

Book Reviews

Blood and Faith: Christianity in American White Nationalism. By Damon T. Berry. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2017. x + 268 pages. \$29.95. doi: 10.1017/hor.2019.11

A timelier book would be hard to find. Damon Berry's *Blood and Faith* delves deep below the surface of political and religious discourse in the United States. In doing so, Berry reveals the ways that the superficial absence of white supremacist ideology belies the way it continues to flourish as a tradition and plan of action in widespread communities. Influenced by Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities,"¹ Berry gives careful attention to the emergent theoretical sophistication of white supremacist writers in the second half of the twentieth century. Recognizing that the failure of the National Socialist agenda of the German Third Reich and the problematic emergence of movements for equality and inclusion have become daunting challenges for their vision of a white nation, these little-known writers gained new motivation. They adopted similar critical tropes about the decadence of modernity and the devolution of social morality that can be found in various streams of thought from neo-conservatism to post-liberal communitarianism. Their solutions, however, rest in a nostalgic turn toward the age of European world domination and colonial power, an age that reaches well into the twentieth century, even if the longing for it is largely silenced in public discourse (74–75). This suppression gives rise to an intense perception that the white race is threatened by extinction. Thus, their writing and their evaluation of the place of Christianity in Western culture leads them to construct political and religious trajectories for building community among those committed to the future of "white nationalism."

Berry turns to Henri Bergson's concept of the closed society to link the imperative of community to a moral obligation of defense (191–93).² To be

¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 2nd ed. (New York: Verso, 1991).

² Henri Bergson, *Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, trans. Ashley Audra and Cloudesley Brereton, with W. Horsfall Carter (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1935).

united as a people by racial and cultural commonality gives rise to the obligation that Berry identifies as “racial protectionism” coupled with “defensive bellicosity” (12–14). Berry identifies and exegetes the work influential to the future of white nationalism, discovering a growing late-twentieth-century consensus on Christianity as an impediment to the survival of the white race. Among other reasons, the polluting Jewishness of Christianity cannot be excised from a religion imposed on European whites; moreover, the idea of interracial community and equality so embedded in Christian teaching goes completely counter to sustaining the purity of the white race. Some advocate rejecting Christianity and all religions for a humanistic rationality of racial protectionism. More than one figure sought to invent a new religion for whites, drawing on European cultural heritage and focused on the self-interest of white racial communities. Others sought to recover pagan religions of pre-Christian European cultures, most prominently Odinism of Northern European cultures. Others sought to build an eclectic mysticism identified with esoteric and spiritualist influences.

Berry demonstrates that near the turn of the millennium, the rising new popular institutions and networks of white supremacists challenge the theoretical consensus to reject Christianity. Newer leaders, seeking to gain a wider following in the twenty-first century, advocate the reform of Christian thought into a true white supremacist ideology, or at the least a pragmatic use of Christian themes and tropes in ways that steer white Christians toward white nationalist interpretations of their faith. Although it is clear from the early chapters that the rejection of Christian faith is a powerful trend among a minority of highly committed and disciplined white supremacist groups, this latter portion of the book draws the reader’s rapt attention to current political trends and conversations around protectionism in relation to Islam, immigration, voting rights, and more. The 2017 Charlottesville conflict takes on deeper social relevance when examined in light of Berry’s scholarship.

As a teacher of Christian theology, I will use Berry’s book as a challenge to the blinders that I and many others wear concerning Christian faith in the United States and the enduring power of white supremacist ideologies. Those who teach American religion, popular theologies, and courses focused on race and religion would do well to consider this well-argued text, which covers groups and theorists that not enough scholars have taken seriously.

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