸ More to the point, McVeigh's telephone records indicate that despite his denials, he talked several times directly with the author of the novel, including a conversation shortly before the Oklahoma City attack.⁹

The author is William Pierce (1933–2002), who received a Ph.D. from the University of Colorado. For a time Pierce taught physics at Oregon State University, and he once served as a writer for the American Nazi Party. Although he denied affiliation with the Christian Identity movement—and in fact attacked the clubbishness of most Identity groups—Pierce's ideas are virtually indistinguishable from Identity thinking. In 1984 Pierce proclaimed himself the founder of a religious compound very similar to those associated with the Christian Identity movement. He called it the Cosmotheist Community.¹⁰

Pierce's *Turner Diaries*, written under the pseudonym Andrew Macdonald, was the main vehicle for his Identity/Cosmotheist ideas. Published in 1978, it describes an apocalyptic battle between freedom fighters and a dictatorial American government. The novel soon became an underground classic, selling two hundred thousand copies in gun shows and through mail-order catalogs. It served as the blueprint for activists such as Robert Matthews, who was implicated in the 1984 assassination of a Jewish talk-show host in Denver. Matthews, like Timothy McVeigh, seems to have taken seriously the novel's predictions of the encroachment of government control in America and the resistance by a guerrilla band known as "the Order." Matthews called his own

movement “the Order,” and the modus operandi McVeigh used in destroying the Oklahoma City federal building was almost exactly the same as the one used by patriotic guerrillas to attack government buildings in Pierce’s novel.

Although written almost eighteen years before the 1995 Oklahoma City blast, a section of *The Turner Diaries* reads almost like a news account of the horrifying event. It describes in chilling detail how the fictional hero blew up a federal building with a truckload of “a little under 5,000 pounds” of ammonium nitrate fertilizer and fuel oil. Timothy McVeigh’s own truck carried 4,400 pounds of the same mixture, packaged and transported exactly as described in the novel. According to Pierce’s story, the purpose of the bombing was to launch an attack against the perceived evils of the government and to arouse the fighting spirit of all “free men.”¹¹ According to Pierce, such efforts were necessary because of the mindset of dictatorial secularism that had been imposed on American society as the result of an elaborate conspiracy orchestrated by Jews and liberals hell-bent on depriving Christian society of its freedom and its spiritual moorings.

Pierce and Christian Identity activists yearned for a revolution that would undo America’s separation of church and state—or rather, because they disdained the organized Church, they wanted to merge “religion and state” in a new society governed by religious law. This is why so many Identity groups lived together in theocratic societies such as Elohim City, the Freeman Compound, the Aryan Nations compound, and Pierce’s Cosmotheist Community. Although these religious communalists believed in capitalism, many held property in common. They also shared an apocalyptic view of history and an even more conspiratorial view of government than the Reconstructionists. They believed that the great confrontation between freedom and a government-imposed slavery was close at hand and that their valiant, militant efforts could threaten the evil system and awaken the spirit of the freedom-loving masses. These are ideas that came to Timothy McVeigh from William Pierce and *The Turner Diaries* and indirectly from the theories of Christian Identity.

Christian Identity thought originated in the movement of British Israelism in the nineteenth century. According to Michael Barkun, who has written extensively about the movement, one of the founding fathers was John Wilson, whose central work, *Lectures on Our Israelitish Origin*, brought the message to a large British and Irish middle-class audience.¹² Wilson claimed that Jesus had been an Aryan, not a Semite; that

the migrating Israelite tribes from the northern kingdom of Israel were in fact blue-eyed Aryans who somehow ended up in the British Isles; and that the “Lost Sheep of the House of Israel” were none other than present-day Englishmen.¹³ According to later versions of this theory, people who claim to be Jews are imposters. Some versions of Identity thinking regard them as descendants of an illicit sexual act between Eve and Satan; other versions have them as aliens from outer space. In either case, Identity thinking claims that the people known as Jews pretend to be Jews in order to assert their superiority in a scheme to control the world. The Jews’ plot is allegedly supported by the secret Protestant order of Freemasons.

British Israelism came to the United States in the early twentieth century through the teachings of the evangelist Gerald L.K. Smith and the writings of William Cameron, a publicist for the automobile magnate Henry Ford.¹⁴ Ford himself supported many of Cameron’s views and published a book of anti-Semitic essays written by Cameron but attributed to Ford, *The International Jew: The World’s Foremost Problem*. Cameron conveyed such Christian Identity tenets as the necessity for the Anglo-Saxon race to retain its purity and political dominance, and the need for western societies to establish a biblical basis for governance. The Christian Identity philosophy was promoted further by Bertram Comparet, a deputy district attorney in San Diego, and Wesley Swift, a Ku Klux Klan member who founded the Church of Jesus Christ-Christian in 1946. This church was the basis for the Christian Defense League, organized by Bill Gale at his ranch in Mariposa, California, in the 1960s, a movement that spawned both the Posse Comitatus and the Aryan Nations.¹⁵

British Israelism appealed to the elite of nineteenth-century British society, but by the time these ideas came to the United States, the ideology had taken a more strident and political turn. Most of the followers of Christian Identity were relatively benign, and according to Jeffrey Kaplan, who studied contemporary Christian Identity groups in the American Midwest and Northwest, their ideas tended to be simplified in the public mind and the groups reduced to the ranks of “monsters” in America’s right-wing fringe.¹⁶ Though that may be true, the fact remains that the ideology lies behind some of the more heinous groups and actions in American society in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

In recent decades the largest concentration of Christian Identity groups in the United States was in Idaho—centered on the Aryan Nations compound near Hayden Lake—and in the southern Midwest near the

Oklahoma-Arkansas-Missouri borders. In that location a Christian Identity group called the Covenant, the Sword, and the Arm of the Lord (CSA) established a 224-acre community and a paramilitary school, which it named the Endtime Overcomer Survival Training School.¹⁷ Nearby, Christian Identity minister Robert Millar and former Nazi Party member Glenn Miller established Elohim City, whose members stockpiled weapons and prepared themselves for “a Branch Davidian-type raid” by the U.S. government’s Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms.¹⁸ It was this Christian Identity encampment that Timothy McVeigh contacted shortly before the Oklahoma City federal building blast.

The American incarnation of Christian Identity incorporated many of the British movement’s paranoid views, updated to suit the social anxieties of many contemporary Americans. For instance, the United Nations and the Democratic Party were alleged to be accomplices in a Jewish-Freemason conspiracy to control the world and deprive individuals of their freedom. In a 1982 Identity pamphlet, Jews were described as “parasites and vultures” who controlled the world through international banking.¹⁹ The establishment of the International Monetary Fund, the introduction of magnetized credit cards, and the establishment of paper money not backed by gold or silver were listed as the final steps in “Satan’s Plan.”²⁰

Gun control is also an important issue to Christian Identity supporters, since they believe that this is how the “Jewish-UN-liberal conspirators,” as they call them, intend to eliminate the last possibilities of rebellion against centralized power. These “conspirators” are thought to be hell-bent on depriving individuals of the weapons they might use to defend themselves or free their countrymen from a tyrannical state. This obsession with gun control has made many Christian Identity followers natural allies with the National Rifle Association. The rhetoric of the NRA has played a significant role in legitimizing Christian Identity members’ fears of the evil intentions behind governmental gun control and has provided a public voice for their paranoid views.

By the late 1990s the Christian Identity movement had become publicly identified as one of the leading voices of America’s radical right. At that time the dean of the movement was Richard Butler, a former Presbyterian minister often described as “the elder statesman of American hate.”²¹ Although Butler’s Aryan Nations compound in Idaho consisted of only a handful of supporters on a twenty-acre farm, its website received over five hundred hits daily. Moreover, the movement received an infusion of financial support from two Silicon Valley entrepreneurs,

Carl E. Story and R. Vincent Bertolini. Their organization, the Eleventh Hour Remnant Messenger, is said to have spent a million dollars promoting Christian Identity ideas as of 1999, and to have had access to fifty million more. One of the projects they funded was the mass mailing of a videotape featuring Butler presenting his Christian Identity theory of “Adam’s pure blood seed-line,” and the alleged global conspiracy to destroy it.²² Loosely affiliated to the compound were groups such as Robert Matthews’s “Order.”

At the extreme fringes of the Christian Identity movement are rogue terrorists. Some are like Buford Furrow, who once lived in Butler’s compound and married Matthews’s widow, and Benjamin Smith, the 1999 Fourth of July sniper in Illinois and Indiana, who belonged to an Identity-like church that eschews other Identity groups and, for that matter, all of Christianity. Others are like Timothy McVeigh, whose group was virtually an anti-organization: a nameless, close-knit cadre.

But Christian Identity is not the only deviant Christian ideology that lies behind acts of terrorism in the United States. Others are related to the Christian Reconstruction teachings, and many of these terrorist attacks have targeted clinics that offer abortion services. The activists are not just prolife, however; they support a radical agenda of refashioning America society around Calvinist notions of Christian politics, attempts to make America a truly Christian nation.

MICHAEL BRAY AND ABORTION CLINIC BOMBINGS

It was “a cold February night” when Rev. Michael Bray and a friend drove a yellow Honda from his home in Bowie to nearby Dover, Delaware. The trunk of the car held a cargo of ominous supplies: a cinder block to break a window, cans of gasoline to pour in and around a building, and rags and matches to ignite the flames. The road to Delaware was foggy and the bridge across Chesapeake Bay was icy. The car skidded and a minor accident occurred, but the pair were determined to forge ahead. “Before day-break,” Bray said, “the only abortion chamber in Dover was gutted by fire and put out of the business of butchering babies.”²³ In the following year, 1985, Bray and two other defendants stood trial for destroying seven abortion facilities in Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia, with a total of over one million dollars in damages. He was convicted of these charges and served prison time until May 15, 1989.

When I talked with Rev. Bray in his suburban home in Bowie many years later, I found nothing sinister or intensely fanatical about him. He

was a cheerful, charming, handsome man in his early forties who liked to be called Mike. Hardly the image of an ignorant, narrow-minded fundamentalist, Mike Bray enjoyed a glass of wine before dinner and talked knowledgeably about theology and politics.²⁴

This demeanor was quite different from his public posture. Prior to one of my interviews with Bray he had just appeared on the American television show *Nightline*, in a program focusing on anti-abortion acts of terrorism.²⁵ The host of the program had accused Bray of being the author of the underground manual *Army of God*, which provides detailed instructions for various forms of destruction and sabotage aimed at abortion facilities. Bray did not deny the accusation, but he did not admit to it either. When I talked with Bray a few days later and asked him about the authorship of the document, he repeated his noncommittal stance but was able to show me a copy of the manual he happened to have on file. It was written in his own characteristically jaunty and satirical style, and I suspected that the television moderator's accusation was correct. Bray's identification with the Army of God movement was established in his trial some years ago when the initials AOG were found on abortion buildings that he was accused of having torched. When I asked Bray why, if he had not written it, he would hesitate to deny his authorship of the booklet, he said that "it was good to show solidarity with anyone who is being maligned for writing such a book."²⁶

Whether or not he was the author, Bray clearly sympathized with the ideas in the manual. As a leader in the Defensive Action movement, Michael Bray has justified the use of violence in anti-abortion activities, although his attacks on abortion clinics have been considered extreme even by members of the prolife movement. The same has been said of his acknowledged writings. From 1991 to 2002 Bray published one of the country's most militant Christian newsletters, *Capitol Area Christian News*, which focused on abortion, homosexuality, and what Bray regards as the federal government's pathological abuse of power.

Bray was the spokesman for two activists who were convicted of murderous assaults on abortion clinic staffs. Bray's friend, Rev. Paul Hill, killed Dr. John Britton and his volunteer escort James Barrett as they drove up to the Ladies Center, an abortion clinic in Pensacola, Florida, in 1994. Several years earlier another member of Bray's network of associates, Rachelle ("Shelly") Shannon, a housewife from rural Oregon, also confessed to a string of abortion clinic bombings. She was convicted of attempted murder for shooting and wounding Dr. George Tiller as he drove away from his clinic in Wichita, Kansas. When

Tiller was finally murdered in 2009 by Scott Roeder while attending church services, Bray applauded the act and wrote on his website that “the decision to abort an abortionist is a *good* thing because such action saves *real* lives” (italics in the original).²⁷ Bray wrote the definitive book on the ethical justification for anti-abortion violence, *A Time to Kill*, which defended his own acts of terrorism, the murders of abortion clinic doctors, and the attempted murder by Shannon.²⁸ And yet in person Rev. Michael Bray is in many ways an affable and interesting man.

Mike Bray had always been active, he told me, having been raised in a family focused around sports, church activities, and military life. His father was a naval officer who served at nearby Annapolis, and Mike grew up expecting to follow in his father’s military footsteps. An athletic hero in high school, he took the most popular girl in class to the senior prom. Her name was Kathie Epstein—who Americans would later know as the Kathie Lee, a nationally known singer and television talk-show figure, hosting a morning program with Regis Philbin. Mike’s own career was marked by less obvious attributes of success. He attended Annapolis for a year and then dropped out, living what he described as a “prodigal” life. He searched for religion as a solution to his malaise and was for a time tempted by the Mormons. Then the mother of his old girlfriend, Kathie Lee, steered him toward Billy Graham and the born-again experience of evangelical Christianity. Mike was converted and went to Colorado to study in a Baptist Bible college and seminary.

Yet Bray never quite rejected the Lutheranism of his upbringing. So when he returned to Bowie, he rejoined his childhood church and became the assistant pastor. When the national Lutheran churches merged, Bray led a faction of the local church that objected to what it regarded as the national church’s abandonment of the principle of scriptural literalism. Seeing himself as a crusader, Mike and his group of ten families split off and in 1984 formed the Reformation Lutheran Church, an independent group affiliated with the national Association of Free Lutheran Congregations. Years later, Bray’s church remained a circle of about fifty people without its own building. The church operated out of Bray’s suburban home until he moved to Wilmington, Ohio, in 2003: Bray remodeled the garage into a classroom for a Christian elementary school, where he and his wife taught a small group of students.

Increasingly in the 1990s, Mike Bray’s real occupation became social activism. Supported by his wife, members of the church, and his volunteer associate pastor, Michael Colvin—who held a Ph.D. in classics from the University of Indiana and worked in the federal health care

administration—Mike and his followers launched anti-abortion crusades and tapped into a growing national network of like-minded Christian activists. They became concerned that the federal government—particularly the attorney general in the Clinton administration, whom Mike, referring to the U.S. government standoff against a religious cult in Waco, Texas, called “Janet Waco Reno”—was undermining individual freedoms and moral values. He saw American society in a state of utter depravity, over which its elected officials presided with an almost satanic disregard for truth and human life. He viewed President Bill Clinton and other politicians as “neopagans,” sometimes comparing them to Hitler. The Nazi image pervaded Bray’s understanding of how ethically minded people should respond to such a threat. Regarding the activities that led to his prison conviction, Bray has “no regrets.” “Whatever I did,” he said, “it was worth it.”

According to Bray, Americans live in a situation “comparable to Nazi Germany,” a state of hidden warfare, and the comforts of modern society have lulled the populace into a lack of awareness of the situation. Bray was convinced that if there were some dramatic event, such as economic collapse or social chaos, the demonic role of the government would be revealed, and people would have “the strength and the zeal to take up arms” in a revolutionary struggle. What he envisioned as the outcome of that struggle was the establishment of a new moral order in America, one based on biblical law and a spiritual, rather than a secular, social compact.

Until this new moral order is established, Bray said, he and others like him who are aware of what is going on and have the moral courage to resist it are compelled to take action. According to Bray, Christianity gave him the right to defend innocent “unborn children,” even by use of force, whether it involves “destroying the facilities that they are regularly killed in, or taking the life of one who is murdering them.” By the latter, Bray meant killing doctors and other clinical staff involved in performing abortions.

Bray defended the 1994 actions of his friend Rev. Paul Hill, in killing Dr. John Britton and his escort. Bray’s theological justifications were echoed by Hill himself. “You may wonder what it is like to have killed an abortionist and his escort,” Hill wrote to Bray and his other supporters after the killings.²⁹ “My eyes were opened to the enormous impact” such an event would have, he wrote, adding that “the effect would be incalculable.” Hill said that he opened his Bible and found sustenance in Psalms 91: “You will not be afraid of the terror by night, or of the

arrow that flies by day.” Hill interpreted this as an affirmation that his act was biblically approved.

When I suggested to Bray that carrying out such violent actions is tantamount to acting as both judge and executioner, Bray demurred. Although he did not deny that a religious authority has the right to pronounce judgment over those who broke the moral law, he explained that attacks on abortion clinics and the killing of abortion doctors were essentially defensive rather than punitive acts. According to Bray, “there is a difference between taking a retired abortionist and executing him, and killing a practicing abortionist who is regularly killing babies.” The first act is in Bray’s view retributive, the second defensive. According to Bray, the attacks were aimed not so much at punishing clinics and abortionists for their actions as at preventing them from “killing babies,” as Bray put it. He was careful to say that he did not advocate the use of violence, but morally approved of it in some instances. He was “prochoice,” as he put it ironically, regarding the use of violence for certain ends which he saw as moral.

CHRISTIAN JUSTIFICATIONS FOR VIOLENCE

Bray found support for his position in actions undertaken during the Nazi regime in Europe. His moral exemplar in this regard was the German theologian and Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who abruptly terminated his privileged research position at Union Theological Seminary in New York to return to Germany and clandestinely join a plot to assassinate Hitler. The plot was uncovered before it could be carried out, and Bonhoeffer, the brilliant young ethical theorist, was hanged by the Nazis. His image of martyrdom and his theological writings lived on, however, and Bonhoeffer has often been cited by moral theorists as an example of how Christians could undertake violent actions for a just cause and how occasionally they are constrained to break laws for a higher purpose.

These were positions also held by one of Bonhoeffer’s colleagues at Union Theological Seminary, Reinhold Niebuhr, whom Bray also cited. Often touted as one of the greatest Protestant theologians of the twentieth century, Niebuhr wrestled with one of Christianity’s oldest ethical problems: when it is permissible to use force—even violence—on behalf of a righteous cause. Niebuhr began his career as a pacifist, but in time he grudgingly began to accept the position that a Christian, acting for the sake of justice, could use a limited amount of violence.³⁰

Niebuhr was drawing on a strain of religious activism that went back to Christianity's origins. The tradition emerged in the context of revolutionary struggles against the Roman occupation of Israel. The New Testament indicates that at least two of Jesus' disciples were members of the rebellious Jewish party the Zealots. Scholars dispute whether or not the Jesus movement was considered antigovernment at the time, but the New Testament clearly records that the Roman colonial government charged Jesus with sedition, found him guilty, and executed him for the crime.³¹

Did Jesus in fact support the violent overthrow of the Roman occupation? The answer to that question is unclear, and the controversy over whether Christianity sanctions violence has hounded the Church from its earliest days. It can be argued that Christians were expected to follow Jesus' example of selfless love, to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt. 5:44). Evidence for the other side comes from such incidents as Jesus driving the money changers from the temple and such enigmatic statements as Jesus' dark prophecy, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have come not to bring peace but a sword" (Matt. 10:34; see also Luke 12:51–52). The early Church fathers, including Tertullian and Origen, asserted that Christians were constrained from taking human life, a principle that prevented Christians from serving in the Roman army. Thus the early Christians were essentially pacifists.

When Christianity vaulted into the status of state religion in the fourth century C.E., Church leaders began to reject pacifism and accept the doctrine of just war, an idea first stated by Cicero and later developed by Ambrose and Augustine.³² This idea justified the use of military force under certain conditions, including proportionality—the expectation that more lives would be saved by the use of force than would be lost—and legitimacy, the notion that the undertaking must be approved by an established authority. The abuse of the concept in justifying military adventures and violent persecutions of heretical and minority groups led Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century to reaffirm that war was always sinful, even if it was occasionally waged for a just cause. Remarkably, the just-war theory still stands today as the centerpiece of Christian understanding concerning the moral use of violence.³³ Some modern Christian theologians have adapted the theory of just war to liberation theology, arguing that the Church can embrace a "just revolution."³⁴

Reinhold Niebuhr showed the relevance of just-war theory to social struggles in the twentieth century by relating the idea to what he

regarded as the Christian requirement to fulfill social justice. Viewing the world through the lens of what he called “realism,” Niebuhr concluded that moral suasion is not sufficient to combat social injustices, especially when they are buttressed by corporate and state power. For this reason, he explained in a seminal essay, *Why the Christian Church Is Not Pacifist*, that it is at times necessary to abandon nonviolence in favor of a more forceful solution.³⁵ Building his case on Augustine’s understanding of original sin, Niebuhr argued that righteous force is sometimes necessary to extirpate injustice and subdue evil in a sinful world, and that small strategic acts of violence are occasionally necessary to deter large acts of violence and injustice. If violence is to be used in such situations, Niebuhr explained, it must be used sparingly and as swiftly and skillfully as a surgeon’s knife.³⁶

In addition to the “just war,” however, there are other, less legitimate examples of religious violence from Christianity’s heritage, including the Inquisitions and the Crusades. The thirteenth-century Inquisitions were the medieval Church’s attempt to root out heresy, involving torture of the accused and sentences that included burning at the stake. The Spanish Inquisition in the fifteenth century was aimed largely at Jews and Muslims who had converted to Christianity but were investigated to see if the conversions were sincere; again, torture and death were standard features of these spurious trials. The nine Crusades—which began in 1095 with Pope Urban II’s plea for Christians to rise up and retake the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, which had fallen into Muslim hands, and ended some three centuries later—were punctuated with the Christian battle cry “Deus volt” (“God wills it”). As the armies moved through Europe on their way to the Holy Land, they gathered the poor and desperate for quixotic ventures that led to virtually no military conquests of lasting value. They did, however, lead to the deaths of thousands of innocent Muslims and Jews. Today the memory of this tragic period in Christian history is evoked in the epithet “crusader,” applied to anyone committed to a cause with excessive zeal.

One might think of the Crusades when one considers the religious commitment of anti-abortion activists such as Rev. Michael Bray who turn to violence in their war with abortion clinic staff and their defenders, the secular state. Bray, however, found refuge not in the historical example of the Crusades but in the ethical justification offered by Niebuhr, along with the example of Christian sacrifice in the assassination attempt by Bonhoeffer. These modern liberal Christian defenders of the just role of violence gave Bray the impression that Christian theology

has supported his own efforts to bring about social change through violent acts.

But Bray radically differs from Niebuhr and Bonhoeffer theologically and in his interpretation of the contemporary situation—comparing America’s democratic state to Nazism and advocating a biblically based religious politics to replace the secular government. It is unlikely that Bray’s positions would be accepted by these or any other theologian within mainstream Protestant thought. Bonhoeffer and Niebuhr, like most modern theologians, accepted the principle of the separation of church and state; they felt that separation is necessary to the integrity of both institutions. Niebuhr was especially wary of what he called “moralism”—the intrusion of religious or other ideological values into the political calculations of state-craft.

To support his ideas about religious politics, therefore, Bray had to look beyond mainstream Protestant thought. Rejecting Bonhoeffer’s and Niebuhr’s “affliction” with moderate neo-orthodox theology, Bray found intellectual company in a group of writers associated with the more conservative Dominion Theology, the position that Christianity must reassert the dominion of God over all things, including secular politics and society. This point of view—articulated by such right-wing Protestant spokespersons as Rev. Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson—led to a burst of social and political activism in the Christian right beginning in the 1980s and continuing into the twenty-first century.

The Christian anti-abortion movement is permeated with ideas from Dominion Theology. Randall Terry, founder of the militant anti-abortion organization Operation Rescue and a writer for the Dominion magazine *Crosswinds*, signed the magazine’s “Manifesto for the Christian Church.” This manifesto asserted that America should “function as a Christian nation” and opposed such “social moral evils” of secular society as “abortion on demand, fornication, homosexuality, sexual entertainment, state usurpation of parental rights and God-given liberties, statist-collectivist theft from citizens through devaluation of their money and redistribution of their wealth, and evolutionism taught as a monopoly viewpoint in the public schools.”³⁷

At the extreme right wing of Dominion Theology is a relatively obscure theological movement that Mike Bray found particularly appealing: Reconstruction Theology, whose exponents long to create a Christian theocratic state.³⁸ Bray had studied their writings extensively and possessed a shelf of books written by Reconstruction authors. The convicted anti-abortion killer Paul Hill cited Reconstruction theo-

gians in his own writings and once studied with a founder of the movement, Greg Bahnsen, at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi.³⁹

Leaders of the Reconstruction movement trace their ideas, which they sometimes called “theonomy,” to Cornelius Van Til, a twentieth-century Presbyterian professor of theology at Princeton Seminary who took seriously the sixteenth-century ideas of the Reformation theologian John Calvin regarding the necessity for presupposing the authority of God in all worldly matters. Followers of Van Til, including his former students Bahnsen and Rousas John Rushdoony, and Rushdoony’s son-in-law Gary North adopted this “presuppositionalism” as a doctrine, with all its implications for the role of religion in political life.

Reconstruction writers regard the history of Protestant politics since the early years of the Reformation as having taken a bad turn, and they are especially unhappy with the Enlightenment formulation of church-state separation. They feel it necessary to “reconstruct” Christian society by turning to the Bible as the basis for a nation’s law and social order. To propagate these views, the Reconstructionists established the Institute for Christian Economics in Tyler, Texas, and the Chalcedon Foundation in Vallecito, California. They publish a journal and a steady stream of books and booklets on the theological justification for interjecting Christian ideas into economic, legal, and political life.⁴⁰

According to the most prolific Reconstruction writer, Gary North, it is “the moral obligation of Christians to recapture every institution for Jesus Christ.”⁴¹ He feels this to be especially so in the United States, where secular law as construed by the Supreme Court and defended by liberal politicians is moving in what Rushdoony and others regard as a decidedly un-Christian direction, particularly in matters regarding abortion and homosexuality. What the Reconstructionists ultimately want, however, is more than the rejection of secularism. Like other theologians who utilize the biblical concept of “dominion,” they reason that Christians, as the new chosen people of God, are destined to dominate the world.

The Reconstructionists possess a “postmillennial” view of history. That is, they believe that Christ will return to earth only after the thousand years of religious rule that characterizes the Christian idea of the millennium, and therefore Christians have an obligation to provide the political and social conditions that will make Christ’s return possible. “Premillennialists,” on the other hand, hold the view that the thousand years of Christendom will come only after Christ returns, an event that

will occur in a cataclysmic moment of world history. Therefore they tend to be much less active politically. Followers of Reconstruction Theology such as Mike Bray, Dominion theologians, such as the American politician and television host Pat Robertson, and many leaders of the politically active Christian Coalition are postmillennialists and hence believe that a Christian kingdom must be established on earth before Christ's return. They take seriously the idea of a Christian society and a form of religious politics that will make biblical code the law of the United States.

In my conversations with Mike Bray, he insisted that the idea of a society based on Christian morality was not a new one, and he emphasized the *re-* in *reconstruction*. Although Bray rejected the idea of a pope, he appreciated much of the Roman Catholic Church's social teachings and greatly admired the tradition of canon law. Only recently in history, he observed, has the political order in the West not been based on biblical concepts. Since he is opposed to this disestablishment of the political role of the Church, Bray labels himself an "antidisestablishmentarian."

Bray was serious about bringing Christian politics into power. He said that it is possible, under the right conditions, for a Christian revolution to sweep across the United States and bring in its wake constitutional changes that would allow for biblical law to be the basis of social legislation. Failing that, Bray envisaged a new federalism that would allow individual states to experiment with religious politics on their own. When I asked Bray what state might be ready for such an experiment, he hesitated and then suggested Louisiana and Mississippi, or, he added, "maybe one of the Dakotas."

Not all Reconstruction thinkers have endorsed the use of violence, especially the kind that Bray and Hill have justified. As Reconstruction author Gary North admitted, "there is a division in the theonomic camp" over violence, especially with regard to anti-abortion activities. Some months before Paul Hill killed Dr. Britton and his escort, Hill—apparently hoping for Gary North's approval in advance—sent a letter to North along with a draft of an essay he had written justifying the possibility of such killings in part on theonomic grounds. North ultimately responded, but only after the murders had been committed. North regretted that he was too late to deter Hill from his "terrible direction" and chastised Hill in an open letter, published as a booklet, denouncing Hill's views as "vigilante theology."⁴² According to North, biblical law provides exceptions to the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" (Exod. 20:13), but in terms similar to just-war doctrine: when one is authorized to do so by "a covenantal agent" in wartime, to defend

one's household, to execute a convicted criminal, to avenge the death of one's kin, to save an entire nation, or to stop moral transgressors from bringing bloodguilt on an entire community.⁴³

Hill and Bray responded to North's letter. They argued that many of those conditions applied to the abortion situation in the United States. Writing from his prison cell in Starke, Florida, Paul Hill said that the biblical commandment against murder also "requires using the means necessary to defend against murder—including lethal force."⁴⁴ He went on to say that he regarded "the cutting edge of Satan's current attack" to be "the abortionist's knife," and therefore his actions had ultimate theological significance.⁴⁵ Bray, in his book, *A Time to Kill*, spoke to North's concern about the authorization of violence by a legitimate authority or "a covenantal agent," as North put it. Bray raised the possibility of a "righteous rebellion."⁴⁶ Just as liberation theologians justify the use of unauthorized force for the sake of their vision of a moral order, Bray sees the legitimacy of using violence not only to resist what he regards as murder—abortion—but also to help bring about the Christian political order envisioned by Reconstruction thinkers such as Gary North. In Bray's mind, a little violence is a small price to pay for the possibility of fulfilling God's law and establishing His kingdom on earth.

The world as envisioned by Timothy McVeigh, Buford Furrow, Benjamin Smith, William Pierce, Richard Butler, and Michael Bray—by followers of both Christian Identity and Reconstruction thought—is a world at war. Identity preachers cite the biblical accounts of the archangel Michael destroying the offspring of evil to point to a hidden albeit "cosmic" war between the forces of darkness and the forces of light.⁴⁷ Reconstruction thinkers also see the world enmeshed in a great moral struggle. "There is murder going on," Mike Bray explained, "which we have to stop." In the Christian Identity view of the world, the struggle is a secret war between colossal evil forces allied with the United Nations, the United States, and other government powers, and a small band of the enlightened few who recognize these invisible enemies for what they are—satanic powers, in their view—and are sufficiently courageous to battle them. Although Bray rejects much of Christian Identity's conspiratorial view of the world, and specifically decries its anti-Semitism, he does appreciate its commitment to fight against secular forms of evil and its insistence on the need for a Christian social order.

As Mike Bray explained, his justification of violence against abortion clinics is not the result of a personal vendetta against agencies with which he and others have moral differences, but the consequence of a

grand religious vision. His position is part of a great crusade conducted by a Christian subculture in America that considers itself at war with the larger society, and to some extent victimized by it. Armed with the theological explanations of Reconstruction and Christian Identity writers, this subculture sees itself justified in its violent responses to a vast and violent repression waged by secular (and, in some versions of this vision, Jewish) agents of a satanic force.

Mike Bray and his network of associates around the country see themselves as engaged in violence not for its own sake but as a response to the institutional violence of what they regard as a repressive secular government. When he is alleged to have poured gasoline on rags and ignited fires to demolish abortion clinics, therefore, those within his culture did not view this as an assault on civil liberties or as a vengeful and hateful crime. Instead, Bray was seen as firing the opening salvos in a great defensive Christian struggle against the secular state, a contest between the forces of spiritual truth and heathen darkness, in which the moral character of America as a righteous nation hangs in the balance.

IAN PAISLEY AND THE TROUBLES IN BELFAST

This notion of a great struggle also lies behind the thinking of at least some activists on each side of the so-called troubles of Northern Ireland, an area racked by terrorist attacks from the early 1960s to the end of the century. When firebombs tore through two shops and a pub in Belfast on August 2, 1998—and an enormous car bomb two weeks later obliterated the nearby neighborhood of Omagh, killing twenty-four—it was clear that the fragile peace agreement negotiated earlier in the year by a former senator from the United States, George Mitchell, had not yet brought lasting peace to the region. On one side of the troubles were Irish nationalists who wish to absorb the six counties of Northern Ireland into the Republic of Ireland; on the other side were Protestants who lived in Northern Ireland for generations and wanted to maintain the loyalty of the region to the British Union. Yet though the conflict was between Catholics and Protestants, most observers questioned to what degree religion was actually at the heart of the dispute.

This is the question I put to a leading member of the nationalist Sinn Féin party in Belfast two days before the firebombs exploded. The Sinn Féin leader, Tom Hartley, had been a comrade of Gerry Adams and Bobby Sands since the 1970s, and when I talked with him he was serving as the leader of the party in the Belfast city council, where he served

as an elected councillor.⁴⁸ Hartley was an articulate, thoughtful man with a thick head of hair and an even thicker Irish brogue. The blue-jeans and open shirt he was wearing were more in keeping with his working-class headquarters in the war zone of Belfast's Falls Road, which I had visited the day before. The building had been barricaded with large rocks to keep car bombs from exploding in front of the headquarters. Hartley's other office was in the elegant surroundings of the Belfast City Hall, which looked vaguely like a miniature version of the U.S. Capitol building. In a workroom near the gleaming marble rotunda, the Catholic activist fixed a cup of coffee and speculated about the religious aspects of the Northern Irish conflict.

Hartley said that he basically agreed with his colleague Gerry Adams that republicans like himself were engaged in an anticolonial struggle that had nothing to do with religion.⁴⁹ They simply wanted the British out. The problem, Hartley explained, was that the conflict had been made into a religious dispute by the British a century ago when they encouraged large numbers of Protestants from Scotland and England to settle in the Northern Irish counties. The result, Hartley said, was tension between peoples with two different religious labels, and more than that, between two different ways of thinking. Hartley speculated that some of the trouble between the two communities was due to differences in what he called the "thought processes" of the religions and in the characteristics of Roman Catholic and Protestant cultures.

Catholics like himself were "hierarchical," Hartley explained, adding that it was a hallmark of Catholic thinking to assume that all Catholics in a region such as Ireland are part of a unified community, the leaders of which can generally count on the loyalty of their people. When Gerry Adams participated in peace negotiations earlier in 1998, he could do so in secret, Hartley said, knowing that his party would stand behind him even if they did not know what the terms of his agreement would be. Adams acted "like an archbishop," Hartley acknowledged, and yet his Sinn Féin comrades approved of his position.

The Irish Protestants, on the other hand, would never do such a thing. They were democratic "up their arse, if you don't mind my saying so," Hartley said. As a result, they were constantly looking for local bases of power and did not easily trust other groups or authorities. Hartley explained that even though the Protestants had been nasty to him and other Catholics, he observed with some surprise that "they were even nastier to each other." Their leadership was based not on office but on charisma, which was powerful but ephemeral. Once these leaders died or

were defeated, Hartley speculated, “you’ll see a dogfight” among Protestants to determine their successors. The Omagh attack by the “Real IRA” showed that Catholics were capable of holding dogfights themselves, since the extremist Catholic attack was aimed at Gerry Adams as much as at the Protestant and government opposition. Yet Hartley’s point was valid. In general, Adams had much broader support within the Catholic community than did any single leader within the quarreling Protestant camp.

Perhaps none of these Protestant figures was more quarrelsome than the Rev. Ian Paisley. Hartley agreed that Paisley, perhaps more than any other figure in the Catholic-Protestant dispute, brought religion into the politics of Northern Ireland and employed religious ideas and images in legitimizing the use of violence. Paisley was a firebrand Protestant preacher who was born into a Baptist family of Scottish ancestry in Northern Ireland in 1926.⁵⁰ Eventually he broke with the established Protestant denominations and founded the Free Presbyterian Church, for which his own Martyrs Memorial Church on Ravenhill Road, Belfast, is the flagship congregation.

When I was shown around the sanctuary of the church by members of Paisley’s staff, I was struck not only by the Protestant simplicity of the attractive modern building but also by the stark images of nationalism. On either side of the pulpit was a flag: the Union Jack on the preacher’s right and the flag of Ulster (Northern Ireland) on his left, with a crown at its center. To the side of the podium were plaques. “For God and Ulster” read one, and another was a memorial to those Protestants who had fallen in defense of Northern Ireland’s union with the United Kingdom. In a corridor outside the sanctuary were busts of what Paisley called “the great martyrs” of the Protestant tradition, including Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley, and George Whitefield. In another room in the church a series of windows featured significant moments in the life of Ian Paisley himself, forever etched as images in the glass.

This was one side of Paisley, the stormy egomaniacal preacher who was so annoyed with Margaret Thatcher’s peaceful overtures to the Irish Republican Army that he condemned her in a prayer during his Sunday morning service. “O God,” Paisley intoned, “in wrath take vengeance upon this wicked, treacherous, lying woman.” Then, as if to goad God more quickly into action, Paisley prayed, “Grant that we shall see a demonstration of Thy Power.”⁵¹ It is open to question whether God ever assented to Paisley’s requests and performed acts of vengeance on moderate British leaders; Irish Catholics; members of the IRA and officers in their political party, Sinn Féin; and anyone else whom Rev. Paisley found

annoying. But it is not at all unlikely that some of the preacher's more zealous followers took up the task of divine vengeance on their own.

A second side of Paisley was that of international religious organizer, leader of a broad network of like-minded religious conservatives that gave credibility and support to his religious-political positions. For years Paisley befriended the Rev. Bob Jones, the American evangelical pastor and founder of the university in Greenville, South Carolina, to which he attached his own name. Paisley and Jones preached on each other's pulpit, and together they founded the World Congress of Fundamentalists. The objective of the organization was, in part, to show their displeasure with the liberal World Council of Churches. Paisley also established the European Institute of Protestant Studies, whose stated goals were "expounding the Bible and exposing the Papacy."⁵² According to a notice in the first issue of its newsletter, *The Battle Standard*, published in October 1997, the institute, which was housed in Paisley's church, "hopes to establish correspondents throughout the world so that it can give a global view of the state of Protestantism."⁵³ By 1999 the denomination that he established, the Free Presbyterian Church, boasted over seventy churches and over twelve thousand followers in a dozen countries, including Australia, Germany, and the United States.

The third side—one intimately related to the other two—was Paisley the politician. From much of the period from the 1970s until he left politics shortly before his death in 2014, he simultaneously held three elected political positions: member of the British parliament, member of the Northern Irish assembly, and one of three Northern Irish representatives to the European parliament. Unhappy with what he regarded as the moderating impulses of the largest Protestant party in Northern Ireland, the Unionists, Paisley founded his own Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), which at one time threatened to rival its parent party in number of supporters. It was also one of the most severe critics of Northern Ireland's first minister, David Trimble.

Though David Trimble was an arch Unionist and member of the militantly loyalist Orange Order, he was not loyalist enough for Paisley. When Trimble denounced the Orangemen's planned march through the town of Ballymoney in 1998, after three small boys had been burned alive in a terrorist act aimed at their Catholic-Protestant mixed-marriage parents, Paisley alone among Unionist leaders led the greatly diminished parade of diehard Orangemen through the town. When Trimble acceded to the peace accord brokered by George Mitchell, Paisley claimed that his former colleague had become a traitor. When Trimble—along with John

Hume, a Catholic political leader—received the Nobel Prize for Peace on October 16, 1998, Paisley belittled the award as “a bit of a farce.”⁵⁴

Was there a connection between Paisley’s religious views and his political position? This is the question I put to Stuart Dignan, a staff member in the Belfast office of the DUP. “No,” Dignan told me, pointing out that members of the governing council came from a variety of churches, not just Paisley’s own Free Presbyterian Church.⁵⁵ But Dignan did affirm that they were all active Protestant Christians and that they agreed with Paisley on political and moral issues—including opposition to abortion and homosexual rights. Moreover, Dignan said, they all agreed that in some way religion mattered in political life, a significance that was symbolized by the phrase “for God and Ulster.”

Paisley was quite specific about how one’s loyalties to God and Ulster can be related. Like the adherents of Reconstruction Theology, Paisley reached into Protestant history for his vision of a religious state. Like the Reconstructionists, he found attractive the theocratic model crafted in the sixteenth century by John Calvin and revived in the eighteenth-century Calvinist ideas of George Whitefield. Like the followers of the Christian Identity movement, Paisley conceived of Christianity as being under siege by demonic forces embodied in the government and certain social groups, though in Paisley’s case these groups were not Jews and other racial minorities but Paisley’s religious opponents: Irish Catholics and apostate Protestants. Utilizing the anti-Catholic writings of such Protestant figures as John Calvin and John Wesley, Paisley branded Catholics as bearers of “satanic deception.”⁵⁶ In one sermon he asked where Jesus Christ could be found today and quickly gave his own answer: “not in the Vatican.”⁵⁷

Critics of Paisley have debated whether all his talk about the satanic deception of Catholicism and the call for God’s vengeance against his political enemies was simply strident rhetoric or whether it led to acts of violence. At one time, Paisley’s DUP was closely linked with the paramilitary Ulster Resistance movement. But in 1989 Paisley publicly renounced the movement’s terrorism and announced that these ties would be severed. Ever since, Stuart Dignan told me, the party has stated adamantly that it does not support violence.

Even so, Dignan admitted that groups such as the ultramilitant Ulster Volunteer Force publicly proclaimed their support for Paisley’s position. Dignan quickly pointed out that the militants’ admiration for Paisley did not imply Paisley’s support for them, especially for their terrorist tactics. Yet it is clear that Protestant paramilitary activists—terrorists for the Loyalist side—received spiritual sustenance and moral encour-

agement from Paisley's statements. Billy Wright, a Protestant paramilitarist convicted of charges related to several terrorist incidents, told the BBC journalist Martin Dillon that Paisley was one of his heroes and that he regarded him as a great defender of the faith.⁵⁸

When Dillon asked Wright directly whether the Irish conflict was a "religious war," Wright said that "religion is part of the equation." Elaborating, Wright explained that he not only had an obligation to defend his religious compatriotes—by violence if necessary—but also that religion provided him a moral sanction to enter into violent encounters. According to Wright, he and his Protestant comrades "have the right to fight, to defend and to die for what we believe is Truth."⁵⁹

Interestingly, some of the paramilitary activists on the Catholic side of the conflict said much the same thing about their own dedication to the struggle and their own moral justifications for killing. There was less agreement on the Catholic side, however, over whether religion is central to the dispute. Part of the issue concerned definitions. Those who thought of religion as something sanctioned by the Church would not identify the Irish republican side as very religious. But those who thought of religion in the broadest sense, as part of a society's culture, saw the republican position as a religious crusade.

Most of the activists in the IRA and the Sinn Féin party had a strong Catholic upbringing and shared in what the Sinn Féin leader, Tom Hartley, described to me as the "Catholic culture" of Irish tradition.⁶⁰ Several Catholic priests, and even some nuns, were quietly supportive of the Irish republican struggle. Father Denis Faul thought that the IRA leader, Bobby Sands, had a "religious motivation" and "theological justification" for undertaking his hunger strike in prison.⁶¹ Fr. Faul went on to say that the Catholic culture of the Irish gave them the ability to kill and be killed, since death "is a sacrifice" and "the opportunity of forgiveness" lessens the guilt involved in killing.⁶² The religious nature of Irish nationalism was also asserted by Conor Cruise O'Brien, an Irishman who has written eloquently about contemporary world conflicts. O'Brien has acknowledged that in his native land religion and nationalism are "like lungs"—one could scarcely exist without both, and not at all without at least one.⁶³ He described the IRA offensive as "a major convergence of religion and nationalism" and termed it "a kind of Holy War."⁶⁴

Considering the Catholic dimensions of Irish nationalism described by Sinn Féin activists such as Hartley and writers such as O'Brien, it is something of a surprise that the hierarchy of the Catholic Church publicly has taken a dim view of the IRA and Sinn Féin activities. This is all the more

surprising in light of Ian Paisley's accusation that "Rome is behind the troubles—that is an indisputable fact."⁶⁵ This "fact" is indeed disputable, however, considering the antagonistic position that the Church's hierarchy has taken against the IRA and the Sinn Féin party from the very beginning of the conflict. Some leaders, such as Archbishop Cahal Daly, have been downright vitriolic. Tom Hartley related to me an incident involving a group of Catholic clergy who signed a petition mildly supporting the republican position. When their names were published as signators, Church leaders had them quietly transferred from Northern Ireland to areas of the country with less contention.⁶⁶ Some claimed that the Catholic IRA activists were eager to divorce their paramilitary activities from their religious obligations so that they would not have to confess their sins of violence to their priests.⁶⁷

Tom Hartley expressed bitterness that the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church was not more supportive of what he and other Sinn Féin members believed to be a movement in support of Catholic culture as much as Irish nationalism. Hartley gave several examples of instances where he thought that the Church was trying to interject itself in Sinn Féin's sphere of influence. According to Hartley, the Church received money from the British government to provide social benefits to the community, a role that Sinn Féin had played. The Church provided an ideology and political organization that competed in some ways with the republican cause.

I asked Hartley if the reverse was not also true: hadn't Sinn Féin in many ways replaced the official Catholic Church, especially in acting as spokesperson for the community and providing a moral voice for the masses? After all, I pointed out, Sinn Féin had opened a series of Advice Centers where individuals could receive solace and support in times of crisis, just as the Church had always done. Hartley noted that these Advice Centers were meant to deal primarily with political and social issues, not personal or spiritual ones. Still, he acknowledged, in some ways Sinn Féin had taken over the role of moral leadership that he felt the Church had abdicated. In a curious way, Sinn Féin was pioneering in a new kind of religious community, a kind of Irish political Catholicism.

So even though Sinn Féin was not cozy with the Catholic hierarchy, it encouraged a certain Northern Irish revival of Catholicism, or at least "Catholic culture," as Hartley called it. In a more direct way, Ian Paisley and his political and religious organizations spurred a revival of Protestant culture and thought within their community. On both the Irish and Protestant sides, violence was related to the renewed role that

religion has come to play in Northern Ireland's public life. In that sense the Christian activists on either side of the Northern Irish struggle have not been that different from one another. Nor have their roles been that dissimilar from those of their politically active Christian brethren in the violent militia and anti-abortion movements in the United States, an ocean away.