

## The Covenant, the Sword and the Arm of the Lord

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What does the word "terrorist" bring to mind? Without even seeing the accused, most people in this country automatically assume this person is Middle-Eastern and Muslim. Although Stern's *Terror in the Name of God* focuses mainly on Islamic terrorists, it begins by addressing terrorist acts of a more homegrown variety. Stern interviews American terrorists here in the United States.

The Covenant, the Sword and the Arm of the Lord or CSA, a group of radical Christians, became one of the "most violent white supremacist centers of the 1980s" (Phelps). Members lived communally on a 250-acre compound near the Arkansas-Missouri border (Barkun 428). The group "came to accept the teachings of Identity Christianity," which, according to Stern, means seeing "Anglo-Saxons as the 'true Israel,' America as a sacred land, and the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution as a God-inspired, Christian inheritance" (17).

Followers of Identity Christianity also expect to be present for doomsday (Stern 17). In fact, the members of the CSA believed the Apocalypse was imminent (*The Covenant, the Sword and the Arm of the Lord*). As Kerry Noble (minister and second in command of the CSA explains, "we are Christian survivalists who believe in preparing for the ultimate holocaust" (*Paranoia as Patriotism*). And that is exactly what they did. The organization set up an "Endtime Overcomer Survival Training School," which offered a course in military tactics, "Christian martial arts" and urban warfare (*Paranoia as Patriotism*). All male members of the group trained in every aspect of military action (*The Covenant, the Sword and the Arm of the Lord*) and each was issued full military gear, including a rifle and a pistol (Stern 21). Weapons and food were stockpiled because the CSA believed that American society was on the brink of famine, economic collapse and war (*Paranoia as Patriotism*).

The CSA believed if they hastened the Apocalypse, the Messiah would return sooner (Stern 11), granting them all an earlier access to paradise. Those deemed "sinners" would have to be judged. This included homosexuals, liberals "and all those who refused the word of the

Lord... they were the enemy, and so they would have to die... we wanted peace," a member states, "but if purging had to precede peace, then let the purge begin" (Stern xiv).

Stern says "purging" included "murder, firebombing a synagogue and a church that accepted homosexuals" and "conspiracy to assassinate federal officials." It also included car and gas pipeline bombings, plans to poison major city water supplies with cyanide and bomb the

Oklahoma City Federal Building, and the siege "on abortion clinics and gay bars." (xiv). Other allegations involve theft and altering of vehicles (Stern 28) and bank robberies (*Paranoia as Patriotism*). In fact, the far-right gunmen were quite good at robbing banks. Successfully, they robbed 19 banks in eight states in one month in 1994. The money they generated through these activities helped fund the purchase of land and equipment "and amass weapons and ammunition" (Ridgeway, "Armies of the right").

GSA's "political goals included racially cleansing the United States. They believed that ridding the world of Jews, blacks, and sinners would facilitate the Apocalypse and the Messiah's return," Stern writes. They also wanted to "replace the current government with a Christian one," destroy institutions such as the United Nations and "stop the creation of a new world order based on 'humanism' and 'materialism'" (xiv). Ultimately, the group contended it was their purpose "to spark the Second American Revolution, resulting in the creation an all-white state" (Stern 27).

Fortunately, the FBI prevented the CSA from furthering the creation of the Apocalypse. On 19 April 1985, agents surrounded the compound and after a tense standoff and negotiations, the cult's members surrendered peacefully (Van Boven). This job was especially dangerous because members of the CSA had been assigned sniper positions in case the government ever raided the compound (Stern 28).

Once emptied, the FBI searched the compound and seized hundreds of weapons, including; bombs, a massive quantity cyanide, handguns, shotguns, machine guns, hand grenades, an anti-tank rocket, C-4 explosives (Stern 11, *Paranoia as Patriotism*, *The Covenant the Sword and the Arm of the Lord*), an anti-aircraft gun from the World War II era, and a homemade armored personnel carrier (Stern 11).

Obviously, members of the group were arrested, and in September 1985 the founder, James Ellison, was given a 20-year prison sentence "for the manufacture of automatic weapons and acts of bombing and arson" (Barkun 415). Kerry Nobel and four other CSA activists were also convicted of racketeering and illegal weapons charges that resulted in lengthy Federal prison sentences.

Thankfully, the group disbanded after their leaders were imprisoned. Kerry Noble renounced extremism and got his sentence reduced to two years in Federal prison after cooperating with the FBI and court system. Now, Noble helps the FBI negotiate standoffs with other right-wing groups (Van Boven and Seibert).

For the moment, we are fortunate that there is little religious turmoil in the United States, compared to what is going on in the rest of the world. When it was in full swing, the CSA was a powerful and terrifying organization that had the ability to wreak havoc on various aspects of American life. It is important for us to realize that groups like this do have power, even in our own country.

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