

Shooting

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building bombs, but they are shooters," Potok said. "Hale is saying he's not responsible, but Hale is a hypocrite."

Across the country, members of the church have been convicted of murder, beatings and conspiracies to bomb NAACP offices and black churches. Police in Sacramento, Calif., are also investigating whether members are behind the arson last month of three synagogues.

Hale, an aspiring lawyer, said he urges church members to stay

within the law. He said blaming the shootings on his group is like blaming the Pope for abortion clinic bombings.

But a recent Sacramento (Calif.) Bee newspaper story quoted him on the synagogue arsons as saying, "Certainly there is nothing immoral about torching the den of the serpent."

The World Church of the Creator dates back to 1973, when it was formed by Ben Klassen, a Florida real estate man of Ukrainian birth who became wealthy after inventing an electric can opener.

Klassen wrote tracts of

explosive racism, urging whites to push blacks, Jews and other "mud races" off the face of the planet.

After one group member was convicted of beating a black sailor to death in a Florida parking lot, Klassen committed suicide, swallowing four bottles of sleeping pills in 1993.



Smith

The church seemed to disappear until the appearance of Hale, who was made "Pontifex Maximus" — an ancient Roman title meaning Supreme Leader — in 1995 on a Montana ranch. Hate-group monitors say they believe the church has grown under Hale's recruiting efforts and use of the Internet.

While the church is thought to have 46 chapters and several hundred active members, thousands more are believed to be associated with the group and its anti-Semitic, racist rhetoric, Potok said.

Hatewatch.org, a monitor of

hate sites on the Internet, reports that the World Church of the Creator has the fastest-growing Internet presence among racist groups today, with pages dedicated to recruiting women and children.

"What you'll hear from Matt Hale is that the World Church of the Creator does not condone violence," said Hatewatch.org founder and director David Goldman.

"But read his Web site," he said. "You'll read enough to see why someone may take it upon himself to get a gun and kill minorities."

For his part, Hale said one motive for Smith's shooting spree may have been a decision last week by an Illinois state hearing panel to reject Hale's application for a law license.

Smith had testified for Hale before that board in April.

"Our number one goal is to straighten out the white man's thinking," he told the panel. "We're the new minority being crushed left and right."

Smith admitted he had "considered violent acts to achieve racial goals, but Hale counseled me to act peacefully."



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