

Hate, American Style

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Abstract: Nicholas D Kristoff Op-Ed column on interview with Rev Matt Hale of World Church of the Creator, group whose sole theology is racial war on behalf of whites; says Hale, a law school graduate, has built World Church into organization claiming to be 'fastest growing white racist and anti-Semitic church in America' with 70,000 to 80,000 adherents; says there are many domestic counterparts to Islamic extremists, but World Church is scariest of all because of its vigor and highbrow racism; says, as Al Qaeda has shown, the only people more dangerous than dumb bigots are smart bigots (M)

My interview with the Rev. Matt Hale, America's scariest hatemonger, got off to a rocky start.

As he picked at a fruit salad in a restaurant here in East Peoria, his headquarters, he recalled an incident in childhood that first led him to regard nonwhites as vermin: At a dance, he saw white girls "betraying their race" by kissing black boys.

"I felt nauseous," he said solemnly. "Interracial marriage is against nature. It's a form of bestiality."

A moment later, I disclosed that I had betrayed the white race and married a Chinese-American. It was, I felt, an awkward moment.

But Mr. Hale, as charming and charismatic as he is hateful, was unfazed. He beamed, and for a moment I thought he was going to ask to see photos of my kids.

I came to East Peoria to meet Mr. Hale because he has become the key figure in America's hate community, revitalizing racism by recruiting women, children and convicts into a high-tech, energetic organization whose followers show a pattern of random brutality toward blacks and other "enemies." It would be flattering Mr. Hale too much to call his group America's Al Qaeda, but the scary thing is that I think the comparison would leave him feeling flattered.

After 9/11 I interviewed Muslim hatemongers abroad, and I wanted to confront our own religious extremists. They are not a threat to national stability, the way they are in Pakistan or Saudi Arabia, but they are every bit as loony as Al Qaeda and they have been enmeshed in violence. That's particularly true of Mr. Hale's group, the World Church of the Creator, whose followers have shot, knifed or beaten blacks, Jews and Asian-Americans in several states.

Mr. Hale dismisses the attacks as understandable but anomalous. He says that while killing enemies (presumably including race-betrayers like me) is morally justifiable, for now it is tactically inappropriate and doesn't accomplish much, anyway.

"Suppose someone goes out and kills 10 blacks tonight," he shrugs impatiently. "Well, there are millions more."

A law school graduate, Mr. Hale, 31, has built the World Church of the Creator into an international organization with members in 49 states and 28 countries. It claims 70,000 to 80,000 adherents and boasts in press releases that it is "the fastest-growing white racist and anti-Semitic church in America."

Yet it is not a religion in any traditional sense, and its sole theology is "RaHoWa" -- racial holy war on behalf of whites. It recruits very energetically, distributing 80,000 leaflets just this spring, and runs a sophisticated Web site with information on, for

example, how to make your own plastic explosives. The church even has a Web page for kids.

There are plenty of other domestic counterparts to Islam's manic mullahs. Think of Christian Reconstructionists, who want to re-establish Old Testament laws, even stoning to death adulterers and heretics. (We tend to forget that stoning to death is never mentioned in the Koran but is frequently prescribed in the Bible; a rigid interpretation of Deuteronomy would lead to the execution of most Americans.)

Mr. Hale's World Church is scariest of all, though, because of its vigor and highbrow racism. One of the church's slogans, an ungrammatical twist on Cato the Elder's famous line about Carthage, is even in Latin: "Delenda est Judaica," which could be translated as "Judaism must be destroyed."

The son of a policeman, Mr. Hale had his awakening when he was 12 years old and read both "The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich" and "Mein Kampf." (So much for the benefits of early reading programs.) He marries his intelligence with attitudes that make your skin crawl.

After the reporter Daniel Pearl was murdered, Mr. Hale wrote: "We couldn't care less about the death of this Jew who along with the rest of his parasitic race are clearly a form of vermin far more dangerous in fact than the kind that run on four legs."

Mr. Hale also boasted to me: "We have really revolutionized the whole racial community. People used to think of a guy with a beer belly, spitting out tobacco and missing a few teeth. Now they think of people who are determined, energetic leaders, educated and idealistic. We're the best."

As Al Qaeda has shown us, the only people more dangerous than dumb bigots are smart, educated ones.

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