

**The Birth of Counterjihadist Terrorism:
Reflections on some Unspoken Dimensions of 22 July 2011**

Egil Asprem

E.Asprem@uva.nl

Herostratic fame spreads easily. This past summer Anders Behring Breivik overnight became the most famous Norwegian name since Vidkun Quisling made his a global synonym for treachery. The parallel is ironic, for in Breivik's own mind it was a civil war against the "quislings" of contemporary Norway which made it absolutely "necessary" to blow up the government offices in the center of Oslo, and cold-bloodedly murder sixty-nine people, mostly teenagers, one by one, on the tiny island of Utøya.

In the days after the attack, several scholars of religion both in Norway and abroad took time from their summer holidays to reflect on what had happened. In the immediate chaos on the 22nd, "everybody knew" that al Qaida had finally struck the Norwegian capital. TV-studios were filled with experts who could tell us of the motivations for the Islamist terrorist organization to attack the city that is otherwise only known for the Oslo agreement and the Nobel peace prize. Norwegian troops in Afghanistan were, bombs fell over Libya – yet the terrorist who was apprehended, red-handed and without remorse, was a 32-year-old blond and tall Norwegian male, from Oslo's affluent, bourgeois west side. His Facebook profile stated his political views as "conservative" and his religion as "Christian" – terms that the media soon conflated into "conservative Christian." When pictures of the mass-murderer posing in Freemasonic regalia started circulating, it was as if a collective confusion gripped not only the Norwegian public but the international one too. Major American television networks, including CNN, preferred to continue talking about Islam long after this information was in. "Does not compute."

2083: Eurabia and the Counterjihadist Insurgency

Attention was soon turned to the 1,500-page "manifesto" (the title belongs to the media; Breivik never used it, preferring to talk about his

“book”) that the terrorist disseminated to thousands of email addresses just before donning a police uniform and driving his car bomb into the center of Oslo. The text (a more precise genre specification seems difficult) had religious symbolism all over it. 2083: *A European Declaration of Independence* bears a Maltese cross on its front cover, under which is written *De Laude Novae Militiae – Pauperes Commilitones Christi Templique Solomonici*. The first is translatable as “In Praise of the New Knighthood,” and is the title of Bernard of Clairvaux’s (1090–1153) famous defense of the Knights Templar. The second was the official title of the medieval Knights Templar, and translates as “The Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and the New Temple of Solomon.” From the very start of Breivik’s text, Christianity, military action, and the defense of Europe are tied together, and by the end of it a vision emerges of a new Templar terrorist organization, dedicated to fight Islam, save Europe, and kill the traitorous “cultural Marxists” – that is, politicians on the left, their journalist protégées, academics in the humanities and social sciences, and anyone sympathetic to multiculturalism and feminism. It contains quite specific details for planning and carrying out attacks on these targets, from the assassination of professors to massacres at journalists’ clubs or conventions of social-democratic political parties across Europe.

Substantial parts of the manifesto have been copied directly from blog posts and articles written by “counterjihadist” writers and ideologues, particularly by the Norwegian blogger Fjordman (Peder Are Nøstvold Jensen, b. 1975). Ideologically, the manifesto places itself within a broader configuration of ideas and worldviews expounded on blogs such as *The Brussels Journal*, *Gates of Vienna*, and *Jihad-Watch*, and sometimes referred to as “the Vienna School of Thought.” These writers and would-be demagogues fear that hidden conspiratorial forces on the political scene as well as in the culture sector are working towards the establishment of “Eurabia” – a Europe coextensive with the Arabic world, with mosques replacing churches and *shari’ah* taking over the courts.¹ There is a continuum here to political positions and views of the world that are placed well within the political mainstream of European parliamentary systems – through parties such as the Dutch PVV, the Sweden Democrats, the Norwegian Peoples’ Party (FrP), the True Finns, and most extremely perhaps, the Hungarian Jobbik party. In this sense, at least, the core elements of Breivik’s ideology are not “extreme” in the sense of falling far outside the limits of what is considered legitimate political expressions in Europe today.

1. The evocative notion is traced back to the Israeli writer Bat Ye’or, *Eurabia: The Euro-Arab Axis* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005).

The basic tenets of the ideology, shared by spokespersons deep inside the political mainstream, are simple: 1) Islam is equated with Nazism/Fascism, and seen as an existential and formidable threat to European civilization; 2) The political establishment, and particularly the Left, is blamed for allowing “the Islamization of Europe” to happen, and typically considered to be “traitors”; 3) Hence, the twin enemies of European culture are identified as socialist and social-democratic politics on the one hand, and Islam on the other.

Breivik’s radicalism consists in taking up arms, and directing his ideologically motivated strike against what he sees as the “cultural Marxists” and “Quislings” of the Norwegian Labour Party (Arbeiderpartiet). Breivik is a radical revolutionary conservative (it is natural to think about the conservative revolutionary movement in Weimar Germany to find ideological kinship, although highly differing contexts need to be accounted for),² and it is the *revolutionary* aspect which truly sets him apart from the numerous non-violent proponents of similar worldviews and ideologies that seem to have mushroomed over the last decade.

Occurring only ten weeks after the assassination of Osama bin Laden, the symbol of global jihadist terrorism, Breivik’s disgusting massacre of defenseless teenagers is symbolic of a new phase in our discourse on terrorism. Just as 9/11 took the meaning of terrorism—previously connected mostly with extreme leftist groups, anarchists, right-wingers, separatists, and the IRA—and turned it into a term seen as largely *coextensive* with “Islamic fundamentalism” or “political Islam,” so too Norway’s 22/7 should alter our views of terrorism once again. The *counter-jihadists* have now produced their first terrorist. There is indeed a sad continuum between 9/11 and 22/7. The counterjihadist repackaging of right-wing ideology was largely made possible by the public response to 9/11. Islamophobia became mainstream, and a dehumanising rhetoric has mushroomed in official media outlets as well as in semi-public discussion forums online, howling about the invasion of Muslims as well as the “treachery” of liberal politicians. In some quarters, the post-9/11 vision is so ingrained that the response to 22/7 has been one of blaming the victims and implicitly, if not explicitly, voicing support for Breivik: Glenn Beck, in one of his usual insightful and well-informed commentaries on current events, thus managed to compare the massacred teenagers on Utøya with the *Hitlerjugend*.³

2. See, e.g., Bat Ye’or, *Eurabia: The Euro-Arab Axis* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005).

3. See, e.g., Ber Quinn, “Glenn Beck likens Norwegian dead to Hitler youth,” *The Guardian*, July 26, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2011/jul/26/glenn-beck-norwegian-dead-hitler>.

In Breivik's mind, and the minds of countless others who share key elements of his ideology, they were traitors. And what does one do to traitors? Breivik knew the answer to that question, and took to its violent but logical conclusion the type of language that had been possessed and created by a large segment of the Western population, in Europe as well as in the United States.

Christian Terrorism?

The sudden deviation from the post-9/11 script of spectacular terrorist attacks gave scholars of religion something new to explain. Immediately after the attack the Italian sociologist of religion and founder of CESNUR, Massimo Introvigne, published a response on the CESNUR website;⁴ noted expert of religious violence and former president of the AAR, Mark Juergensmeyer, commented in *The Huffington Post* and the *Religion Dispatches* blog;⁵ and the veteran Christianity scholar Martin E. Marty published a short reflection in his *Sightings* newsletter from the University of Chicago.⁶

The question that these scholars have been most eager to address has been whether or not, or in what sense, Breivik is a "Christian," and to what extent his Christianity had anything to do with his motivations to kill. Introvigne was quick to dismantle the view that we were looking at a "Christian Fundamentalist."⁷ Instead, Introvigne emphasized that Breivik's use of Christianity is purely as an *instrumentum regni*, an instrument for use by the emerging "elite" of which he sees himself as the vanguard. Christianity's importance is for forging cultural and political cohesion in a fight for European identity and against Muslim occupation and "cultural Marxist" degeneration.

Juergensmeyer and Breivik's "Cosmic War"

Quite an opposite emphasis was made by Mark Juergensmeyer, whose *Huffington Post* commentary explained "Why Breivik Was a Christian

4. Introvigne, "The Identity Ideology of Anders Behring Breivik: Not a Christian Fundamentalist," <http://www.cesnur.org/2011/mi-oslo-en.html>.

5. Juergensmeyer, "Why Breivik Was a Christian Terrorist," *Huffington Post*, July 27, 2011, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mark-juergensmeyer/why-breivik-was-a-christi_b_910443.html; Juergensmeyer, "Is Norway's Suspected Murderer a Christian Terrorist?," *Religion Dispatches*, July 24, 2011, http://www.religiondispatches.org/archive/politics/4910/is_norway%E2%80%99s_suspected_murderer_anders_breivik_a_christian_terrorist/.

6. Marty, "Breivik's Christianity," August 7, 2011, http://divinity.uchicago.edu/martycenter/publications/sightings/archive_2011/0801.shtml.

7. Introvigne, "The Identity Ideology of Anders Behring Breivik."

Terrorist.” Juergensmeyer’s analysis has received much attention online, in official media channels and on blogs. It was also translated into Norwegian, after which it attracted some criticism in the Norwegian blog circuit.⁸ Seeing as Juergensmeyer is an influential and well-regarded scholar, an expert of religious terrorism and violence, it becomes all the more important to engage seriously with the ideas he has put forward and raise some points of criticism where they are due. In what follows, I will take Juergensmeyer’s reflections on the “Christian terrorist” as a starting point for offering some further reflections on Breivik’s religion.

Juergensmeyer argues that Breivik, like Timothy McVeigh, is essentially a “Christian terrorist.” “Many Christians cringe when Norwegian mass-murderer Anders Breivik is described as a ‘Christian terrorist,’ but that is what he is.” *Pace* Introvigne,

It is true that Breivik was much more concerned about politics and history than about scripture and religious belief. But much the same can be said about Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri and other Muslim terrorists. ... So if bin Laden was a Muslim terrorist, Breivik is a Christian terrorist.⁹

Since labelling al Qaeda an “Islamic” or “Muslim” terrorist organisation has become something of a convention, despite central ideologues being arguably just as much interested in global politics and a rhetoric of cultural hegemony, the logic goes that Behring Breivik’s terrorist acts, legitimated by a similar mixture of religion and politics, are justifiably labelled “Christian.”

So far so good, although one could arguably use the same logic to deconstruct the “Muslim” qualifier of terrorist attacks that are legitimated (among other things) by references to Islam, or for that matter the “Jewishness” of terrorism justified by narratives derived from Judaism.

Less convincing is Juergensmeyer’s strangely picked example of just how “Christian” Breivik really is:

The symbol that Breivik designed for his movement, and that was made into a medallion in India, portrays a cross penetrating a skull on which are scrawled the crescent symbol of Islam, the Marxist hammer and sickle, and the Nazi swastika. How much more Christian can you get?

The symbol referred to is Breivik’s “Badge of the Justiciar Knight” that he had designed by an artist in Varanasi, India.¹⁰ It is hard to see what

8. For example, Bjørn Are Davidsen, “Retorikk og revirmarkering,” *Dekodet*, August 6, 2011, <http://dekodet.blogspot.com/2011/08/retorikk-og-revirmarkering.html>.

9. Juergensmeyer, “Why Breivik Was a Christian Terrorist”.

10. See e.g. “Varanasi, Hindutva link in Norway’s mass murderer’s manifesto,”

is so essentially Christian about a cross-shaped dagger crushing a skull with symbols of Islam, Communism, and Nazism on it. One would need something quite a bit more substantial to make a convincing argument for a straight-forward Christian connection. Instead, we seem left with a particularly militant expression of symbolism derived from the counterjihadist movement.

These faults aside, one should not dismiss out of hand the relevance of Juergensmeyer's general approach to religion and violence to the events of 22/7. Consider, for example, that a major point of his acclaimed book, *Terror in the Mind of God*, was that a religious background never monocausally *leads to*, nor fully *explains*, specific acts of violence. What religions may do, however, is provide the "mores and symbols" through which such acts of violence are understood, legitimated, even seen as necessary and good. The religiously symbolic dimension of such acts of violence often take place within a preconceived state of war, typically a Manichean struggle between forces and agents of Ultimate Evil and the righteous soldiers of Go(o)d – what Juergensmeyer calls "cosmic war."

This may at first sight fit Breivik much better, as he believes himself to fight a lonely war against the roots of evil that he identifies with the internal enemy of Marxism/multiculturalism/feminism and the external enemy of Islam. At least that is the case Juergensmeyer attempts to make.

Another concept for which Juergensmeyer is known is the notion that religious terrorism is "performance violence":

Like religious ritual or street theater, they are dramas designed to have an impact on the several audiences that they affect. Those who witness the violence—even at a distance, via the news media—are therefore a part of what occurs.¹¹

That there is a performative aspect to Breivik's attacks is without doubt. It is mythologized, and strongly *fictionalized* through the narrative of a secret Templar terrorist organization drawn up in the manifesto (more on that in a bit). The trial ensuing after getting caught alive is even described as a stage, through which the terrorist can reach a worldwide audience. This is performance all the way down.

For Juergensmeyer, "performance violence" is closely linked with *empowerment*. Through perpetrating carefully scripted acts of violence against highly symbolic targets, which are given meaning in terms of a

Star News, July 27, 2011, <http://www.newsbullet.in/world/52-more/13934-varanasi-and-hindutva-link-in-norway-mass-murderers-manifesto?tmpl=component&print=1&layout=default&page=>.

11. Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 124.

war of cosmic proportions, the individuals and groups involved create an illusion of control and power.

While this aspect may be important for many religiously motivated terrorists, it seems less of a fit when applied to Behring Breivik. Again, this questions the usefulness of labelling him a “Christian terrorist,” fighting a Christian “cosmic war” in the Juergensmeyerian sense. A curious feature of the counterjihadists is that, while they in reality represent demographical groups which are *dominant* and in all relevant ways *empowered* in Western societies (politically as well as socioeconomically and culturally), they have nevertheless created a discourse in which they cast themselves as *disempowered* (i.e. by “Marxist” elites and a “tsunami” of Muslim immigrants), and their own existence as being under threat. An act of performance violence on this background can, perhaps, be seen as an act of empowerment, but one that is based on a completely paranoid distortion of reality and of one’s own relative (lack of) power. Breivik grew up in the comfortable upper middle class, with access to good education, and all opportunities being open to him. Yet he devoted himself to fighting an imagined enemy which, in the real world, hardly has the same privileges.

A final problem with this reading of Breivik concerns Juergensmeyer’s concept of a Manichean “cosmic war.” While a state of war is certainly imagined and used for all it is worth in Breivik’s manifesto and by the many who agree with his views on multiculturalism and Muslim immigration, the war is “Manichean” only in the sense of representing a grossly dualistic attribution of evil, but not at all in the sense of being a cosmic war with truly transcendent goals and rewards. Behring Breivik’s war, like the war of his fellow counterjihadists, is *here and now*. It is about the identity of Europe, not about transcendent salvation or the ultimate fate of the cosmos.

So, we are back with radical identity politics, and Christianity as a cultural marker. In that regard it is worth mentioning that Behring Breivik explicitly sympathizes with groups fighting for similar monocultural values in their own regions, and that this some times leads to arguments against the spread of Christendom. For example, Breivik expresses deep respect for the Indian Hindutva movement, not only because they share a common enemy in Islam, but also because their agendas of identity politics are structurally very close to each other.

Breivik even comes out *against* Christian conversion efforts in India, seen as a shameful crime against the Indian nation. From the “manifesto”:

The UPA (incumbent government) relies on appeasing Muslims and very

sadly proselytising Christian missionaries who illegally convert low caste Hindus with lies and fear alongside Communists who want total destruction of the Hindu faith and culture. ... India will continue to wither and die unless the Indian nationalists consolidate properly and strike to win. It is essential that the European and Indian resistance movements learn from each other and cooperate as much as possible. Our goals are more or less identical.¹²

Counterjihadism and Paganism

The priority of nationalist identity politics over religion “for its own sake” does not stop there. In the imagined European civil war, carefully forecasted in Breivik’s *2083*, Christianity is only one cultural marker among other possible ones. Breivik does not hide the fact that he considers himself merely a “cultural Christian” rather than a “religious” one: “Myself and many more like me do not necessarily have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and God. We do however believe in Christianity as a cultural, social, identity and moral platform. This makes us Christian.”¹³ In fact, the existing institutions of Christendom are all seen as corrupt, weak and “suicidal,” and a thorough *reform* of Christianity is another of Breivik’s revolutionary aims. This would be a different church indeed, and it would include much of what has been “rejected” through earlier phases of European identity politics. Including *Odinism*:

As a Norwegian, I am extremely proud of my Odinistic/Norse heritage as it is an essential aspect of my culture and my identity. However, things aren’t black and white. Supporting the Christian cultural heritage does not automatically mean you hate Odinism or vice versa. ... The Odinists needs to understand that the Church they hate is the cultural Marxist Church and not the real Church. The Church I love doesn’t exist anymore because it has been deconstructed. However, I know that it can be reformed and that it again will embrace and propagate principles of strength, honour and self defense. Instead of abandoning the Church we will save it and re-create it as a nationalistic Church which will tolerate and allow (to a very large degree) native cultures/heritage/thought systems such as Odinism.¹⁴

Odinism denotes, as readers of this journal will surely know, a particular approach to reconstructionist Norse neopaganism (otherwise *Åsatru*) that has often been linked with right-wing politics in the past, and particularly with racism/racialism. This issue has been highly controversial within Pagan communities, where it has sparked intense internal polem-

12. Breivik, *2083*, unpaginated.

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*

ics over the years.¹⁵ In Norway, this sort of racist Pagan religion, whose main goal is to expound extreme (and often vulgar) right-wing political ideas, has had several expressions, of which the most well-known are the now defunct Odinist group Vigrid, led by Tore Tvedt, and the various efforts of black metal pioneer, arsonist, and murderer Varg Vikernes.

In his manifesto, Breivik explains why Odinism simply was not good enough for his uses:

Odinism is significant for the Nordic countries but it does not have the potency to unite us against such a devastating force as Islam, cultural Marxism/multiculturalism and capitalist globalism.¹⁶

This is precisely where Christianity comes in instead:

In order to protect your culture you need, at the very minimum, strong, uniting symbols representing your culture. In this context, the cross is the unrivalled as it is the most potent European symbol. I have had this discussion with many Odinists, and even they understand this.¹⁷

In the Q&A section which follows, Breivik continues this thoroughly pragmatic and instrumentalist line:

Q: Why did you choose an allegiance to a group with Christian values and pan-European goals instead of a purely national/regional group?

A: Many have asked this question. My choice has nothing to do with the fact that I am not proud [sic!!] of my own traditions and heritage. My choice was based purely [on] pragmatism.¹⁸

While he had considered an Odinist outlook, Breivik continues, he chose Christianity instead, the basic argument being that it provides a broader and better platform from which to launch a cultural war on behalf of his imagined monocultural Europe. Religion for him is explicitly a tool to achieve worldly ends—and not a provider of references for “cosmic war.” The script for war was rather found in a certain political and cultural discourse (counterjihadism, islamophobia, etc.), built around defining “European culture” and fighting perceived internal and external “threats.” Religion is built over this, as superstructure (ironically in a somewhat cynical Marxian sense)—and it is just as much the Pagan forebears as the later Christian cultures of Europe that fascinate. Brei-

15. I have previously analyzed the polemics over right-wing politics and racism in reconstructionist Norse Paganism in Norway in the present journal: Egil Asprem, “Heathens up North: Politics, Polemics, and Contemporary Norse Paganism in Norway,” *The Pomegranate* 10.1 (2008): 41-69.

16. Breivik, 2083.

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*

vik's ideological hero, the blogger Peder "Fjordman" Jensen, made this clear enough in the article "Christianity, Pros and Cons," later reused in the terrorist's manifesto:

Yes, medieval Christianity had no qualms about resisting invaders, but medieval Christians (as Protestants love to point out) had adulterated their faith with pagan beliefs. Over the past few centuries, Christianity has stripped itself of its pagan accretions. In the process, it has become as much a threat to ourselves and our loved ones as Marxism used to be, if not more so.¹⁹

As European Christendom gradually extirpated its Pagan roots and elements, it, too, gradually became a threat to European identity and culture. In this light, it is less of a surprise that the future church Breivik fantasises about would include Pagan traditions.

An Intermezzo by Varg Vikernes

As if to illustrate the ideological fault lines as well as the links between Christian-oriented counterjihadism and the older style of Norse Pagan right-wing ideology, Varg Vikernes personally entered the scene with a damning criticism of Breivik, from his own "heathen" perspective.²⁰ The two disagree mainly about one thing: The Jews. Where Breivik is a pro-Israel pragmatic cultural-Christian Zionist, Vikernes is a classical anti-Semite. Quote Vikernes:

[Behring Breivik's] manifest is vast, some 1500 pages, and he is pretty thorough in both what he says and what he did. There are a few facts that doesn't [sic!] make sense to me. How can he list all the problems caused by different Jews in our history and yet fail to mention even one of them with a single word in his manifest? He attacks the symptoms of the disease Europe is suffering under, but not the cause of the disease.²¹

The cause, of course, is a worldwide conspiracy of Jews. Vikernes then goes on to attack Breivik's involvement with Freemasonry, or "international Jewry at its worst":

they too are working for a de-construction of all nations on Earth, and to build a global Hebrew temple, enslaving us all under the will of the Jews and their servants, the Freemasons.²²

Then, of course, his Christianity:

19. Fjordman, "Christianity, Pros and Cons," *The Brussels Journal*, August 29, 2007.

20. Vikernes, "War in Europe: Part I - Cui bono?," *Burzum.org*, July 24, 2011, http://www.burzum.org/eng/library/war_in_europe01.shtml.

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*

The Jews created Christianity as a religion for non-Jews to follow, so that they too would become worshippers of their Hebrew false “God,” so that the unruly Pagan Europeans would become servants and a powerful tool for the Jews.²³

Nevertheless, the affinity that Breivik had felt towards the Odinists is reciprocated by Vikernes, who admits that most of Breivik’s paranoid ideas are “true,” although the “right” interpretive key (i.e. classical anti-Semitism and conspiratorial anti-Freemasonry) is missing:

What Mr. Breivik has said is largely true, in all except in what he doesn’t say; he doesn’t tell us that the Jews are the origin to all these problems, and that they were created by the Jews to hurt us. All we have to do to make this act of violence favourable to us is to make this clear to everyone; the Jews created Marxism, feminism, Christianity (need I tell you that Jesus and not least Paulus/Saul were both Jews?), so-called psychology, banking (“money lending”), the hippie-movement and all other ideologies and movements which are aimed to destroy and de-construct all nations in Europe. Behind each and every one of them you will find a Jew (or some times a Freemason)!²⁴

Vikernes’ conclusion is thus predictable: 22/7 was either a “false flag” operation, or Breivik had been misled by conspiratorial forces, become a marionette in the hands of the Elders of Zion.

Coda: The Esoteric Dimension of Counterjihadism

I: Fiction, Templars, and Terrorism

In connection with Breivik’s militant revolutionary stance, certain symbols, mythology, and social structures which offer a superficial suggestion of Western esotericism appear. These have for the most part evaded any analysis in the wider public, but may offer some additional clues to understand the cultural logic at play. In Book Three of *2083*, Breivik builds his revolutionary strategy around a revived Order of the Knights Templar. He poses in full Freemasonic regalia, indicating a third degree of the local St. John’s Lodge of the Norwegian Order of Freemasons, of which he was a member.²⁵ There is even an initiation ritual,

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. There has been some speculation regarding Breivik’s interest in Freemasonry. It does not figure frequently in *2083*, but every time Freemasonry is mentioned, it is in connection with the Knights Templar. The origin myth of the Masons being the successors of the Templars shines through on several occasions. Breivik is not

apparently based on the first degree of Freemasonry. Ideally, this ritual should be performed in the Temple of Solomon, but “as you obviously do not have access to the Temple of Solomon (as it currently lies in ruin below the Al Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem)” it will have to be performed with “the second best option, a solid rock (shaped somewhat as a cubic altar) resembling an actual stone altar”:

Prior to the rite, you, as a Justiciar Knight candidate, are described as a “poor candidate,” in a burdened state of darkness, which is figurative of being in a state of the darkest ignorance surrounded by negative influences (chains/burdens) preventing you from being a Knight and doing the right thing. The properties of stability and strength of the stone altar is being communicated to the oath contributing to making it inviolable. Furthermore, you are to print out the text (the oath) and sign it with your own blood, and subsequently burn it on the “altar.”

What do the references to Freemasonry, initiation rituals, and Templarism mean in this context? Is there an “esoteric connection”?

The initial answer should be “Not really.” As brilliantly observed by Umberto Eco’s protagonists in *Foucault’s Pendulum*:

The lunatic is all *idée fixe*, and whatever he comes across confirms his lunacy. You can tell him by the liberties he takes with common sense, by his flashes of inspiration, and by the fact that sooner or later he brings up the Templars.²⁶

Foucault’s Pendulum is a fitting reference in another way as well, since Breivik, in fact, explicitly states that the Order is a *fictitious* one, only illustrating how a revolutionary campaign *could* look. The intended use of fiction reminds one of the processes described by Eco, by which fiction becomes fact – at least for some people. In Eco’s novel, the protagonists’ playful invention of an ultra-secret esoteric Order, the *Templi Resurgentes Equites Synarchici*, or simply *Tres*, and their big, long-term plan to estab-

uncritical of contemporary Freemasonry, however: “They claim to be Knights of Christ yet they are not willing to sacrifice their life for the preservation of European Christendom. They do not even acknowledge that European Christendom is in the process of being deconstructed. They claim to be Knights but they are not even warriors. How can they claim to be today’s manifestation of a pious chivalric order when the core doctrine of the Knights Templar was to submit to voluntary poverty? All I see is a group of decadent individuals who are not willing to make any substantial sacrifices for anyone or anything.” Despite this tirade, he does “respect their role in society. They are fine representatives and curators (keepers of cultural heritage) and therefore fulfil an essential role. In fact, we [the Knights Templar] have much to learn from them and are likely to go to them (their libraries) for research purposes.” Breivik, 2083, unpaginated (Q&A section).

26. Umberto Eco, *Foucault’s Pendulum* (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1989), 56.

lish universal Synarchy, becomes all too serious when it takes on a life of its own in the minds of occultists hungry for secrets and conspiracies.

In the real history of esoteric societies, Eco's satire is reminiscent of the way the first Rosicrucian orders were created. It all started as a *ludibrium* in the early 1600s: the invention of a fictional secret order, based on a fictional character (Christian Rosenkreutz), and the printing of spoof manifestos (*Fama* and *Confessio Fraternitatis*), which nevertheless spoke to very real issues at the brink of religious war in Europe.²⁷ About a hundred years later, real groups were emerging, claiming that *they* were the genuine Rosicrucians (ignoring, of course, the warning of the manifestos that no real Rosicrucian will ever admit to being one).²⁸ Whether or not Johann Valentin Andreae and his circle would approve of the many secret Rosicrucian orders which have later drawn up their mythologies based on the stories of the manifestoes we cannot know, but it is doubtful.

A similar effect may have been intended by Behring Breivik for his 2083-manifesto, attempting to inspire real-world action through the fictional creation of an extravagant and secret military order of Knights Templar. Though Breivik claims his order to be fictional, there is significant ambiguity. Quoting his infamous manifesto once again:

The motivation for this "fiction-writer-approach" is to contribute to create a new type of innovative writing style. By defining, in a horrifically detailed way, a fictional scenario, the reader will be shocked due to the "hopefully" credible and extremely detailed elaborations....The book was created to try to explain to the European political elites how the continuation of given political doctrines could result in similar manifestations (radicalisation of certain groups/individuals), as history has already proven, if they continue with their current policies. As such, it is a reminder to the current establishment what might happen if they repeat the mistakes of the past.... All "threats" etc in these fictional books are "in character" and its primary goal is to give an impression of what it would be like if we were under threat by an extremist organisation....All incriminatory information in this work is written "in character" and must not be confused with an actual plan, or strategy to attempt to harm any individuals or infrastructure, any political groups or attempt to seize political or military control of Western European regimes...²⁹

27. For a concise overview of the formation, see e.g. Roland Edighoffer, "Rosicrucianism I: First Half of the 17th Century," in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, edited by W. J. Hanegraaff et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 1009-1014.

28. See, for example, Christopher McIntosh, *The Rose Cross and the Age of Reason: Eighteenth-Century Rosicrucianism in Central Europe and its Relationship to the Enlightenment* (Leiden: Brill, 1997); cf. Henrik Bogdan, *Western Esotericism and Rituals of Initiation* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008).

29. Breivik, 2083, unpaginated.

It would be wise, therefore, to see most of what comes from Behring Breivik's pen and mouth, also (and *especially*) during the trials ahead, as *prescriptive* rather than descriptive statements. In this respect, his Templar dreams are as much part of his ideology — as motivational fiction, utopian literature, or blueprints of revolution — as any of his paranoid Eurabian fantasies and anti-Marxist rants.

When it comes to substance, Breivik's Knights Templar seem little more than a fancy name for a guerrilla-structured military/terrorist organisation, with the symbolic force of medieval Christianity and crusade rhetoric so fitting for the counterjihadist movement. The prescribed organization obviously looks nothing like the historical Knights Templar, and neither does it resemble in any substantial way the countless neo-Templar esoteric orders that have formed out of esoteric currents over the last couple of centuries. Any connection seems purely aesthetic, purely superficial, and we find no obvious trace of any direct and thought-through engagement with esoteric discourses.

But that is, perhaps, a superficial response to a superficial use of the esoteric. May this esthetic and thematic overlap signify something else, something which has perhaps less to do with Breivik's own conscious motivations, but is still linked to deeper structures in Western culture and identity? Maybe.

II: The Cultural Logic of Esotericism

This is not the first time that Templarism gets connected with right-wing politics—we have, notably, Lanz von Liebenfels' Ordo Novi Templi (founded 1907), with its racist and "ariosophical" *Theozoologie*.³⁰ The connection between esotericism and right-wing politics has lived on in the public imagination throughout the post-war era, and several groups and spokespersons exist, advocating views that rest on this fusion. From radical traditionalists to esoteric Hitlerists, esoteric imagery, ideas, themes, symbolism and related mythology have provided motifs in certain right-wing movements and philosophies³¹ — sometimes in more substantial ways, but mostly, as with Breivik, not beyond the aesthetic level.

Why is this so? Perhaps the beginning of an answer can be found if we look at the deeper historical and cultural structures in which esoteri-

30. For this context, see Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: Aryan Sects and their Influence on Nazi Ideology* (New York: New York University Press, 1992 [1985]).

31. See e.g. Joscelyn Godwin, *Arktos: The Polar Myth in Science, Symbolism, and Nazi Survival* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1993).

cism is essentially rooted. Wouter Hanegraaff once proposed the notion of a “Grand Polemical Narrative” at play in Western culture, which has, through various historical periods created a category of “rejected” and often quite stigmatised knowledges.³² It starts with the rejection of paganism and magic as dangerous and perverted religions, a process which was still strongly present during the Protestant Reformation. It continues with the rejection of “occult sciences,” and related things like Rosicrucianism and secret societies, as ridiculous and irrational fantasies, during and following the Enlightenment. Crudely put, what was at stake was the construction of Western cultural identity, first as monotheistic and Christian, then as rational and scientific, and arguably in our own days: as secular, humanistic, and tolerant.

The point here is that the esoteric in Western culture in large part has emerged from and been connected to – almost to the extent of being coextensive with – everything in the world of thought that has been rejected in these successive struggles over the identity of European culture. But the irony is that, following the Enlightenment especially, the “waste basket” has become a natural place to start for opposing voices – reactionaries, romantics, and progressive visionaries alike. Whether the discontent be preoccupied with religion, science, philosophy, or politics, exotic alternatives are plenty in the reservoir of esoteric ideas and motifs.

Given this structural affinity between rejected elements of the past, and given that what we call esotericism is somehow baked into these modes of cultural change and innovation, we may have a reason why “the esoteric” surfaces in revolutionary conservative ideologies. These are, after all, movements which are built on something of a reversal of the “Grand Polemical Narrative.”³³

Perhaps this does not explain much, but it does provide a nuanced answer to those who might want to start talking about a right-wing “esoterrorism”: No, we should not consider Brevik’s neo-Templar terrorist fantasies a “proper part of” Western esotericism as such. But neither is the presence of esoteric motifs entirely coincidental, and we do find other traces of this within segments of the European New Right (*Nouvelle Droite*). In fact, when the esoteric links with politics in modern history it is almost always connected with various “countercultural” movements;

32. An updated version will be available in his new book: Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

33. A version of this argument is advanced in a forthcoming article by Jacob C. Senholt, “Radical Politics and Political Esotericism: The Adaptation of Esoteric Discourse within the Radical Right,” in *Contemporary Esotericism*, edited by Egil Asprem and Kennet Granholm (London: Equinox, 2012).

however, these may very well be on the left as on the right (to the extent that the distinction makes any sense). Consider for example the utopian Socialist Spiritualists of the 19th century, or the connection between esoteric ideas culled primarily from Theosophy and Anthroposophy on the leftist counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s. It is as if any ideological critique of (or revolt against) modernity that seeks to incorporate a religious dimension never escapes the esoteric.

It did not escape counterjihadism, although that does not make counterjihadism “esoteric.” Neither does it make a vile mass-murderer as Breivik an “esoterrorist.” A “Breivik,” not unlike a “Quisling,” is merely someone who massacres his own people in the name of blind ideology that claims such crimes are necessary in order to save that very same people. There is nothing “esoteric” about it, just a slippery slope of poor arguments and flawed ideology.