STRIDENT VOICES IN
KANSAS BETWEEN THE WARS

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I. THE KU KLUX KLAN IN KANSAS

IN THE EARLY 1920's, Kansas (especially eastern Kansas) succumbed for a brief period to the surge of the nationally revived Ku Klux Klan. The Klan is mentioned herein for the purpose of relating, for the first time in print, I believe, a footnote to history, and to show some similarity between the Klan philosophy and that of Rev. Gerald B. Winrod in the 1930's.

On January 10, 1925, the Kansas supreme court rendered its decision in effect ousting the Klan from "doing business" in Kansas on the basis that it was a foreign corporation not approved to do business in the state by the then state charter board.

In the 1924 election, Klan supporters had won control of the state senate and had elected a great number of state representatives. On February 25, 1925, in a sudden action, the senate passed Senate Bill 269, which measure was designed to remove the state charter board's powers of investigation and discretion in granting corporate charters.

The speaker of the house that year was Clifford R. Hope, age 31, a strong Klan opponent. Because of the Klan issue, he had won the speakership in the Republican caucus by only two votes. While Hope was delivering a speech to the Kansas Livestock Association in Wichita, the bill was rushed over to the house, where it was delivered to the chief clerk. The Klan proponents planned to have the bill passed, under emergency procedures, during Hope's absence.

O. H. Hatfield of Copeland, a former state representative from Gray county, was chief clerk of the house, an appointee of the speaker. After delivery to Hatfield, the bill became "lost," and Hatfield contacted Hope in Wichita and urged his immediate return to Topeka, meeting him at the train with a status report.

On February 27, after Hope's return, the bill was "found" by Hatfield, and an attempt was again made to emergency it through the house. Although the vote was 77 to 40 in favor of the emergency, it was not the necessary two-thirds vote and the effort hence failed. Hope thereafter referred the bill to the judiciary committee, immediately followed by an attempt to have it withdrawn from the committee and referred back to the committee of the whole. The vote on this issue was 63 to 52 in favor, but again not the necessary two thirds.

Thereupon, after Hope's promise that the bill would be neither buried in committee nor kept down on the calendar, the bill followed the usual, nonemergency legislative procedures, with the result that the furor for it diminished, and on March 6 it was defeated on its merits, 65 to 57.

Although in 1925 support for the Klan in Kansas was probably on the wane, the action of the house in defeating Senate Bill 269 was a great blow to the Klan. It is, of course, a subjective view, but I would like to think that the Klan's demise was hastened by the wisdom of Hatfield in knowing when to lose and when to find a bill, and the courage of Hope (who planned to—and did—run for congress the next year) in vigorously opposing the Klan, when it would have been easier and safer politically to have acted pleasant and not taken a decisive stand.

Lila Lee Jones has analyzed well the reasons for the Klan's popularity in Kansas:
Fanaticism and fear contributed to the Ku Klux Klan movement in eastern Kansas during the 1920’s. Many Americans were disillusioned and had a deep sense of insecurity during the period following World War I. This led many leading small town citizens to the organization which appeared to preserve the status quo.

There were, however, deep rooted fears and insecurities among Kansans, as elsewhere in the United States, and the Klan gave priority to those related to Catholicism, prohibition, and immorality. There were also hints in Klan literature of fears of communism, immigrants, labor organizations, Jews, and corrupt government.

Although most Klan writers began by saying that they were not anti-Catholic, they ended by condemning the Roman Catholic Church as representing the greatest single threat to Anglo-Saxon-Protestant values. There were those Protestant ministers who for years had linked the anti-Christ and the Beast of the book of Revelation with the Catholic Church and the Pope. It took little persuasion on the part of Klan writers to convince Protestants of all denominations that the last days had arrived and that the Pope could overthrow the government of the United States as easily as the Communists had seized Russia.

The growth of fundamentalism in protestant America also played an important role in the Invisible Empire. Fundamentalism challenged the new developments and sought to entrench traditional doctrines and practices. It was at times a bitter and divisive movement which was often militant. Its leaders were charged with stirring up conflict as much for the love of a fight as for love of truth. The movement tended to identify Christianity with patriotism and was influenced by the stream of superpatriotism which marked the 1920’s. One fundamentalist leader preached “100 per cent Americanism” and said patriotism and Christianity are synonymous terms just as hell and traitors are synonymous. Although fundamentalism declined rapidly after 1925, its influence continued in certain congregations and small denominations. Many who agreed essentially with its doctrines turned away because they did not want to be associated with its spirit of bitterness and strife. It is not difficult to see the parallels between this movement in protestant churches and the Ku Klux Klan. Like the Ku Klux Klan, fundamentalism introduced harmful tensions into the churches which offset its worthwhile contributions.

The Ku Klux Klan, then, can be viewed as an inevitable product of the 1920’s. Fear and insecurity led many Kansans into the Invisible Empire, but those who became members of the secret order in eastern Kansas were not revolutionaries or simply chronic malcontents. Many represented honest laborers and small town businessmen—bankers, ministers, publishers of small town weeklies, lawyers, doctors, and merchants. Insecure in the present and apprehensive about the future, they turned against those things which they saw as threatening and alien to them. When the enemies failed to materialize or were eliminated, the knights no longer had anything to fear and their crusade collapsed.

As above indicated, one may note great similarity between Klan “doctrine” in the 1920’s and that of Winrod in the 1930’s.

II. REV. GERALD BURTON WINROD

ALTHOUGH his name is little known today, Gerald Burton Winrod could be described as one of the most intriguing, strangest, and most tragic figures of Kansas history; indeed, he was regarded by some as the most likely leader of the Fascist-anti-Semitic movement in the United States in the 1930’s and prior to World War II, in the remote event that all such extremist groups had ever presented a united front.

Winrod was born in Wichita on March 7, 1900. It was reported that his father, J. W. Winrod, had three favorite sports—drinking, fighting, and dancing; he was a bartender in the Old Four Ten saloon until Carry Nation wrecked it. This event, coupled with his wife’s miraculous cure from cancer, led to J. W.’s conversion. Young Gerald, deeply affected by these events, followed a traveling evangelist at the age of 17 and was a full-fledged evangelist at the age of 21.

During his entire career as preacher, author, and publisher, he received no religious schooling, held no pastorate, and was not a member of any denomination. He received an honorary D.D. degree from Los Angeles Baptist Theological Seminary in 1935.

His concern over modernism in religion led him to call a meeting in Salina in 1925 for the “united defense of the Christian faith.” From this meeting of approximately 100 fundamentalist leaders sprang the Defenders of the Christian Faith. Winrod was elected executive secretary, “Faith of Our Fathers” was chosen as the official hymn, and the statement of objectives was derived from the book of Jude, “Contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”

In 1926 Winrod established The Defender Magazine, and remained its editor, as well as executive secretary of the Defender organization, until his death in 1957. The Defenders’ announced purpose was to “expose modernism on every hand. We will oppose by God’s grace this wicked doctrine of evolution in tax-supported schools. We will meet the rationalists at every front, whether in the pulpit or elsewhere, and seek to check their work until the faith of our fathers is restored.” Winrod stated the principle of “opposition without malice.” “While our position is uncompromising, yet

During his career, Gerald B. Winrod (1900-1957), controversial Wichita radio preacher and editor who was a candidate for the U.S. Senate in 1938, moved from the mainstream of fundamentalism to an anti-Semitic conspiracy view of history. "Winrodism" in the 1930's contributed to what Henry Steele Commager called a "dirty work at the crossroads" outlook in American thinking. Photograph from Wichita Beacon, November 12, 1957.

During the period from 1934-1937, a monthly newspaper, The Revealer was published; its main purpose was attacking the Roosevelt administration. In January, 1937, Winrod established the Capitol News & Features Service for the purpose of supplying Washington "news" to 2,000 county newspapers without charge, but this effort collapsed in April due to a lack of funds.

During this period, Winrod gave political speeches in Kansas. Concerning the campaign year of 1936, a distinguished member of this Society, Arno Windscheffel, recalls:

"Soon after I got out of law school some of the Republican leaders in Smith Center needed to raise some money. In the mid 30's money was difficult to obtain. Someone came up with the idea of having Winrod come to Smith Center and then charge admission. This was done. The Republican big wigs did not want to be identified with Winrod, so they asked Tod Reed, a quite elderly lawyer, to introduce Winrod. Tod was given a script for the introduction. Tod was almost stone deaf. He made the introduction and Winrod started blasting. He especially blasted the Republican Administration (in Kansas) and Republicans in general. Tod was an ardent Republican, but not being able to hear he politely sat smiling through the whole verbal assault on the Republicans. After the speech Tod praised Winrod and thanked him. The auditorium was packed. The next day someone told Tod about Winrod's blast against the Republicans—it was then Tod's turn to blast.

III. THE SENATE RACE, 1938

In early 1937 Winrod mounted a nationwide campaign in opposition to F. D. R.'s "court-packing" plan, as a forerunner to his race for the United States Senate in 1938. In January that year he announced as a Republican candidate against Sen. George McGill, who was seeking his second full term.

Winrod utilized radio as his principal campaign weapon, commencing broadcasts on WIBW in Topeka on January 27, and continuing every Tuesday thereafter. He was acknowledged by all as a gifted orator.

Early on, he set forth his seven-point platform, seeking to jump the gun on other potential candidates and to capitalize upon the strong isolationist and anti-New Deal sentiment of that time:

1. Defense of Constitutional Democracy Against the encroachment of Communist, Fascist, and Nazi propaganda.

2. Rebuilding of national character by the quickening of patriotic, moral, and religious sentiments, as an antidote to possible bloodshed.
3. Rigid observance of State's Rights to reverse present trends toward centralized bureaucracy.
4. Absolute neutrality through obedience to the nationalistic impulse, that no more American blood should flow on foreign soil.
5. Restoration of the right to create money, to the United States Congress, so that duly elected representatives of the people shall control the flow of currency.
6. Repeal of experimental legislative measures which have proved themselves to be inimical to the best interests of both labor and industry.
7. An attitude on the part of the national government that will inspire public confidence, bring private capital out of hiding and create honest jobs so that a man can do an honest day's work and receive an honest day's pay.

Winrod's platform and speeches stressed the "fundamental Americanism" approach and carefully avoided, even by indirection, his previous anti-Semitic and anti-Catholic views.

It is reported he distributed more campaign literature than any other candidate and expanded his mailing list to 150,000, making use of Dr. John R. Brinkley's lists.

Winrod, a vegetarian, seldom attended party luncheons or dinners. When he did, he sometimes left immediately, without shaking hands all around. He made extensive use of a sound truck (a widely used campaign method of that time), speaking from a platform in the rear; on such occasions, he would linger after his speech to greet his listeners.

Winrod's opponents did not commence full-time campaigning until about July 1 and Winrod was conceded to have the lead as of that date. The other candidates were: Clyde M. Reed, former governor (1929-1931) and publisher of the Parsons Sun; Dallas Knapp, former state senator and Coffeyville lawyer; and Jesse Clyde Fisher, a Methodist minister, then superintendent of the Liberal district and a Garden City resident. Earlier in the year both Cong. Frank Carlson and Clifford R. Hope were mentioned as candidates, but both declined to run. Winrod's official biographer, G. H. Montgomery, has stated that Fisher was a tool of Winrod's enemies in an effort to split the "church vote."

Winrod's candidacy was opposed by many clergymen. One group, for example, distributed a 15-page pamphlet entitled \textit{Drive Fascist Ideas From Kansas}, using reproductions of pages from \textit{The Defender} and \textit{The Revealer}. This was followed by a letter entitled "Dear Fellow Kansans."

John D. M. Hamilton, then chairman of the Republican National Committee, and former Gov. Alf M. Landon opposed Winrod, as did most of the state's newspapers, including the Wichita \textit{Beacon} and Topeka \textit{State Journal}.

William Allen White, true to character, lashed out at Winrod, not only in the Emporia \textit{Gazette} editorials, but also in paid advertisements in other newspapers, charging that he was reviving the spirit of the Ku Klux Klan.

Late in the campaign, Winrod responded, both in a pamphlet, \textit{Unmasking a Conspiracy of Lies}, and by a radio address, "Viewing the Facts." He termed his campaign "a holy crusade." He claimed he was opposed only to apostate Jews, and was not anti-Catholic, anti-Masonic, or a Nazi. He charged that $1,000,000 was being spent by Jews and Democrats to defeat him. He threatened to expose the source of such funds, stating the disclosure "would rock the political foundations of the nation."

William Allen White dared him to do so, but no such disclosures were ever made. Winrod also charged he was being harrassed by federal agents.

Winrod did receive support from a scattering of respectable Kansas leaders and newspapers, and from 26 Wichita clergymen, and undoubtedly inherited many of the old "hard-core" Brinkley supporters.

The effectiveness of the anti-Winrod campaign was evident on August 2, primary election day, especially considering that Reed and Knapp were essentially competing for the same votes. The results were: Reed 102,691, Knapp 62,418, Winrod 52,344, Fisher 25,548.

Winrod carried only Clay county (in "Brinkley country"), but ran second in several others.

Montgomery regards the senate race as Winrod's greatest mistake, believing that politics would have muted rather than amplified his "Christian influence."

As for Winrod himself, in April, 1950, he wrote in \textit{The Defender Magazine}:

There can be no question but what my campaign frightened the hidden masters. They knew that I would make myself heard in the event of going to the Senate, and that they would never be able to control me. . . . I was defeated by the most powerful combination of Communist and New Deal agencies ever assembled. They had inexhaustible sums of Jewish money upon which to draw, and violated my civil rights at every turn.
IV. THE MASS SEDITION TRIAL OF 1944

ON JULY 23, 1942, Winrod’s name headed the list of 28 persons indicted by a federal grand jury in Washington for sedition. The indictment alleged violations of the Espionage act of 1917 and the Smith act of 1940, charging that the defendants individually conspired to disseminate Nazi propaganda for the purpose of undermining the loyalty and morale of U. S. armed forces. This indictment was subsequently dismissed, but another, charging 33 defendants, was issued on January 4, 1943. This time Winrod’s name was in the middle. The indictment also listed alleged seditious publications, including Winrod’s The Revealer and his short-lived Capital News and Features Service. This indictment was also dismissed.

Finally, on January 3, 1944, a third indictment, based solely on the Smith act, was issued, charging 30 defendants, including both Winrod and E. J. Garner, then the publisher of Publicity in Wichita.

The indictment alleged that the defendants had,

unlawfully, willfully, feloniously and knowingly conspired, combined, confederated and agreed together with each other and with officials of the government of the German Reich and leaders and members of the Nazi Party, in Washington and other parts of the country, and in Germany and elsewhere, to commit acts with intent to interfere with, impair and influence the loyalty, morale and discipline of the military and naval forces of this country.

Alleged subversive publications listed were The Revealer and The Defender; the Defender Publishers was listed as an alleged subversive organization.

The trial commenced April 17, 1944, before Judge Edward C. Eicher, a former three-term congressman from Iowa, appointed to the bench in 1942. (In 1950, Winrod charged that Eicher had been appointed as a federal judge for the specific purpose of presiding over the trial and upon his promise to send Winrod and others to prison.) The prosecutor was O. John Rogge, whom Winrod charged to be a close personal friend of the judge.

The trial began with 30 defendants, 23 lawyers, and 40 reporters present. It continued for some eight months in an atmosphere generally described as a circus.

On May 16 the jury was impaneled. Rogge presented a three-hour opening statement, alleging a worldwide Nazi conspiracy to destroy democratic governments and replace them with Nazi regimes. Similarity of the various defendants’ anti-Semitic and anti-Communist statements (and opposition to U. S. entry into World War II) with those of the Nazis were cited. The defendants claimed, and probably rightfully so, that there was no evidence of a conspiracy to incite insubordination in the armed forces.

The trial dragged on and on; there was a two-week recess in July (no air conditioning then!) and thereafter the trial was held only in the afternoons. Some lawyers and defendants quit attending every day. By October, only four or five reporters were in attendance. At one point, Winrod returned to Kansas due to the illness and death of his father. The number of defendants was reduced to 26, due to the death of Garner (then 80 years old), and the ill health of others.

The trial ended abruptly on November 30, 1944, due to the death during the night of Judge Eicher. (In April, 1946, Winrod called the judge’s death an act of God, in response to prayers across the nation.) On December 7 a mistrial was declared and finally, in June, 1947, the indictment was formally dismissed.

In the retrospect of history, it is clear there was little, if any, evidence of a mass conspiracy, and certainly no credible evidence that Winrod was a part of any conspiracy. Some have claimed the trial was brought about by “war hysteria”; the Saturday Evening Post compared the trial to Nazi and Communist propaganda trials. Alf M. Landon later told John D. Walthen, “Guilty by association is hardly a reason to charge sedition. The issue was not calmly and coolly studied as sedition cases should be.”

Winrod, of course, believed he was tried because the Jews wanted him out of the way and Montgomery, his official biographer, claimed the trial was a part of F. D. R.’s plan for absolute power.

In retrospect, it is perhaps one of the ironies of history that the defendants, most of whom were so eager to charge others with various conspiracies, themselves became the victims of similar accusations.

V. THE WINROD-BRINKLEY-GARNER CONNECTION

TIME available for the completion of this paper has not permitted detailed research into the Dr. John R. Brinkley-Winrod relationship, but the evidence which has been studied indicates at least a mutual admiration society between the two.

Francis Schruben, in *Kansas in Turmoil: 1930-1936* states: "Brinkley's friends ranged from the ultra-nativistic Reverend Dr. Gerald Winrod to the Jewish Levand brothers, publishers of the Wichita *Beacon*." Regarding the 1932 gubernatorial campaign (when Brinkley was running the second time, with his name on the ballot), Schruben has written:

In addition, Brinkley may have profited in September by the printed facsimile of a letter of endorsement by The Reverend Gerald B. Winrod, the controversial Wichita clergyman with nativistic tendencies. Winrod said he and his followers had their "fingers on the Kansas pulse," and personally sent Brinkley "every spiritual blessing in your stand for the highest religious and moral interests for which you are well known."

It is clear that Brinkley either owned or controlled *Publicity* in Wichita, of which E. J. Garner was the editor. While Brinkley was engaged in Kansas politics, *Publicity* was the official organ of the Brinkley-for-Governor clubs, and when Brinkley left Kansas for Texas, his "goodbye letter" was written to Garner and published in *Publicity*. After Brinkley's move to Texas, *Publicity* continued to promote Brinkley's activities.

After World War II, Winrod continued his anti-Semitic campaign, opposing international Communism, the United Nations, the old Federal Council of Churches, the National Conference of Christians and Jews, and Dwight D. Eisenhower, whom he called a tool of the Jews.

In his last years he promoted repudiated forms of treatment for cancer and lambasted the medical profession. Having suffered from multiple sclerosis for years, he contracted Asian flu in the fall of 1957, refused to see a medical doctor, and succumbed on November 11 of that year.

Dr. John R. Brinkley (1895-1942), well-known "goat-gland doctor," owned Kansas' first radio station and came close with his write-in campaign to becoming governor in 1930. Running again in 1932 he may have profited from the endorsement of Gerald Winrod, who sent him "every spiritual blessing in your stand for the highest religious and moral interests for which you are well known."

VI. WINROD'S RELIGIOUS IDEAS AND POLITICAL BELIEFS

STUDIES of Dr. Winrod agree that he was first, last, and always a preacher. As an orator, he was compared to William Jennings Bryan.

As a fundamentalist in the late 1920's he strongly opposed modernism (defined as an attempt to restate Christian faith in light of modern scientific discoveries), the ecumenical movement, and the Catholic Church.

He possessed an almost incredible belief in biblical prophecies (as he interpreted them); one author has stated his belief in prophecy was not confined to the Bible, but included the Great Pyramid of Egypt prophecies and myths. He often took passages of scripture out of context; for example, the verse: "The chariots shall race in the streets, they shall jostle one against another in the broadways; they shall seem like torches; they shall run like the lightning" was...
interpreted as a prophecy of the automobile with headlights. Passages in Job and Psalms referred to the radio; the lion mentioned in Ezekiel 38:13 was Great Britain.

He apparently believed the Battle of Armageddon and the end of the world would occur in his lifetime. The president of the pre-World War II World Bank he saw as the "anti-Christ" and the bank's worldwide control as "the mark of the beast." In 1933, however, he observed that the "mark of the beast" might be the NRA Blue Eagle. He traced Communism back to Cain (whose name meant "red"). Atomic power destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. The dust storms of the 1930's were sent by God to punish the United States for the "ungodly features of the New Deal." It would appear to follow naturally that he sometimes attributed his own actions to divine inspiration.

In 1936 Winrod referred to Catholicism as "baptized paganism" and called the pope "Mr. Pius of Vatican City." By 1949, however, Winrod was urging a united Protestant-Catholic front against Communism. And the previous year he charged the World Council of Churches (which he called "the bride of the Anti-Christ") with being anti-Catholic; the reason: because the Vatican had always been anti-Communist.

Now I wish to comment in some greater detail upon Winrod's political views in the 1930's and prior to World War II, primarily as he expressed them in The Defender magazine. Until January, 1933, his views in general had been in the mainstream of one of the dominant and respectable traditions of our state: Religious conservatism, literal interpretation of scripture, and Prohibition.

It was a tragic day when Winrod first read (probably in 1932) The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion, a book first published in Tsarist Russia in 1905 purporting to prove a continuing Jewish plot to seize control and rule the world. One scholar has well described Winrod's reaction:

This forgery turned his old concept of Satan's unseen hands into his new concept of THE HIDDEN HAND of Jewish Conspiracy. Winrod wrote of his new discovery in the feature article of the January, 1933, Defender magazine:

"There has been uncovered before my eyes, the inner workings of one of the most gigantic plots ever perpetuated in any period of world history. For months I have been sifting evidence, assembling facts, accumulating material; and step by step, fact upon fact, I have traced these destructive forces back, back, back, to their hidden sources and I am now prepared to say that I firmly believe all these horrible outbursts which we are today witnessing are simply results of intelligent causes. Behind the scenes there is what I choose to call, A HIDDEN HAND.

"I later made the amazing discovery that there is a plot to overthrow the religious, moral, and governmental systems of the earth and that it is a world conspiracy, evidently planned several hundred years ago by a self-perpetuating group of men who today control the wealth of the world. ... They arranged to pull wires behind the scenes to precipitate political and economic upheavals."

With the aid of this "document" Winrod was able to combine his notion of demonized unseen hands with his expectation of Jewish apostasy:

"I knew that the hellish agencies which are today going out to the ends of the earth, had to have their secret octopus-roots fastened in demon-possessed brains somewhere; so I started reasoning from effects back to causes. I soon came upon the amazing discovery of what purports to be a conspiracy, which is centuries old, to overthrow the religious and governmental systems of the Gentile world."

Winrod felt it is duty to devote himself and his magazine to "unmasking" the origins and processes of this conspiracy.

"Informed persons," Winrod wrote in February, "know that the world is breaking up. We may as well face the facts. A revolution is not coming. It is already here." He believed that 300 men, "conspirators against civilization," had planned and caused the social chaos of the thirties. "This group," he continued, "claiming to hold the financial destiny of the world in their hands, are wealthy Jews." Winrod addressed himself briefly, once and for all, to the question of motive: "... it is a religious conviction with them to create Gentile chaos. ... Out of the chaos they believe themselves called of God to create a dictatorship built upon gold with a Superman at the head, who will be their Messiah with headquarters in Palestine." Their whole purpose, he concluded, is to set the stage for the Superman. It is not surprising that Winrod showed little interest in examining the possible motive of the alleged Elders, or in considering the authenticity of the document. The whole scheme described in the Protocols fit in so exactly with his prophetic views that it must have appeared to Winrod as incredible confirmation of his independent deductions. The Elders were effecting the conditions described in the Old Testament prophecies. As Winrod was fond of saying, prophecy was simply history written in advance.

The Protocols, Winrod explained, revealed that in carrying out this international plot, the Elders recognized no limitations. They used means legal and extra-legal; they worked on all fronts simultaneously, tearing down all institutions and rebuilding them so that all power resided in them. The outline of the activities of these Jewish Elders given in the Protocols became the outline of Winrod's major subject matter for the next five years. Briefly, these alleged activities were as follows: The Elders promoted immorality among Gentiles through control of the press and publishing business; attacked the Church through the device of modernism; corrupted school children by teaching jungle evolution, and immoral, godless, communist
Gerald Winrod's concern over modernism in religion led him in 1925 to call a meeting of fundamentalist leaders for the "united defense of the Christian faith." In 1926 he established The Defender Magazine and he remained its editor, as well as executive secretary of the Defenders of the Faith organization, until his death in 1957. The Defenders opposed the teaching of evolution in the schools and sought to "contend for the faith" with all other enemies of truth as they saw it.
ideas, and poisoned the general public through alcohol, cigarettes, movies, and filthy literature. One of their most powerful tools in creating national unrest was the virus of Liberalism, which led to destructive experimentation with social relationships. Since this small group of Jews controlled most of the world's wealth, and all the gold, they could manipulate forces to create any sort of economic condition desired. They had, in fact, purposely created the 1929 depression. Communism was created by the Elders to foment anarchy and revolution.

Through all these avenues the Jewish conspiracy would work until such chaos would result that a world dictator would seem necessary, and in fact, be demanded as the only solution. At such a juncture the anti-Christ would be unveiled.9

During the period 1933-1937, Winrod, in pursuit of his conspiracy theory of history, publicized some amazing stories. An example is related by the same scholar just quoted.

[In 1776] Adam Weishaupt, a leading Jesuit teacher at Ingolstadt University in southern Germany, created the "Illuminati," an organization purporting to embody ancient and advanced degrees of Freemasonry. The "Illuminati" patterned their secret government after the Jesuit order, by pulling wires, and by setting up spy systems to control the lodges all over Europe. Many Jesuits followed Weishaupt into the organization; many of the leaders were Jews. Weishaupt, although possibly not a Jew himself, was in the center of a Jewish circle, analogous to Stalin's position in the Soviet government.

Winrod, in his book, Adam Weishaupt, A Human Detil, showed how he (Weishaupt) gained control of all masonic lodge rooms in Europe and changed them into secret societies of revolutionary planning. A study of the "Illuminati," Winrod emphasized, will show where all the modern ideas of Bolshevism originated. The French and Russian revolutions were brought on by this agency. Yes, he concluded, Modern Communism and old Jewish Illuminism are one and the same thing.

This fantastic tale was based upon a four volume work written in 1798 by a Professor John Robinson entitled Proofs of a Conspiracy Against All the Religions and Government of Europe Carried on in the Secret Meetings of Free-Masons, Illuminati, and Reading Societies. Here, in one neat conspiratorial package, Winrod had his three arch enemies. And some lesser ones, too, as he was swift to point out, who were responsible for the present lamentable decay in the Protestant Church. The decay was due largely, he believed, to the fact that Protestantism was being Judaized. The group who held views most similar to Judaism were the modernists who were behind such nefarious organizations as the National Conference of Christians and Jews.9

During this period, at one time or another, Winrod attacked Jews, Communists, Catholics, international bankers, Socialists, New Dealers, Masons, Italian Fascists, and chain stores. Strange bedfellows indeed, but in Winrod's eyes they were "interconnected working parts of the Jewish plot to rule the world."

During this period also, Winrod commenced advertising and recommending the books and tracts of well-known quasi-Fascists of that time: Elizabeth Dilling, James True, Robert Edmondson, Father Coughlin, Arno Gaebelain, and Joseph Kamp, and using their writings as source material.

Another scholar has succinctly summarized:

In a little over a decade Winrod had moved from the mainstream of fundamentalism with his crusade against evolution and modernism to an isolated irrational tangent. He had become a bigot, anti-Semitic, and hopelessly blinded by a conspiracy view of history.

One scholar has asked the question: Was Winrod a Nazi? He concluded that he was not. This conclusion would appear to be correct in the sense that there is no evidence that Winrod was a member of any Nazi organization or that his activities were directed from Berlin.

However, in response to the broader question: Was Winrod a Nazi sympathizer in the period prior to the United States' entry into World War II? The answer must be a qualified "yes." (Qualified because, as with other subjects concerning which he wrote and spoke, it is difficult to sort out the thoughts constantly churning around in his mind.) For example, in January, 1933, he listed Fascism as one of the 10 deadly enemies for that year, and in December noted that freedom of the press was gone in Germany. In December, 1936, a Defender article by Oswald J. Smith states, after praising Naziism and Fascism as compared to Communism, "Fascism, Nazism, and Communism are alike our foes."

At the same time, from 1933 on, Winrod expressed admiration for Hitler's "breaking the back of a Jewish plot to destroy Germany by controlling the country's finances and corrupting its morals," for purging the German motion picture industry of immorality, outlawing nudist cults, Jehovah's Witnesses, and spiritualism. Jewish persecution he dismissed as an exaggeration. He described Hitler as "poor, a vegetarian and a teetotaler, who lives very frugally."

In December, 1934, and January, 1935, Winrod traveled to Europe, spending five days in Germany. Although he always claimed his visit was for religious purposes and that he had no contact with Nazi officials, others have

stated that Winrod was invited to Germany by Dr. Otto H. Vollbehr of the Propaganda Ministry.

Regardless of the facts concerning this visit, there is no question that Hitler secured even more favorable treatment by Winrod thereafter. The Defender published pro-Nazi articles by Oswald J. Smith (previously mentioned), Rev. M. Ballister, and Arno Gaебelein, a fundamentalist leader.

VII. CONCLUSION

It seems appropriate to conclude this paper with an assessment of Winrod, primarily as he has been seen by others, both his contemporaries and by scholars—and then attempt to state why I have chosen this subject matter.

First, his contemporaries:

His father, J. W. Winrod, wrote: “In the providence of God our son Gerald has been appointed [sic] and set apart by the Holy Spirit to be a battering ram for righteousness to his day and generation. . . .” There is no doubt that Gerald himself agreed with this assessment.

It would be interesting to know how William Allen White, who fought Winrod tooth and toenail during the 1938 campaign, would have assessed his life. We do know his thoughts after that primary election:

The Reverend Gerald B. Winrod is an honest man. He also displayed a certain amount of courage going against the overwhelming tide of public sentiment in Kansas. Dr. Winrod certainly exhibited a rather interesting phase of cunning intelligence, knowing the psychology of his little crowd.

The thing that was the matter with the Rev. Gerald Winrod was his gross ignorance. He did not know that all the balderdash which a tent evangelist palavers to catch emotional people would not stand him in stead when it came to appealing to a state like Kansas.

After Winrod’s death in 1957, Rolla Clymer wrote:

Winrod was a strange man, with a brilliant intellect and possessed of many admirable qualities. A kindly judgment seems to indicate that he lacked the proper elements of control over his other attributes—and thus defeated the essential mission he might have carried out during his life. If it takes all sorts of people to make up the world, Winrod was in a class by himself. Despite the swirl of antagonism that he always managed to stir about him, the record indicates that he was a righteous man at heart.

Ralph Lord Roy, in his book, Apostles of Discord, devotes a chapter and makes other references to Winrod. He gives three alternate explanations of Winrod’s career: (1) he was a sincere preacher of Christianity as he interpreted it; (2) he was a man with a perverted sense of mission which led him to seek power; (3) he was motivated by greed. Roy seems to favor the third one, stating that Winrod’s former allies and employees claimed he had a miser complex and “a money-worshipping brain.” He also says that in 1950 the Defenders organization was worth $276,272, and that Winrod’s Wichita residence was valued at $30,000.

One Kansas graduate student (who quoted the Rolla Clymer editorial) leans to the first view, stating his belief that: “Winrod was a sincere preacher and practitioner of what he believed to be right. That he was wrong on many counts or that some of his opinions were asinine and abhorrent does not change the fact of his basic sincerity. Being sincere does not excuse him for any harm he might have done by his activities; it does, however, explain why he did them.”

Another Kansas graduate student presents this summary:

In some ways Winrod embodies the American ideal of good citizenship, if being well informed, holding firm convictions, and participating in political activities are taken to make up that ideal. He was unquestionably a well-read and well-informed citizen. He was a man of convictions boldly declared; as one writer has expressed it, Winrod often called a spade a tractor, so eager was he to make his beliefs plain. Not content with agitating for his beliefs through his several propaganda organs, Winrod fulfilled the third commandment of good citizenship by organizing political action. He took to heart the admonition of his society to do something to correct the ills he saw in that society. His form seems perfect; the content badly warped. When the ideas to which he gave expression through his activities, and the resulting ills he set about to correct are regarded with an eye to their implications for a democratic society, the fallacy of constructing a concept of good citizenship without including a system of values becomes apparent.

Using the Ralph Lord Roy “three alternate explanations” as a reference point, it is my personal belief that Winrod was both “a sincere preacher of Christianity, as he interpreted it,” and “a man with a perverted sense of mission which led him to seek power.”

A Kansas undergraduate scholar, at the conclusion of an excellent research study of Winrod and the mass sedition trial of 1944, has observed:

The threat to democracy comes not primarily from the possibility of wholesale acceptance of Winrod’s views and methods. The danger lies in “Winrodism,” that positive assuredness of national mission which clouds and distorts an ability to see actual causes in events that confront us. Winrod was a product of his time and currents in American life. He also helped shape the America which came after him. The effects of his fantastic efforts to see conspiracy in all that did not conform to his pattern were only amplified by the prosecution in the Sedition Trial which likewise saw a sinister plot lurking behind each bush along the rocky road of democracy. Having been bombarded from all angles in the last few decades by such viewpoints, the American people have developed a nearly paranoid interpretation of world events. Great events are not seen as the result of logical causes; if something goes wrong, be it the loss of China, the loss of eastern Europe, or the assassination of a President, the American people are receptive to conspiracy theories of explanation.

“Winrodism” in the 1930’s, the Sedition Trial and Cold War of the 1940’s, followed by the mad era of McCarthyism have molded what Henry Steele Commager chooses to call a “dirty work at the crossroads” outlook that has become firmly entrenched in American life and thought.

Now, why have I chosen this subject matter for discussion? It is because the dangers of “Winrodism,” or whatever other name we may wish to call it, continue to this day, and because of my belief that we as historians, both professional and amateur, have a particular duty to expose the false and to seek and tell the truth forthrightly, incessantly, and sometimes unpleasantly.

Robert Cecil, in his book, The Myth of the Master Race: Alfred Rosenberg and Nazi Ideology, in speaking of Nazism has succinctly and simply stated the why and the wherefor of these dangers:


Underlying Nazism, however, were two ideas which have universal application and are very much alive today. The first corresponds to man’s basic need to think better of himself by thinking worse of some group of people different from himself. There will always be fertile ground for neo-Fascist and neo-Nazi activity so long as large numbers of men try to compensate at the expense of others for their feelings of insecurity and inferiority. Secondly, the belief seems fated to persist among large groups that their misfortunes must necessarily be due not to individual inadequacy or misdirection of effort, but to the malignant conspiracy of some other groups, which may at any given time be labelled ”the bosses,” ”the Unions,” ”the Commies,” ”the colonial oppressors,” ”the blacks,” or, more simply, ”them.”

Although Winrod indicated he considered himself and his followers superior to all those peoples and groups that he lambasted (which, as we have seen, were many and varied), his greatest error lay in his unshakeable belief in the conspiracy theory of history.

That there have been some conspiracies in history by small groups with particular objectives for a limited time is true, as Julius Caesar, for example, well knew. But to blame our every trouble and misfortune upon the continuing machinations of a handful of “conspirators” is not only false, it greatly hinders the search for remedies for the real (and usually complex) causes for our troubles.

And so, as we plan for a new museum and new programs of service to the people of Kansas, and to those beyond our borders, let us remember that the strength of our state and the nation (indeed, of any nation) lies neither in conformity nor in the superiority of any group, however virtuous and talented it may be, nor in intellectual tranquility and stagnation. Our strength lies in diversity, in tolerance, and sometimes in turmoil.