

CHAPTER 8

Rifles and Rhetoric

IN MAY 1934 DR. HEINRICH BRÜNING BURNED HIS PERSONAL PAPERS and fled Germany. Brüning had been chancellor of the Weimar Republic from 1930 until 1932, navigating the ship of state through the thick of the Depression. Now he was just steps ahead of the Gestapo, the secret police controlled by Himmler. Brüning probably would have been caught but for the aid of an unlikely guardian. “Goebbels saved my life,” Brüning later recalled. Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi propaganda chief, had gotten word to Brüning’s secretary, urging that the former chancellor “not go by the usual streets.” Brüning needed to get far away. He took a position in the political science department at Harvard and headed to Boston.¹

Brüning spent his first few years at Harvard in isolation, concentrating on teaching and academic affairs. He “resided like a monk” and rarely spoke out on events in Germany. But then came November 1938 and Kristallnacht. Brüning broke his silence with a flurry of highly charged articles characterizing Hitler and his men as “torturers” of Jews and predicting that Nazism would soon die out. Herbert Scholz did not like the sound of that. Himmler’s henchman arrived in Boston just as Brüning’s press campaign was gaining momentum. There is every reason to suspect that Scholz was sent to Boston specifically to seal Brüning’s lips again, but no one connected these events at the time. The American press speculated that Scholz’s assignment was a demotion following an unspecified diplomatic faux-pas in Washington.²

Scholz spent part of his first year in Boston investigating Brüning and devising a scheme to undermine him. Then, in October 1939, Brüning received a stunning letter from the consulate. The German Foreign Office, Scholz explained, had “received certain information” to the effect that the former chancellor would spend the upcoming semester lecturing at the University of Oxford. Scholz reminded Brüning that Germany and Britain were at war and asked that Brüning contact him to “discuss the matter . . . now.” Brüning made no reply. His plans were not public knowledge, which meant that Scholz was spying on him.³

Brüning had every reason to feel threatened. He knew Scholz’s father in law, Georg von Schnitzler, and the implications of that relationship: Scholz was close to the heights of Nazi power. Indeed, via Schnitzler, Brüning likely was aware that Scholz had spent time at the Brown House and was now an SS officer, which meant he took orders from Himmler, the man whose death squads Brüning had narrowly escaped. Describing the “purge list” compiled for the Night of the Long Knives, Brüning told an interviewer, “I was at the head. Then came Schleicher. They got Schleicher.” Former Chancellor Kurt von Schleicher and his wife were murdered in a hail of bullets on June 30, 1934, as they answered a knock on the door. Brüning harbored no illusions about Scholz and worried both for himself and for loved ones back in Germany. Refusing to respond to Scholz was a tactical mistake, though. Soon more letters arrived, each one adding to Brüning’s fears.⁴

Scholz’s interventions had their intended effect, scaring Brüning into quiescence just as his anti-Hitler activities were beginning to take off. These included not only outspoken protests but also clandestine efforts to directly undermine the Nazi regime, such as Brüning’s behind-the-scenes backing of Adam von Trott, a German diplomat and early Nazi resister. In November 1939 Trott wrote a sensitive memorandum to the State Department “soliciting the assistance of . . . individuals in the United States in supporting a movement involving the overthrow of the present regime in Germany.” Brüning arranged for Trott to meet with Assistant Secretary of State George S. Messersmith, perhaps the foremost anti-Nazi in the State Department at that time. But in the wake of Scholz’s harassment, Brüning cut off contact with Trott. The dissident found no further support in the United States, and his influence campaign went nowhere, as the country remained stubbornly on the sidelines of the war in Europe until 1942. Trott returned to Germany and continued his

work, eventually getting the noose in 1944 after joining Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg's plot to assassinate Hitler.⁵

The intimidation campaign against Brüning was hardly the only intelligence work Scholz did for the SS while stationed in Boston. Scholz was not in Boston long—by summer 1941, he was expelled from the United States along with the rest of Germany's diplomatic corps. But his sojourn was an energetic one and often fruitful. He owed his effectiveness to a number of factors. One was his own creativity. Scholz pursued a range of activities, from coercion of dissenters to secret and overt information warfare. One day he developed intelligence, and the next he engaged in sabotage. His stable of agents included Fascist- and Communist-sympathizers alike. A true master of spy craft, Scholz knew every trick in the book and many besides.

A second source of Scholz's accomplishments was the ineptitude of US security officials. Virgil Peterson, a Chicagoan whose true interest lay in busting that city's organized crime syndicates, never got the hang of counterintelligence or counterterrorism. From the vantage point of history, it seems that, as far as Peterson was concerned, bad guys were motivated by money, not God or politics. He spent his years in Boston a passive observer of both the Christian Front and its Nazi handlers. Meanwhile officials in Washington were stuck in neutral. The American public was well and truly at odds with itself over the war in Europe, making a concerted counterespionage effort politically contentious. For every member of Congress who wanted the national security apparatus to do more to root out German agents, there was another who insisted that there were no such agents. These politicians did not consider Hitler a friend, but did he really need to be an enemy? It is also worth keeping in mind that US intelligence was in its infancy, growing to behemoth proportions only during the Cold War.⁶

Finally, Scholz could credit a good deal of his work to Moran. Among all of Scholz's espionage efforts, his most ambitious may have been a project to undermine the US military—a project of which Moran was the public face. It was a remarkable transformation for Moran and another demonstration of his quick wits and rhetorical talents. Unlike the many Army and National Guard veterans of the New York front, Moran the lecturer had never focused on weapons of war. Yet he learned fast and became a foremost activist on behalf of the M1941 Johnson semiautomatic rifle, which he hoped first the US Army and then the Marines would adopt. It is safe to say that Moran would not have uttered a word about the Johnson rifle had Scholz not seen a US

commitment to the new firearm as advantageous to Germany in a possible war with the United States. The effort to install the Johnson as America's standard-issue rifle ultimately came to naught, but it was the beginning of Moran's interest in military affairs. He would soon be found discouraging recruitment by convincing listeners that the army was encouraging enlistees to engage in sinful sexual behavior. Later he would assert that recruits were going mad in their army camps and that Germany was so powerful it was not worth fighting.

With Scholz's guidance, Moran's attitude and style changed markedly. He spent the second half of 1940 blazing from his pulpit on behalf of Hitler. On some occasions, he discarded his cautious approach to anti-Semitism. He continued to protest that he was not anti-Semitic, merely pro-American and pro-Christian. But his language grew more forceful as he came under the sway of Nazi ideas. His oratory also became more political and less religious. This is not to say that Moran foreswore Christianity—not by any means. But he allowed priests like Brophy to handle the theological talk while he, Moran, appealed more to secular principles. Moran's work with Scholz coincided with a period when US politics was moving, however slowly, in the direction of the Allies. As the challenge of securing US neutrality became more pressing, so Moran's Nazi activism became more vehement and more dangerous.

Spy Craft

On July 9, 1941, George Johnson Armstrong gained an ignominious distinction. He was the first British subject to be executed under the 1940 Treachery Act. Armstrong never achieved much as a spy. His crime lay primarily in trying to become one, and the man who recruited him was Herbert Scholz.

Armstrong fit the profile of a Scholz agent. As a British national, Armstrong did not raise suspicions in the way German nationals did. As an engineer, Armstrong was in a position to secure technical information. And as a sailor in the British Navy, Armstrong was well placed for foreign work. Moran was the rare Scholz agent who remained stateside; otherwise, the consul consistently had his agents either join the US or Allied militaries or stay in their military jobs and request overseas assignments. From abroad, they could report to German handlers and make dead drops of time-sensitive information. Armstrong was much more valuable to Scholz as a merchant mariner on the other side of the Atlantic.

Lastly, Armstrong's idealism made him a fine recruit. Armstrong was a Communist, a view that would not have left him happily disposed toward his own government. But, as far as he knew, the Germans were different. When Armstrong passed through Boston in 1940, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was in effect, sealing neutrality between Stalin and Hitler and raising the Nazis' standing among those sympathetic to the Soviet experiment. At the same time that Scholz was meeting secretly with Moran, the SS man was also furtively enlisting Moran's opposite. It is unclear what would have made Moran angrier—Armstrong's Communist views or his British passport.⁷

It was Armstrong who approached Scholz, in the form of a letter offering to spy for the Germans. But British intelligence intercepted Armstrong's communications, leading to his arrest, extradition from the United States, and trial. He was accused of "conduct to the prejudice of public safety, the defense of the realm, and intent to assist the naval, military, and air operations of the enemy." Armstrong defended himself, claiming he had hoped to use his access to Scholz to learn about Nazi spies carrying out espionage in the United States and Britain. But Armstrong's story was not convincing enough to rescue him from the gallows.⁸

A more substantial Scholz contact was Fritz Fenthol. In spring 1940 Fenthol traveled from Germany to Russia, China, Japan, and then the United States. In late July he spent four days with Scholz and Lilo at their fashionable residence on Reservoir Road in the affluent Boston suburb of Chestnut Hill. A "confidential informant believed to be reliable" told the FBI that Fenthol came to America "under the personal orders of Adolf Hitler and the German General Staff." It is unclear what Scholz and Fenthol spoke about in private, but J. Edgar Hoover was convinced that "Scholz was obtaining national defense information." The FBI director was horrified to learn that this Scholz spy had apparently penetrated the New England Defense Conference, a liaison group overseeing US military research conducted at universities in New England. Rather than risk embarrassment, Hoover kept the information on Scholz's military spying from the State Department, which was informed of the breach only after the war was over.⁹

Another Scholz spy, whom the FBI would eventually catch, was William Curtis Colepaugh. An engineering student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a US Naval reservist, Colepaugh came under the influence of both Communist and Nazi propaganda and in spring 1940 decided to join the German army. He immediately contacted Scholz. The German consul

was receptive but encouraged Colepaugh to set aside his desire to enlist in the Wehrmacht. Instead Scholz wanted Colepaugh to stick with the Naval Reserve and, as an ordinary deckhand, “ship aboard a British vessel . . . and bring back information on the operation of British convoys.” Colepaugh did as instructed, landing a job on the freighter *Reynolds*, bound for Scotland. He “assiduously noted what patrols accompanied the convoys and how they guarded them.” After his return voyage, he remained in the US Naval reserve until he was discharged in 1943.

In January 1944 Colepaugh sailed as a mess boy on the liner *Gripsholm*, jumped ship in Lisbon, and presented himself to the German Consulate as a friend of Herbert Scholz. Colepaugh was then sent to the Nazi spy school at The Hague in the Netherlands, where he was trained by Otto Skorzeny, the legendary SS officer who commanded the daring glider raid in the Apennines to liberate Mussolini in 1943. On November 29, 1944, Colepaugh and fellow spy Erich Gimpel were offloaded from a German submarine near Hancock Point, Maine. Ordered to gather technical information on the Allied war effort and transmit it back to Germany, Colepaugh instead spent a month on the lam and then turned himself in to the FBI.¹⁰

Spies like Colepaugh and Armstrong were expendable. Scholz hoped they would be useful, as Colepaugh was. But if they failed, as Armstrong did, so be it. Scholz’s job was to recruit them and get them into the espionage pipeline. In this respect, he was successful. He was also good at sabotage. For instance he implemented a small but effective plot to starve the US Army of manpower. In October 1940 the Army’s Military Intelligence Division learned from a “reliable” source that Scholz was secretly providing “German males” living in the United States “with birth certificates, either putting them under or over the draft age.” Scholz could not have singlehandedly prevented the expansion of the US armed forces, but he did what he could, and cleverly. Nothing came of the Army’s intelligence discovery. Even when Scholz was caught in the act, US officials turned a blind eye rather than hold one of Hitler’s men accountable.¹¹

The Johnson Rifle

Scholz’s interest in Colepaugh and Armstrong reflected wider Nazi intelligence priorities in the United States prior to Pearl Harbor and the US declaration of war. Technical information was a key area of interest for Nazi spies

and was arguably the area in which Nazi spies proved most effective. Engineers like Colepaugh and Armstrong were thus valued targets for recruitment. But one did not have to be an engineer to be useful: Scholz was equally eager to put Moran to work in the area of technical espionage. What emerged in Boston in summer 1940 was a strange mix of politics, religion, and rhetoric aimed at swaying members of the Christian Front to become theologically invested in, of all things, Congressional debates surrounding a rifle.¹²

The question was whether the army should adopt the M1 Garand as its standard-issue service rifle, or else take up the Johnson semiautomatic rifle. At the August 19 and August 26 meetings of the Christian Front, Moran made impassioned pleas for attendees to write their members of Congress, pushing for adoption of the Johnson. This was a confounding departure for Moran, who had been lurching pacifist. In 1940 alone, he had delivered at least four speeches on just war theory, arguing that the United States was not justified in resorting to war.¹³

Melvin Maynard Johnson, a 1934 graduate of Harvard Law school, amateur inventor, and member of the US Marine Corps reserve, had designed his weapon to compete with the Garand. Both were semiautomatic rifles, but the Johnson had advantages, such as a larger magazine capacity. As one firearms enthusiast put it, some thirty-five years after the debate over the two guns, the Johnson “was reliable, accurate, and easier and cheaper to make than the M1 Garand.” The Johnson also had its backers in government. On May 10, 1940, the Senate Military Appropriations subcommittee traveled to Fort Belvoir, Virginia, to test both rifles, and Senator Ernest Lundeen of Minnesota, a veteran of the Spanish-American War, “scored 28 bull’s-eyes without a miss, using both weapons.” Yet Lundeen was swayed by the Johnson’s ease of use and concluded that the design was “way ahead of the US military mind.” But since the US Army had already committed to production of the M1 before the Johnson came to market, ordnance officials and many politicians were reluctant to change course.¹⁴

It is entirely possible, even likely, that Lundeen conveyed his experience to the Germans. Lundeen was an isolationist and profoundly antiwar. Perhaps he was a pacifist because he had experienced war himself, but he was also thoroughly pro-German. In 1967 historian Alton Frye uncovered that Lundeen had secret talks with the German Embassy in Washington prior to the outbreak of war in the United States.¹⁵

By coincidence, Lundeen's interest in the Johnson was piqued on the same day as the Germans'. While Lundeen was racking up bullseyes, the Germans were invading Holland. The campaign began May 10 and ended just four days later, as the Dutch came to realize that the German Air Force would easily decimate their cities. The Dutch defeat brought an intelligence coup for the Germans. Earlier in 1940, the Dutch government became Johnson's lone volume buyer, purchasing a large shipment of his gun for use in the Dutch East Indies. Consequently, when the Nazis took over the Netherlands, they came into possession of as many as 30,000 Johnson rifles.¹⁶ In short order, the Nazis knew everything there was to know about this quite esteemed US-made firearm, which was a great help because the Germans were struggling to develop their own semiautomatic. They could reverse-engineer the Johnson, learn its secrets, build a superior weapon, and outgun the Americans on the battlefield.

If, however, the Americans adopted the Garand, the Germans would be out of luck, or so they believed. As it happened, the Garand was arguably the lesser firearm, but the Germans did not know this. In fact, they did not know how the Garand worked—and this was precisely why they had reason to hope the Americans would instead choose the Johnson. The plans for the Garand constituted one of the few US technical secrets the Germans were unable to steal, though they came close. In 1939 the FBI discovered that a German spy ring headed by a South African agent named Fritz Joubert Duquesne had pilfered the Garand's technical specifications. Specifically, Duquesne was able to get hold of the plans for the gas-operated breech mechanism, the heart of the semiautomatic loading action. Duquesne was just about to ship this vital battlefield intelligence to Germany when the FBI raided his office, stymieing the information transfer. It was after this failed effort to compromise the Garand that the Nazis began covertly persuading the Americans to adopt the Johnson, the rifle they could study in depth.¹⁷

In the wake of the Dutch conquest and Lundeen's show of marksmanship, Moran began to lobby vigorously for adoption of the Johnson. He pushed his followers to support a bill sponsored by Senators Morris Sheppard and David Walsh, which aimed to make the Johnson the US Army standard. This pressure campaign preceded Moran's first documented meeting with Scholz, another reason to believe the two men were working together before that secret liaison joined by Stempel. Moran had never previously shown interest in military

ordnance: Why else would he care, except to help his German handlers gain the upper hand in a seemingly imminent war with the United States?

In early July, the Sheppard-Walsh bill was defeated, but that did not stop Moran. He shifted his attention to the US Marine Corps, launching an even more strident initiative than the Sheppard-Walsh push. On August 26 Moran invited a “past commander of the Massachusetts Marine Corps veterans” to address the Christian Front. The unidentified Marine’s speech focused on the topic of how “the Garand rifle recently accepted by the US Army is vastly inferior to the Johnson rifle.” There were about 750 listeners in the audience that night.¹⁸

A few months earlier, Moran barely mustered a third of that number; suddenly, with the cloud of sedition lifted and Scholz providing the front new purpose, New Englanders were flocking to Moran’s gatherings. These were mostly supporters, but members of local Jewish organizations were there, too, listening to Moran hold forth on munitions. The Boston Police Department’s Radical Squad, though primarily attuned to Communist organizing, also attended. No doubt these outsiders were spooked by the possibility that the Boston Christian Front was going the way of the New Yorkers. Just a few weeks earlier, they had been let off at a trial where their own rifles and bombs—purchased legally or assembled from readily available parts—were on display. Was Moran promoting the next weapon of far-right revolution? If so, he was doing it obliquely. Observers seemed confused by Moran’s gun talk. Either they did not understand what was being discussed, or Moran’s shift to this new martial position escaped their analysis. Moran seemed genuinely concerned that the US military equip itself with the Johnson rifle, even as everyone who followed his work knew that the Christian Front was committed to keeping the United States out of the war.¹⁹

In the end, the Marines also declined the Johnson as a standard-issue rifle, although the gun saw some action with Marine paratroopers in the Pacific theater. The chilling fact remains, though, that Scholz was able to subvert the conversation on the matter. He fostered what looked like an ordinary democratic debate, which in fact could have produced a direct effect on the battlefield conditions of World War II. As the Christian Front morphed from a religious organization into a Nazi-controlled political one, it was becoming something more than a propaganda enterprise. Ordinary Roman Catholics in Boston were unconsciously aiding a state with which their own would soon be at war.

Momentum

Under Scholz's influence, the Boston Christian Front experienced a large uptick in membership and won more publicity than it was previously accustomed to. One factor was Moran himself. Even when the front was at a low ebb during spring 1940, he was coming into his own, operating like a neighborhood political boss crossed with a local parish priest. He inspired confidence and loyalty. At a Christian Front meeting on May 24, 1940, one observer was impressed by "Moran and his assistants [who] seemed to know most of the people in the audience." Moran "addressed many of them by their first names and was apparently on friendly terms with them."²⁰

But the front's newfound success bears clear imprints of Scholz as well. After July, Moran and the Christian Front changed. Moran's secret meeting with Scholz heralded a new style of Christian Front leadership, focused on pro-German sentiment and blunt anti-Semitism. Moran jettisoned his earlier approach of providing an escape clause for his anti-Semitism, and he stopped leavening his praise of Hitler with criticisms. He also started spewing invective at the US military. To make room for all this political chatter, Moran largely set aside religious oratory. He was not abandoning Christ in favor of Hitler; Moran simply relied on friendly priests such as Father Brophy to serve as the front's religious pillars while Moran himself concentrated on distributing Scholz's Nazi-friendly message. An observer from the American Jewish Committee in New York City noticed the new priestly trend when he infiltrated a series of Boston meetings. "Almost at every meeting there is always one or more clergyman present," he noted. Echoing Tillich, the infiltrator worried that, with so much clerical backing, "this movement will spread and become more powerful and more dangerous than the late Christian Front."²¹

These shifts showed themselves early. At the Christian Front meeting on August 12, about two weeks after his first confirmed meeting with Scholz, Moran warned his followers that some Boston Jews were concerned about "correcting any misinformation which might be distributed at Christian Sunday schools." Moran was incensed. "The gall of these—Jews, who try to interfere with the observance of our religion," he fumed. There is no indication of the exact expletive uttered, but it is the first documented example of Moran resorting to coarse language.²²

It was also during the Scholz period that Moran started generating circular letters. Unlike his earlier newsletters, these documents were not intended to

substitute for public meetings while the front was underground. Rather, Moran gave out the circulars only at meetings, so that frontiers would have literature to distribute in their communities. It may be that Scholz encouraged Moran down this road. In any case, the letters reflected Moran's new-found focus on military matters of special interest to the Germans. For instance, Moran's September 9 circular was counter-recruitment activism sung in the key of Catholic sexual morality. Moran decried the distribution of condoms at Army training camps, where enlistees were "supplied with contraceptives upon arrival." Training in the US Army was "the safest way to become immoral," Moran asserted, lamenting that soldiers were being encouraged to engage in the sin of extramarital sex. The army's birth-control policy was a sure sign that "the family was no longer sacred." The right thing to do was to stymie enlistment. "We presume that those of you who practice Christianity . . . will object to such temptations being placed in the way of your sons."²³ Sexual morality and the politics of reproduction were, in general, strategically important for Moran. At a 1941 meeting, he asked his listeners to vote against Roosevelt in the coming election because of his position on birth control and because the president supposedly preferred "that masturbation be sanctioned for youth."²⁴

Sometimes Moran's focus on political controversies crowded out his religious message entirely. The October 7, 1940, meeting at Hibernian Hall was devoid of religious content. Moran railed against Roosevelt, saying the president wanted "to acquire more power through a stronger and more centralized government." This accusation was also a defense of Hitler. "President Roosevelt, who talks against Hitler, is actually a greater advocate of centralized power than Hitler." And as for Hitler, his "actions are actually not as bad as his talk," Moran thought. "I promise to be far more radical in the future," he announced. With war looming, there was no place for moderation when it came to Roosevelt or "those atheistic—Jewish Communists." Comments like these won the audience's enthusiastic approval. The free-will offering taken up at the end of the meeting netted \$62 (\$1,166 in 2020 dollars), an increase from \$35 the previous week.²⁵

The surge in heated rhetoric testifies to the increasing difficulty of the challenge facing Moran, Scholz, and others carrying out the Führer's Order. Hitler wanted to persuade foreign powers to remain neutral, but neutrality was looking like a more and more untenable position. By fall 1940 the Germans had toppled nonaligned states like Belgium, Luxembourg, and the

Netherlands, demonstrating how little respect the Nazis had for neutrality. Yet Moran had to convince his fellow Americans that neutrality was the best choice for the United States. In his October 7 circular, Moran wondered aloud what patriotic Americans should do “if a declaration of war is made by a power-mad administration against the will of the people.” The British, Moran wrote, did not deserve America’s help, because they were not fighting “for principles which are the basis of American life.” Indeed, Moran thought the British were duped into the war by Jews. “We ask you, do you believe the English people are fighting even for themselves?” he asked rhetorically, while rambling about Jewish infiltration of the royal family and the Bank of England—“there is not one Gentile on the Governing Board of the Bank of England.” No, Britain was fighting “to satisfy the hatred of the Jews for Hitler.” The choice for Americans was obvious. “We of the Christian Front of America, as Christians and as citizens, therefore would refuse unequivocally to participate in a war at the demand of a corrupt administration except in the case of invasion.”²⁶

Moran was no stranger to isolationism, but this felt different. Despite his closing lip-service to readers’ status as Christians, his argument had virtually nothing to do with Christianity. Nor did Moran make his usual claim that, whatever Americans thought of Hitler, the real enemy was Communism. The circulars were supposed to introduce the wider world to the vision of the Christian Front, yet the foundational myth of Judeo-Bolshevism was nowhere to be found in the October 7 letter. Instead of explaining why Judeo-Bolsheviks threatened Christianity, Moran argued that America simply had no place in a war to protect another people, Jews, who had in any case courted their own disaster. And instead of appealing to the Mystical Body, he appealed to civic values of democracy and limited government. It is impossible to say whether Scholz had a hand in the new messaging, but one can readily imagine that Moran saw the need to make secular appeals if he was going to convince the wider public to stay neutral. It was one thing to exhort conservative Christians to keep reds out of school classrooms. It was another to move the weight of public opinion in hopes of influencing national security policy coming out of Washington.

Scholz’s impact is clear in Moran’s sudden fascination with the liberal arts. Moran had always been well spoken, and he had clearly done readings in biblical interpretation. But he was no longer content to quote scripture and theologians. Now he began to cite the sorts of secular thinkers one might study

in the philosophy department at, say, Leipzig. An FBI informant who attended the October 4 meeting noted that “he talks about Voltaire, Spinoza, and other philosophers.” Presumably the Jewish Spinoza provided a negative example. “Moran must have his speeches prepared for him by other people,” the informant thought. Audiences were awestruck. “Talking in his usual calm and persuasive manner, his voice never rising above nor falling below an even level, he kept his audience of 700 spellbound,” one observer from the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) wrote after the October 21 meeting.²⁷

Although Moran’s rhetorical style had changed, the thrust of his oratory had not. In February 1941, another ADL report marveled that “Moran has the ability without exhorting or gesturing to keep his listeners glued to their seats—while he spouts a steady flow of words that are bristling with hate.” This observer also noticed that the police seemed to be treating Moran as though he were no longer a threat. “Perhaps the most significant thing impressing a listener who has made it a habit of attending these lectures in the past, is the conspicuous absence of police,” the ADL plant wrote. Previously he had witnessed both uniformed and plainclothes policemen dotting the hall while Moran held his meetings. But during the fall of 1940, the Boston Police went on hiatus. “Can it be that they had lost interest in a man who through his naïve mannerisms can throw them off track by his casual manner of talking?” the ADL observer wondered. It is not clear whether Scholz had anything to do with the decreased police presence. Perhaps the outcome of the New York trial had mollified the police. And one cannot discount the extent to which the police were on Moran’s side. As Derounian discovered, Moran was not idly boasting when he claimed to have coopted the balance of the local police.²⁸

“Words that are bristling with hate” would also be an apt description for the pronouncements of Moran’s priestly spokesmen. On October 24, Father Brophy arrived in Boston to address a group of Christian Front dignitaries at the stately Westminster Hotel in Copley Square. The occasion was a dinner party to celebrate the forty-ninth birthday of Father Coughlin, and Brophy was prepared with a suitably lighthearted opening. “I come from New York City. I don’t know Yiddish yet, but suppose I’ll have to learn it,” he joked, as the audience laughed in appreciation. Brophy, though, had not come to Boston to deliver a standup comedy routine. In his encomium for Father Coughlin, he described the radio priest as one who “has striven at all times to link up the scattered forces of the Mystical Body of Christ into a single

battle line so that with united force, we might remain unwavering against the common enemy.” Brophy did not have to specify who that enemy was, but, going off-script, he explained the obvious. “How can any of us today trust the Jews?” he shouted, “when Jesus couldn’t!” According to an FBI report based on later conversations with Moran, “The room rocked with applause, with clapping and stamping.”²⁹

Composing himself, Brophy returned to the theme of the Mystical Body, lamenting that “non-Christians”—his preferred euphemism for Jews—were more cohesive than his own Christian brothers. “These non-Christians have wonderful organization because they are all united,” Brophy asserted. “If a non-Christian in Yugoslavia has a toothache, all of the non-Christians in New York get a headache.” This was street-level theology. Brophy was making Pauline biblical principles accessible to ordinary Catholics, but he was adding his own grotesque twist. It was imperative that Christians “likewise unite,” and the vehicle for that unification was the organization Coughlin had inspired. “A nucleus has been started—the nucleus is the Christian Front.” For Brophy, the Christian Front was the material realization of the Mystical Body of Christ. In effect, he was telling his audience that the Body of Christ would shrivel and die unless it was nourished by Jew hatred.

“We must be good Christians,” Brophy announced, “but that does not mean being weak-kneed, and letting all the non-Christians get the power.” To murmurs of disgust, Brophy declared that the National Conference of Christians and Jews had recently condemned anti-Semitism. “Anti-Semitism equals fortitude for Christians, Christian fortitude,” he bellowed. Here again Brophy was sacralizing anti-Semitism. As one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, fortitude occupies an important place in Catholic theology. For Catholics today, fortitude is the willingness to stand up for God and God’s truths, even when doing so means facing down fear. For Catholics in 1940, fortitude meant “being able, in the spiritual contest, to fight manfully and to resist our most wicked foes.” If anti-Semitism was fortitude, then Jews were the “wicked foes” whom Catholics were divinely enjoined to resist.³⁰

Brophy repeated his Mystical Body speech on October 28 at the Christian Front meeting at Hibernian Hall. An observer counted “about 350 to 400 people in the audience . . . jammed to standing room only capacity. The group consisted of youngsters in their teens . . . and a lot of young men in their 20’s.” Moran’s strength had been among men and women with families. Now his message was attracting younger Bostonians. Indeed, his movement seemed

to be growing geographically as well. The US Army's Military Intelligence Division reported that Moran's Christian Front handbills had been found as far west as Cincinnati, plastering the lockers of a local bus station.³¹

Like Brophy, Moran took for granted the idea that Jews comprised their own closely held body and that their insidious power lay in unity. In an effort to encourage similar unity among Christians, Moran organized a "buy Christian" campaign for the 1940 Christmas season. "Christians would do well," Moran wrote in his weekly circular of December 9, "to learn from the Jew that quality in which he most excels—LOYALTY TO HIS OWN PEOPLE!" To this end, Moran urged his followers to "buy their Christmas cards, presents, and decorations . . . from those who join us in our love of Christ." He provided a list of fifteen stores owned by "fellow Christians," which should be patronized during the Christmas season. Displaying his meticulous research, Moran indicated that Kennedy's, then Boston's premier clothing store, should be patronized except for the womenswear and boys' shoes departments, which were "leased out," presumably to Jews. "We are not advocating a boycott," Moran offered. "We have simply suggested where any Christian with a brain in his head should trade."³²

The whirlwind year of 1940 closed with Moran in an aggressive posture. The ups and downs of the first half of the year gave way to momentum in the second half, as Moran peddled Scholz's line behind the protective walls of religious freedom and isolationist politics. With the police backing him, and federal counterintelligence indifferent, it seemed there was nothing standing in Moran's way, at least from a legal standpoint. His views were by no means universally accepted, but he had the liberty and the resources to press them with ever greater force on the body politic. In the coming year, as the United States inched closer to war, Moran's work on behalf of the Nazis would become that much bolder and more urgent.