

Deeds and creeds

From the Editors in the [July 14, 1999](#) issue

The story of the lone, crazed gunman is a familiar one in America, but that is not the story of Benjamin Smith, who went on a drive-by shooting spree in Illinois and Indiana over the July 4 weekend, killing two and wounding nine. Smith was an up-and-coming leader in the World Church of the Creator, an Illinois-based white-supremacist group that believes whites are pitted against other races—the "mud people"—in a battle for survival. That's why he targeted blacks, Jews and Asian-Americans. There was a method to Smith's mad violence, and the method was learned from the WCOTC.

The Church of the Creator has been around for three decades. It has flourished on the far-right fringe along with assorted anti-Semitic, neo-Nazi, skinhead and white supremacist groups. The Internet has proved to be a fertile field for the growth and international export of this brand of racism. A trip to the WCOTC Web site quickly reveals links between this group and the sprawling radical right-wing culture marked by heavy metal music, racist philosophy, Holocaust revisionism, and expectations of RAHOWA, or "racial holy war. "

In this culture, the Church of the Creator is distinctive mostly for its savvy marketing and its explicitly anti-Christian stance. Whereas many other racist groups (like the Ku Klux Klan) maintain that they are in some way defending Christian identity, the WCOTC offers a Nietzschean-style critique of Christianity, condemning it for its supernatural theology and "insipid" ethic. The WCOTC creed states: "We indict Christianity of softening up the White Race for accepting the idea of race mixing. By such suicidal teachings as 'We are equal in the eyes of the Lord' and 'We are all God's children,' the entering wedge was hammered into the body of the White Race to accept the inferior niggers and mud races as their equals." It was perhaps a sign of this antireligious fervor that Smith opened fire on Orthodox Jews as they were leaving a Chicago synagogue and shot at Korean-American Christians as they stood outside a United Methodist church in Indiana.

Groups like the WCOTC are, to put it mildly, disturbed by the pluralism and diversity of American life. Ironically, they often borrow the language of diversity to defend their own actions, claiming that they are simply speaking up for the embattled "white" cause the way other groups speak for the black or Hispanic cause.

Such perverse attacks are a reminder that equality—especially amid our increasingly diverse society—remains a radical notion. As the proliferation of white supremacist groups shows, such equality is not always as "self-evident" a truth as the founders of the republic thought. In a sense, the WCOTC's critique of Christianity expresses a shrewd insight: the vision of a society that is committed to human equality and to affirming racial and ethnic diversity is at root a religious vision. It springs, for Christians at least, from the God who shows no particularity and who has created each person in God's own image.