Paganism and Its Discontents

Paganism and Its Discontents:

Enduring Problems of Racialized Identity

Edited by

Holli S. Emore and Jonathan M. Leader

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

Paganism and Its Discontents: Enduring Problems of Racialized Identity

Edited by Holli S. Emore and Jonathan M. Leader

This book first published 2020

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-5275-5770-7
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-5770-3

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

PREFACE

HELEN A. BERGER, PH.D.

On the same weekend that fifty people were murdered and almost as many more injured in a terrorist attack at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand by an Australian white supremacist, an important conference sponsored by the Cherry Hill Seminary and the South Carolina Institute of Anthropology and Archaeology took place on the campus of The University of South Carolina, in Columbia, South Carolina. I was unable to attend the conference due to a scheduling conflict but I imagine that the March 15, 2019 shootings and their aftermath must have provided a background to all the papers that are collected here and offered even greater urgency to the discussion that followed. One respondent, Diana Paxson, in fact begins her paper referencing the events that had just occurred in New Zealand. Of course the New Zealand shootings are only one of a growing list of killings that have occurred both in the United States and worldwide in synagogues, historically African American churches, shopping malls, and even at a children's camp in Norway. The killers have all been young men who are linked through the Internet and who in their online manifesto reference earlier terrorists as their heroes and role models. Growingly they are using Nordic Pagan symbols and in some cases have self-identified as Asatru or Odinists.

It is unclear whether or not the Christchurch killer was a contemporary Pagan. His gun had Pagan symbols on it and some of the other terrorists he celebrates in his manifesto are Heathens. In answering his own question about whether or not he was a Christian, he states that it is complicated. Was it complicated by his being Pagan but from a Christian (that is non-Jewish, non-Muslim) background? or by his being a non-practicing Christian? or some other factors? We may never know but as a Swedish graduate student, Patrik Hermannson who went undercover in the United States to study the white supremacist's movement discovered, members of the alt-right are using Heathen symbols and rituals to celebrate their northern Europe heritage and, most importantly for them, their white identity even if they are not practicing Heathens.

The connection that has developed between white supremacists worldwide and either Heathenry or Heathen symbols is the reason for this conference and why this collection of papers is of such value. Cherry Hill Seminary, the pre-

eminent Pagan seminary, gathered a group of scholars and practitioners of Heathenry together to discuss this disturbing trend. As a number of the papers indicate not all Heathen are part of the alt-right; in fact my own research reveals most are not. Older white supremacist groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan are Christian. The alt-right is not only a Heathen or contemporary Pagan problem but as Heathen symbols become integrated into terrorists' attacks and as more young white supremacists embrace the religion as an extension of their radical views or become radicalized through online Heathen websites that are "folkish," the religion has come under a spotlight. These essays contribute to the ongoing dialogue of the connection of Heathenry to right wing movements. This collection will both be useful to scholars of contemporary Paganism and those that study the alt-right.

The keynote paper by Michael Strmiska throws down a gauntlet to the audience, both those who attended the conference and those of us reading his words in this volume. He begins by stating that there are no "good" Nazis, racists, or anti-Semites. There can be no place for accepting the other when the other is embracing a doctrine of intolerance. He lays out a call not only to Heathens but to all contemporary Pagans to examine the sources that have resulted in the connections between their religion and the politics of hate. He notes that one important source for contemporary Paganism is the Romantic movement in the late 19th century, which grew as a response to industrialization. Romanticism looked back to what was described as a simpler, better, more authentic life of peasants that was viewed as embedded in the natural world. This provided a powerful critique of industrialization but, within it, there was a seed of celebrating the land and the ancestors, which was only too easily translated into blood and soil—a Nazi call to action. Strmiska in turn has a call to action for all forms of contemporary Paganism but particularly Heathenry, which has a history of being intertwined with white nationalist movements. He calls on Heathens to learn more about current medieval research, which shows Europe to be more ethnically diverse than folkish literature shows. He wants Heathens to engage with the ancestors, to read the old text but to do so through a modern lens. Heathens, he suggests, should argue with their ancestors, or at least confront the implicit notion of an all-white nation or afterlife.

Jefferson Calico, an academic who wrote a recent comprehensive book on American Heathenry focuses in his essay in this volume on folkish Heathenry in the United States. Unlike inclusive Heathenry, which believes the religion should be open to all who hear the call of the Northern gods, folkish Heathenry views the religion as a matter of genetics—most commonly a religion of white people whose ancestors originated in Northern Europe. Folkish Heathenry, according to Calico, is part of the performance of white

identity politics. He acknowledges at the beginning of this essay that there can be no "benign assertions of a white racial identity" in the contemporary U.S. but by the end of the essay his statement seems more muted as he tells us that racial Heathenry is not primarily about racism.

Calico briefly develops the religion's links to the earlier vőlkisch movement of the 19th and 20th centuries, which helped to create the German nationalist movement that underpinned Nazism. He describes this history implying but not naming the Nazi movement in Germany. This is unfortunate as many young Americans, when surveyed, are found to have little knowledge of the Holocaust or the ideology of Nazism and may miss the link between German nationalism, the development of concepts of a superior Aryan race, and Nazism.

The heart of this essay, which is very useful, particularly to those who are beginning their study of Heathenism, is Calico's discussion of one of the most important and controversial figures in American Heathenry, Stephen McNallen, founder of the Asatru Folk Assembly and probably the most important single person in the early Asatru movement in the United States. Calico provides an excellent summary of the transition in McNallen's writings from a romantic embrace of Northern European culture and religion to a racially aware celebration of whiteness and ultimately to a clearly anti-immigrant and racist position. He describes McNallen and his wife Sheila as "performing white identity" and attempting to expand the notion of the United States as a "white" country through their public rituals and activities and interactions with the press. Calico notes that others, such as Stephen Flowers, who writes under the name Edred Thorsson, have picked up and developed some of McNallen's ideas. The concept of Metagentics—the notion that spirituality is passed biologically much like hair or eye color--is one such concept. Calico argues, much as Margot Adler had decades before in all editions of Drawing Down the Moon other than the first edition, that (folkish) Heathens may be racialist but are not all racists. Adler showed some discomfort at this distinction and two decades later and after the Unite the Right march in Charlottesville among other incidents. Much more is needed to make this distinction as well as to examine the links between those who marched and those that embrace white identity politics.

One of the appeals of McAllen's concept of metagenes is that is has a scientific veneer, which may explain why it is so often repeated in blogs on the Internet. Ben Waggoner's essay in this collection, however, clearly illustrates it is pseudoscience. Waggoner, a biologist, traces the sources that McAllen used to develop this concept and shows that it was based on dubious science at best. Waggoner's essay is the most thorough discussion of the biology, or lack

thereof, behind the concept of metagenes that I have seen and it therefore provides a service to those who might think of it as a scientific concept or to those who need to explain to others why is it not and why it therefore should not be used as a justification for excluding non-whites from the religion. Waggoner clearly indicates that metagenes are not a biological but a political concept.

Diana Paxson a well-known Heathen writer and practitioner, provides a personal account of living an inclusive form of Heathenry. She juxtapositions her own practice of Heathenry with both folkish forms of Heathenry and with universalist religions. She provides the clearest description of folkish Heathery that I have read, describing it as a religion for only those individuals of Northern European heritage, who look like the typical image of people in that region. In other words, people who appear to be white. As she notes, at least in some instances people who do not look like the stereotypical Norse man or woman may indeed have more genetic links to that region than those who fit the stereotype.

Paxson notes that white Identity politics and the fear of the great replacement—that is whites no longer being in the majority in the United States, or being eliminated as a race through intermarriages with non-whites—serve as a spur for the development of racist forms of Heathenry. She juxtaposes this with inclusive Heathenry, which to the contrary welcomes anyone who hears the call of the Northern Gods. But this is not a universalist religion. Those who join, she instructs us, must conform to the norms, scriptures, and requirements of the existing religion and its focus on a particular region. The person who joins regardless of ethnic or racial background transforms to fit into Heathenry and cannot expect Heathenry to be transformed by them. This is similar to the suggestion of what an inclusive Heathenry might look like made by Strmiska at the end of his paper. As a sociologist I wonder how well this would work in practice as religions, cultures, and groups are always subtly or not so subtly transformed by those who join. Nonetheless, it offers a sense of Heathenry that remains true to its past and to the Eddic poems while being inclusive of others and not emphasizing race or being racist.

Several of the essays cover similar ground to one another, although their emphasis differs. Gus di Zerega does a careful analysis of Georg Gottried Herder's concept of language groups and the import for him that language, not borders of nation states, unify a people. According to Herder actual borders are less important than the shared culture that a language provides. As DiZerega notes, Herder's notion of culture and of "a people" or a "folk" that are unified by a culture served as ideological underpinning of Nazis' notion of

rights to land that were part of other nation states and currently serves as one of the underpinnings of folkish Heathenry.

A number of the authors examine the important role of Julius Evola, an Italian philosopher of the early twentieth century who along with René Guénon advocated for a return to traditional society as an antidote to the problems he saw in industrial society. Among other things he called for a return to paganism, although he was not referring to contemporary Paganism, which did not exist then. However, like much of contemporary Paganism, he called for a return to the old ways and the old gods as an aspect of returning to a more traditional society. Evola provided a strong critique of capitalism and industrialization, not from an egalitarian stance but from one that celebrated hierarchy and strong men. He believed in very traditional gender roles and class roles. His image of the society was that the poor and weak would be protected by the strong who would have social power and greater wealth. Women were believed to need men to lead. Evola's advocacy for a return to "the old ways," including the older religion, has encouraged those on the right to look to contemporary Paganism, and particularly, but not exclusively, to Heathenry as one part of the answer to their discontent in modernity. It is that emphasis on tradition that helps to create links with other forms of contemporary Paganism.

Most contemporary Pagans veer politically left, not right, but there is a disturbing live and let live attitude that provides cover for racists within the religion. This is not true of all contemporary Pagans or all Heathens. Tahni Niktins provides an overview of the Heathen and other contemporary Pagan groups who are attempting to counter the alt-right movement. She notes in particular Heathens against Hate, Gods and Radicals, and Huggins Heathen Hof, who began the online petition Declaration 127, against the AFA and their words of racism and sexism. Holli Emore, who organized this conference for Cherry Hill Seminary, carries this theme to a more general discussion of racism and the need to confront it. Stephan Grundy does a textual analysis of Heathen texts to show that racism was not part of early Nordic society.

This conference and these papers are a good beginning as Heathens and scholars of Heathenism confront the racist within. More of these conferences are needed that continue to look at the roots of racist Paganism and the responses to it. But more needs also to be said of the response from other forms of contemporary Paganism to the growth of the alt-right within their ranks. Heathens have always been somewhat separate from other contemporary Pagans. Margot Adler did not include this group in the first edition of her groundbreaking book, Drawing Down the Moon, which provided the first overview of the religion. She did, however, include it in subsequent editions. Heathens attend many of the same festivals and are

normally considered part of the larger umbrella of contemporary Paganism. Some of the ideas of Heathenry enter into the dialogue and practices of other contemporary Pagans. Although the use of runes, for example, is more common among Heathens than other spiritual paths of contemporary Paganism, others do also use them to foretell the future. Perhaps most importantly, the issue of tradition and return to the old ways is something that is ubiquitous within the religion. Ethically more is required in a response to White Nationalism that is growing within a small subset of the religion. And at least in my own research on contemporary Pagan responses to alt-right Pagans it appears that issues of white identity and some of Evola's concepts are beginning to bleed into other spiritual paths. Let us have more of these conferences, more books, more collected essays and most importantly of all, more research on the connections and tensions that exist between a traditionally liberal religion and the growing alt-right.

INTRODUCTION

HOLLI S. EMORE, M.DIV.,
AND JONATHAN M. LEADER, PH.D., EDS.

Communities practicing Norse-Germanic spiritualities are currently divided, with growing polarization between the two groups. Some embrace a "heritage" or "volkish" component that many perceive to be racist and racialized, while others embrace an inclusive Heathen ethic of diversity that rejects volkish thinking. Racialized Heathenry was on full display in 2017 at the white supremacist "Unite The Right Rally" held in Charlottesville, Virginia. Photographs and videos of the event showed numerous Heathen symbols in use by the rally participants. The Pagan Engagement and Spiritual Care Survey[1] also revealed a strong thread of racism among some survey respondents.

The authors reached out to both academic researchers and Heathen community members to further discussion of the racialized radicalization perceived to be infecting Pagan communities. The result was the "Paganism & Its Discontents: Enduring Problems of Racialized Identity" conference. Too often there is a failure to acknowledge the agency of communities being studied. Organized by Cherry Hill Seminary and the University of South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology, "Paganism & Its Discontents" is, we believe, the first academic conference addressing the specific issue of racialized identity theology in contemporary Heathenry religious traditions that was inclusive of the communities themselves. The following chapters are the papers which were presented in March 2019.

Tragically, news of the Christchurch, New Zealand shooting reached symposium attendees just before or as they arrived for the opening session. This act of violence highlighted and magnified the gravity of the symposium's theme. Between that point and the publication of the conference additional acts of violence that incorporated Heathen symbols by the perpetrators resulted in one paper, "Radicalization, Recruitment, and Realities in Modern Paganism and Heathenry: a perspective,"[2] being excepted from the publication.

---

[1] Emore, Holli S., 2018, survey conducted to fulfill thesis requirements.

[2] Presented in closed session by Jonathan M. Leader, Ph.D., University of South Carolina Institute for Anthropology and Archaeology.

This was due to the paper's frank discussion of the processes, techniques and platforms used by racialized groups to further their ends and the possible points of interdiction to shift outcomes. The discussion of the paper was a closed session of the conference.

The published papers presented here are not just for the purpose of scholarship. They are shared as a foundation that delineates between two communities that are using shared symbolism for widely different purposes. It is the editors' intent that the publication will assist in broadening the understanding of the narratives in play, with the result being a mitigation of the rising tide of hate and racialized identity.

CHAPTER 1

ARGUING WITH THE ANCESTORS: MAKING THE CASE FOR A PAGANISM WITHOUT RACISM KEYNOTE ADDRESS

MICHAEL F. STRMISKA, PH.D.

Talk presented at the March 2019 symposium in Columbia, South Carolina, "Paganism & Its Discontents: Enduring Problems of Racialized Identity."

In agreeing to come here to speak about racism and white supremacy in Paganism, and what I think can and should be done to free the religion from this lingering problem that we involved in Paganism can never quite seem to shake, I was reminded of the way Donald Trump responded when confronted with the reality of armed white nationalists, neo-Nazis, neo-Confederates, Ku Klux Klan members and other such racists gathering at Charlottesville, Virginia in summer of 2017, creating a toxic and tragic atmosphere that resulted in many injuries and one fatality. He made a response that will live in infamy and which I believe will be a permanent blot on his reputation. Rather than make a straightforward, unequivocal condemnation of racism and Nazism, as one might have expected, President Trump said that he believed that, "there were very fine people on both sides." That is to say, there were good Nazis and good anti-Nazis. There were good racists and good anti-racists. As has been widely reported, members of white nationalist, neo-Nazi and racist groups found Trump's lack of condemnation and his assertion of moral equivalency between those who support racism and Nazism and those who oppose it highly comforting and encouraging, and they thanked him for it.

I have at times heard similar moral equivocation, typically disguised as pragmatic open-mindedness intended to placate different constituent groups, from leaders and members of Pagan movements, particularly the Asatru-Heathen community which has the most marked problem with associations with Nazi-style racism by virtue of the attempted appropriation of Germanic

Paganism by Nazis in the past and racists and neo-Nazis in more recent times. Well, I want you to know, I am not here to give you a scholarly version of President Trump's moral equivalency, which could easily be done by taking refuge in academic principles like scholarly objectivity and epoché, the Dutch theologian Gerardus Van Der Leeuw's practice of "bracketing" religious phenomena and withholding judgment. I have for many years been an outspoken critic of racist tendencies in Paganism and the dangers of extreme right-wing ideology, and for taking that stance, I have paid a personal price of being condemned and vilified by those who believe it more appropriate and constructive to take a softer, more understanding, less confrontational, more "objective" stance toward the various shades and versions of racism and bigotry that appear in some forms of Paganism and which may even constitute the main appeal of Paganism, for some.

So, let me make it very plain. I do not believe that there are good Pagans on both sides of the racism issue. I think racism is bad for Paganism as it is bad for humanity, and I don't believe you can be a good Pagan and a "very fine" racist at the same time. I do, however, hope that Pagans who are involved in racism to any degree can be helped to better understand the reasons why racism is a problem for us all, not a solution to anything, to see how racism is a spiritual dead end that diminishes those who invest their energy in it, to grasp that religion without racism is a higher and more comprehensive form of spirituality, and to then reject racism in their hearts, in their minds, and in their religion. Then, in my judgment, they will be good Pagans--but not until then.

I suppose that with this forceful and unequivocal opening statement, I may have ruined any sense of suspense about where my keynote address would be headed, but I wanted to give those audience members who might have been hoping for a nice, neutral, not-pointing-the-finger-at-anyone, Nazis-are-people-too, let's-leave-space-for-people-of-all-views-to-feel-comfortable-kind-of-statement, a chance to head for the exits if they needed to. Now let me share with you a broader set of reflections on the relationship of Paganism to racism.

In my 25+ years of involvement with modern Paganism, primarily Norse-Germanic Paganism often called Heathenry or Asatru, and Baltic Paganism such as the Romuva and Dievturi movements based in Lithuania and Latvia, as both a scholarly observer, a sometimes participant, and at different times both a supporter and a critic and often both at the same time, I have come to see that Paganism is a broad and varied phenomenon that is a lot like the World Tree in Norse mythology. It is a connecting framework in which different worlds and paths intersect, to which different people bring their different interests and concerns. In Norse myth, the tree is maintained by three sisters, the Norns, who represent Past, Present and Future, that is, what came into

existence in the past, what exists now, and what will or should exist in the future. Similarly, modern Paganism draws on what people today believe was the Paganism of the past; what they see as a proper continuation or revival or reimagining of Paganism in the present time; and what they think this religion will be or should be in the future. To turn this picture another way, Paganism is always involved in a dialogue between the imagined past and the imagined future dialogue that takes place in the present time and is inescapably shaped and conditioned by the experiences and concerns of the present moment.

The divisions and disagreements among Pagans can be described in similar terms. Different perceptions of the past world, different interpretations of our current reality, and different hopes and expectations for the future draw different kinds of people to Paganism and drive them to develop different forms of the religion. What I first want to explore with you today is how more or less racialized versions are derived from these different understandings of past, present and future. What I mean by racialized versions of Paganism is perhaps more accurately represented as a spectrum of positions about the function of ethnicity and ethnic identity in Paganism, which inevitably leads to conceptions of race and racialized identity, whether this is acknowledged or not. I say this because race and ethnicity are inseparably interlinked as ways of classifying and categorizing human differences and origins. Since Paganism is a form of religion primarily based upon European-derived cultural materials and religious traditions, and since it is primarily, though not exclusively, embraced and practiced by white people of European descent, the racial binary division between a white Pagan majority and the limited participation and representation of non-white Others is an inescapable social fact. Distinctions between different European cultural groups such as between Scandinavians and Celts or Slavs and Greeks are further subdivisions within modern Paganism, but it is notable that the range of ethnic options applied to Paganism rarely includes any non-white categories, again demonstrating that Paganism as it now exists is a primarily white majority, European-derived social phenomenon.

Let us look at this through a historical lens. I believe it is reasonable to take the 19th century as the main gestation period of modern Paganism in Europe and the West, because this was the age of romanticism and ethnic nationalism, which would both be integral and driving forces in the development of modern Paganism. It was in this period that we see an intensive interest in pre-Christian mythology and ethnic folklore develop in counterpoint to the long dominance of Christianity and the rationalism of the Enlightenment. A romanticization of the European past emerges, with a glorification of pre-industrial peasant life and of the Middle Ages, which no doubt represented an early, very long-range marketing strategy for future pop culture phenomena such as *Lord of the Rings* and *Game of Thrones*. (That is a joke). Another focus of romanticism was a

renewed appreciation for the beauty and value of the natural world, paradoxically enhanced by the loss of contact with nature brought about by the new reality of industrial life in crowded cities and mechanized factories.

A political offshoot of this new concern with the European past was the development of ethnic identity as a rallying point for national independence movements, and even revolutions, that would seek to carve out new nation-states organized around ethnic identity, a trend reaching its peak after World War One when the great multicultural, multinational, multilingual empires of Russia, Austria, Germany and the Ottomans would collapse to give way to new nations centered around single ethno-national identities. This intermingled with the romantic reevaluation of nature to create a new glorification of land and nature in connection to identity ethnic history, that is to say, the "blood and soil" idea.

The new focus on ethnic identity proved politically potent but socially destructive, as it was impossible to neatly and cleanly divide multinational, multiethnic empires into single ethnicity nation-states but all too easy to foment persecution and harassment of ethnic, religious and cultural minorities. The cause of ethnic glorification and the dream of ethnic purity would have disastrous consequences that continue to the present day. Given the long history of anti-Semitism in Europe, it was unsurprising that the Jewish population of Europe would come in for particular abuse, with Jews perceived as an alien ethnic group in every European country and the new 19th century trend of Jews assimilating and professionalizing only triggering new forms of anti-Semitic hostility. The Jews were hated for being different and also hated for trying to be the same. They were hated for being poor and living in shtetls, and then hated for being rich and living in mansions. The anti-Jewish passions expressed in the Dreyfus Affair in France and pogroms in Russia and Ukraine would be surpassed by the brutal extermination campaigns of the Nazis, who were often aided and abetted by non-German anti-Semites and opportunists across Europe.

It should also be noted that the nineteenth century was not only the time when romanticism and ethno-nationalism became dominant cultural and political forces in Europe, it was also the high water mark of European imperialism, with non-white peoples around the world coming under white, European domination. Many European and European-descended peoples in colonialized regions in this period would come to see white supremacy as a natural fact of life, which then develops into a key component of their sense of identity and their understanding of their position in the universe. This inevitably colors the new appreciation of the European past including Pagan religion and mythology, which becomes for some another area of white specialness and

white superiority. It is therefore not surprising that there should be some relationship between white supremacist attitudes and ideas and modern Paganism, today as the foundations for modern Paganism were laid in the peak period of white supremacy in the nineteenth century.

It would certainly make our religious lives as 21st century Pagans a lot easier if we could simply disown all the intolerance, racism and anti-Semitism that was intertwined with the ethnic romanticism and nationalism of the 19th century, and declare that Paganism is just a good old, nature-based, polytheistic religion mainly based on European traditions, with no connection to any of these nasty political and social trends. However, it would be ignorant, dishonest and self-deluding to not address these issues in a day and age when the problems of racism, intolerance and inequality have become issues of common concern and widespread discussion.

Go back and read 19th century historical and folkloric studies of European mythology and ethnic traditions, the kinds of books that 20th century Pagans would draw on, and see if you do not find racist and white supremacist assumptions that no respectable scholar would dream of publishing today. The unself-conscious references to *the* Celts, *the* Slavs, *the* Germans and others, described as monolithic groups with fixed characteristics and tendencies may seem at first glance a harmless exercise in ethnic self-glorification, but the other side of the coin is denigration and devaluation of other peoples not seen as properly European. The Europeans of the Pagan past are construed as noble savages while the Africans, Asians and indigenous peoples of the nineteenth century world are viewed as real savages. The construction of a romantic tableau honoring the European Pagans of that past is undergirded by the nineteenth century domination and denigration of non-white, non-European peoples, including the persecution of Jews and Roma Gypsies within the European continent itself. We might speculate as to whether, from a psychological view, the romantic revaluation of European Pagans of the past might have been something of a compensation for collective guilt about the devaluation and ill-treatment of other peoples.

There is also a parallel or contrasting impulse in this period of the romanticizing of Asian peoples and religions, which involves not a degrading underestimation of their value, but an equally distorting over-estimation of Asia as a land of timeless spirituality and Asian peoples and cultures as essentially peaceful and religious. Of course, this positive evaluation of Asia followed upon the European colonization of the region, most importantly the British conquest of India and surrounding countries. The glorification of the Asian Other rested upon the European domination that first rendered Asians unthreatening. In a similar way, the final snuffing out of American Indian

resistance at the conclusion of the Indian Wars in 1890 and the confinement of Native Americans to reservation lands made possible a new understanding of Native peoples as noble savages and eventually, a new appreciation of the wisdom and spirituality of American Indians.

We can see a common thread between the romanticizing of European Pagans, Asians and Native Americans. Paying tribute to any of these peoples and their traditions was a way of registering a note of protest against the ravages of industrial modernity. The Native American-European Pagan interface also highlights the notion of a higher valuation of pre-modern life. It is therefore not altogether surprising that modern Paganism has often taken inspiration from Asian and Native American religious traditions. The roots of the world tree run deep and draw from sources common to all. This common ground is something we Pagans today can stand on to oppose those who would seek to make modern Paganism a limited and indeed sadly self-limiting exercise in ethnic self-glorification. They of course may make the opposite argument, that these linkages with non-European traditions are silly and insubstantial and above all, not European and thus not sufficiently "ethnic." There are ways of bringing these viewpoints together, and I will say more about this in due course.

To conclude this discussion of Paganism's roots in the 19th century, let me observe that the rise of modern Paganism involves the interweaving of a number of separate strands. First of all, there was a romantic desire to rediscover and reimagine the European past, including research into folklore and mythology, with European Paganism receiving the benefit of a newly positive valuation through this process. Second, there was the focus on nature as something beautiful and valuable, perhaps even sacred. Third, the new interest in ethnic identity took the folkloric research into ethnic traditions in a political direction, asserting the rights of people with shared ethnic traditions to have their own single-ethnicity nations and an end to multicultural, multiethnic empires. The religion of Modern Paganism could therefore be described as a three-legged stool standing on connection to the past, reverence for nature, and inspiration from European ethnic traditions, which together provide a support for cultivating higher levels of spirituality, a high seat, if I might borrow a term from Norse Paganism. And so it is that three of the most common ways of describing Paganism are as "old religion," "nature religion," and "ethnic religion." Which of these three we emphasize and how we interpret each of these elements will end up defining what contemporary Paganism means to each of us personally and collectively.

The appeal of this new, yet aspirationally old, religion was the hope that it could provide a way for the ruptures and brutalities of the disenchanted, industrialized

modern world to be healed and re-enchanted, bridging past and present and gesturing toward the future as well. And though this romantic religion of neo-Paganism was typically grounded in old European myths and gods and in European regional ethnic traditions and identities, it was always in dialogue with the other traditions of the Western world, particularly Christianity, and traditions of the non-Western world as well, by contact with the Eastern and other religions that had been brought into the European orbit by the forces of Western colonialism and imperialism.

Therefore, from its first twinklings in the newly polluted skies of the 19th century, modern Paganism has always contained within itself the dual potential to either make common cause with other religious and ethnic traditions that provided an alternative to industrial modernity, or to turn inwards and content itself with European ethnic self-glorification. As you no doubt surmise, I see this same set of choices still facing us today. In a sense, the question I want to pose to you is whither Paganism in the 21st century? The question is not only what is Paganism now, but what do we think it should be in the future? Though we often think of Paganism as revisiting and reconstructing the past, we need to also embrace Paganism as something we are constructing for the future, something that will make sense for an increasingly interconnected and pluralistic world.

I would suggest we begin this creative task by considering the ways in which key elements of Paganism are not now nor have they ever in the past been static, stable things, but are more like streams fed by invisible springs whose waters flow out from their subterranean sources to take many different trajectories. The desire to explore the spiritual meanings of the Pagan past through examining myths, texts and other artifacts is perhaps the most powerful wellspring of modern Paganism, but when we look into the waters of the past, we find it is as much a mirror as a window. It offers us glimpses of a bygone world that inspire and challenge us, but at the same time we cannot help but recognize ourselves in the flickering stream and end up gazing at our own reflection. The attempt to understand and reconstruct the past inevitably leads to varying interpretations in the service of different purposes. Some take the fragmentary nature of the historical evidence as a caution against believing that it could ever be possible to perfectly recreate the religious ideas and practices of the European past, and seek to develop a flexible style of Paganism allowing freer borrowing from other traditions, creating a more open-ended kind of Paganism that is grounded in European tradition but may blend in other sources and traditions as well. Such Pagans find something in the old European folkloric, mythological or other such materials that is spiritually meaningful for them but feel free to add on other spiritually meaningful elements, regardless of their ethnic pedigree or geographical provenance.

However, an inherent danger in such Paganism is the risk of becoming an incoherent hodgepodge of diverse elements.

Others inspired by the past are moved to recreate a particular regional ethnic religious tradition as thoroughly as possible by an intensive effort to assemble, analyze and utilize as much historical and scholarly material as possible. In this case, the gaps and missing links in the historical record are not seen as any absolute barrier but an immensely challenging and rewarding puzzle that can never be solved with absolute certainty but which can certainly be patched together into a functioning, useable religion, with greater or lesser allowance made for revision of known elements or addition of new ones as suggested by new discoveries or interpretations advanced either by scholars or community members responding to the needs of contemporary practitioners.

The first, more open-ended form of Paganism has been variously labeled by me and others as eclectic or universalist, and the second, more consciously restricted form as reconstructionist and ethnic. All arise from an original inspiration derived from Pagan traditions of the European past, but their spiritual streams are fed by different influences and ultimately flow in different directions. We should, however, always be cautious about overstating the distance or difference between them, because the most eclectic Paganism can still have a solidly reconstructionist side, and the most ethnically grounded Paganism may still be strongly influenced by other traditions from other ethnic sources, even if this influence is denied or disavowed. On this last point, I am reminded of a Norse Pagan acquaintance who explained to me his practice of a system of meditative body postures that he told me he had developed from the study of Norse Pagan runes, but which plainly resembled good old Hindu yoga, a bit more Vedic than Eddic.

Anyway, both the eclectic and universalist forms of Paganism, on the one side, and the more reconstructionist and ethnically-focused on the other, all look to and make use of European ethnic traditions of the past, but if we ask for what reason and toward what end, we find some further important differences. For more eclectically-oriented Pagans, the old mythological and folkloric materials that come from particular ethnic traditions are viewed as launching pads for spiritual explorations that transcend these source materials and their historical and ethnic settings to contemplate issues of universal significance. That is to say, their inquiries into Celtic myths or Old Norse poems or Lithuanian folk songs or whatever the source material might be is less about connecting to some particular ethnic identity or imagined ethnic community than about cultivating their own spirituality. For more ethnically minded Pagans, this order of priority may be reversed, so that their engagement with the Tain or the Eddas or the Dainos is less about cultivating spirituality, and more about

connecting to a particular ethnic identity and becoming as it were completely Celtic or super-Scandinavian or unambiguously Baltic.

This is not to say that the two pursuits are polar opposites nor that they are mutually exclusive or irreconcilable, only that these are tendencies which point in different directions and offer rather different trajectories for further development. On the one side, the ethnic past is a starting point that opens outward; on the other side, the ethnic past is the destination that one is trying to reach and reconstruct. Where the Pagan past becomes too narrowly conceived as an ethnic past, and when that ethnic past becomes defined in an overly exclusive and insular manner, that is where and when we open the door to things like white supremacy, racism and Nazism, and that is when and where we risk inviting into our homes and halls people who see Paganism as the vehicle for such ideologies and attitudes. Fortunately, we do have choice in these matters and we do have intelligence to bring to bear, and hopefully we also have compassion and vision that we can apply as well.

Let me expand this discussion to provide an alternate view of these tendencies in a non-Pagan context. Some years back, when I had a Fulbright-funded teaching assignment at Siauliai University in Lithuania, I did research on Asian-oriented religious movements in Lithuania. I focused on the Hindu-based Hare Krishna religious movement and the Tibetan Buddhist-inspired Karma Kagyu or Diamond Way movement led by Danish Lama Ole Nyedahl. I found the Krishna movement to be one with a more emotional appeal, a religion that pulled on the heart, conjuring a joyful spiritual community bathed in the loving smile of the ever-youthful Hindu deity. It seemed to appeal to people who were misfits in Lithuanian society, hungry for life-affirming meaning and sometimes literally starving in the harshly competitive and often merciless world of post-Soviet Lithuania. In contrast, the Diamond Way seemed to appeal more to the intellect, to those more inspired by rationality and discipline than a god often portrayed as a laughing, playful child.

In addition to these temperamental differences that I detected in the followers of the two religious movements, I found an intriguing contrast in how they related to the cultural background of the two movements. The devotees of Krishna placed great importance on the Indian-ness of Krishna Consciousness, with the most devout wearing orange robes and other such traditional clothing and some men shaving their heads in the manner of Hindu monks. Their temples were conscious attempts to recreate an Indian cultural context as much as possible, from the large paintings of Krishna and his consort Radha adorning the walls to Indian vegetarian food cooking in the kitchen and Indian music playing on the stereo. Devotees I spoke to rhapsodized about pilgrimage

trips to India they had made, and one of my male informants told me of his fervent wish to someday marry an Indian bride.

The meeting places of the Diamond Way Buddhists stood in marked contrast, almost completely lacking in cultural reference. There might be a few perfunctory pictures of the movement's founders on the walls and a scattering of Tibetan Buddhist items here and there, like mandala paintings and prayer beads, but Little Tibet, this was not. This was a stripped-down, strictly functional meeting place for meditation, lectures and discussion, with no attempt to emphasize the Tibetan cultural origins of the Diamond Way movement. Very few of those I interviewed expressed much interest in traveling to Tibet and I was rather surprised to discover that only a very small number voiced much concern about the perilous situation of Tibetan Buddhist monks and monasteries under surveillance and persecution by Chinese communist authorities.

One of my chief informants explained the situation to me this way. Buddhism, he told me, is a technology. It happened to develop in India and then be transported to Tibet, later on to other places, and now it is everywhere. Where it came from doesn't matter. All that really matters is that it works as a technology of personal transformation. The practice is the thing, not the cultural trappings. Therefore what happens in Tibet is of no more importance than what happens anywhere. Of course, he greatly respected the Tibetan monks who had passed on Buddhist teachings to the founders of Diamond Way who then brought it to the West, but it is their knowledge and mastery that was most important, not their Tibetan-ness.

On another occasion, this same person told me that he found it extremely irritating that the Hare Krishnas would parade up and down the main street of the city of Kaunas even on a traditional Lithuanian holiday, wearing Indian clothes, banging on Indian instruments, and singing Indian songs. He told me that on such a day, he wanted to enjoy Lithuanian traditional culture with his son without being bothered by a bunch of imitation Indians playing at being Hindus on a day when most people wanted to sing Lithuanian folk songs, eat Lithuanian food and celebrate being Lithuanian!

To my Diamond Way friend, Buddhism was something that could be imported into Lithuanian society without any conflict with Lithuanian ethnic culture or identity because it was a largely culture-free and ethnicity-transcendent technology of universal application, like a light bulb or a toothbrush. For my Hare Krishna acquaintance, however, taking up a certain amount of Indian culture and identity went hand in hand with his devotion to Hare Krishna Hinduism, and could not possibly be separated from it.

Now, let's apply this to Paganism to see if any of the same dynamics come into play and if this could help us illuminate our own situation. For most Pagans, Paganism comes to them in a colorful cultural package, swaddled in what are imagined to be medieval or even more ancient clothes, with designs and motifs inspired by the folklore, mythology and archaeology of one or more European ethnic regions. Swords, staffs, statues, tapestries, talismans, jewelry and other items based on or inspired by medieval or ancient designs are likewise deployed to provide a sense of pre-modern ambience and ethnic aspiration, if not in the most extreme, "turn-it-up-to-11" cases, a certain ethnic desperation. Like the Hare Krishna Hindus in Lithuania, such Pagans find creating an evocative atmosphere that pays tribute to their spiritual homeland to be a critical element of their religious practice.

The artistry and craftsmanship involved in creating such items is impressive. However, we may ask whether these objects, as beautifully made as they may be, serve a deeper religious purpose beyond evocative decoration. For the Hare Krishna Hindus, the Indian atmospherics are embedded in and provide support for Hindu devotional practices and goals that ultimately go beyond simply being Indian or pseudo-Indian but move toward an idea of spiritual insight and transformation. Is the same true for Pagans with their European ethnic accoutrements? The answer will vary depending on individuals and communities, of course, but we see again the intertwining of the ethnic and the spiritual. For some these objects may primarily represent a validation of ethnic identity, and constitute little more than an archaically crafted way of saying "Kiss me, I'm Irish," or in the more sardonically Scandinavian version, "Eat me, I'm Danish," but for others the objects will mean much more. If these ethnic adornments support a quest for higher meaning and deeper experience, a connection to some larger reality, than it would seem appropriate to call the whole package a religion. If not, then maybe what is going on is just ethnic self-glorification and historical role-playing, which is all well and good and obviously enjoyable and gratifying for those with this interest, but it is not, in my view, a religion. Going further, I would assert that if someone's main interest in Ethnic Paganism is the ethnic dimension, and they are only looking to reconstruct religious practices because this will validate their ethnic identity, then once again, we encounter ethnic self-glorification and historical role-playing, but not necessarily religion.

At this juncture, I must again observe that there is a real danger in the more ethnically-oriented Paganism of ethnic self-glorification providing a platform for white supremacy, racism and neo-Nazism, both in the overt and obvious way of Pagans who are openly neo-Nazi or white supremacist or who become such over time, but also in a less obvious, more subtle and more insidious way. We may personally oppose the ideas and attitudes of racism and white

supremacy, but if we only do this quietly and passively, and are unwilling to actually confront and denounce such things when they occur in our midst, if we provide comfort and camaraderie to racists or white supremacists because we prefer to avoid confrontation, are we not more than a little like Trump with his racist-enabling statement about "very fine people on both sides?"

We face a most difficult task here. The desire to explore and celebrate the religious dimension of ancient ethnic tradition, which is an integral part of all Paganism, even among the most universalist and eclectic, has to be distinguished from a racist intention to glorify whiteness and European-ness in the service of white supremacy, which is most likely to appear in more overtly ethnically-oriented Paganism, as it is the ethnic identity dimension that provides the most obvious bridge to the ideology of white supremacy. We have to look within ourselves and ask if there is not some small part of us that takes pleasure in notions of European specialness and is secretly pleased by some gentle and discrete version of white supremacy, perhaps some very polite form that would never dream of using such harsh words as racism, white or supremacy. We must also ask whether the affirmation of ethnic identity in our Paganism is the main goal of our religious quest, the only goal, or just one stage of a greater spiritual journey? That may ultimately prove the great dividing line among Pagan communities, between those for whom the ethnic dimension is the end in itself, and those for whom it is but a starting point that leads to something beyond the ethnic.

Please do not misunderstand me.

I am not by any means saying that ethnic Paganism equals racism. What I am arguing is that highly ethnic-centered Paganism can be very conducive to racism and its assorted evil affiliates. We who embrace the spiritual value of Paganism must protect it from the disease of racism, to which Paganism is obviously highly vulnerable. Toward this end, I am happy to note there are Pagans who have been taking up this battle with courage and determination. Anti-right-wing, anti-racist Norse Pagans have created several networks to advance their cause. These include Heathens Against Hate, Heathens United Against Racism, and the Alliance for Inclusive Heathenry, all of which stand in adamant opposition to racist and white nationalist versions of Norse Paganism. However, we only have to look at news photos and film footage of the "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville in August of 2017 to see that there were indeed people there bearing Pagan symbols, marching alongside the racists, neo-Confederates, white power advocates and others, lending the support of Pagan spirituality to the cause of white supremacy.

I know some will be quick to object that that those involved in Charlottesville were only a small minority of the overall Norse Pagan community, let alone the larger Pagan universe, and this is very true. On the other hand, there were no Norse or other Pagans at Charlottesville standing in opposition to the right-wing racism, and that sends a message too. When you consider that this kind of thing gets massive media coverage, the implications are enormous and distressing. If the larger public sees Paganism associated with white supremacy, it may put a stain on our reputation that could have many repercussions on the lives of Pagans who had nothing to do with Charlottesville and who may be completely opposed to what it represented. As the saying goes, you only get to make a bad first impression once, and public perception and public judgment in the age of social media is instantaneous. A further ramification of the association of Paganism with racism at Charlottesville and elsewhere is that it could cause an upswing in racists and white nationalists taking an interest in Paganism and seeking to join Pagan groups. That is to say, events like Charlottesville could serve as a recruiting tool for both racists attracted to Paganism and Pagans attracted to racism. Now imagine if there had been a large number of Pagans at Charlottesville who had brought banners and signs denouncing racial bigotry and white supremacy. Their actions and statements could now serve as a recruiting tool for Pagans who oppose racism and anti-racist advocates who might now become interested in Paganism.

Let me now return to my earlier theme of how Paganism revolves around conceptions of the past, the present and the future and see how this applies to Charlottesville. Imagine the mentality that would be required for someone to both embrace Paganism and support the "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville. Your view of the Pagan past would probably be a vision of a white-only community of good ethnic Europeans, white-only Vikings, Druids, or whatnot. It would not be hard for you to have arrived at such a mental picture, because many of the books that you would find readily available, some coming straight out of the racialized romanticism of the nineteenth century, would portray a world of heroic white men and beautiful white women without any non-white Others to be found—no Jews, no blacks, no Roma, no Saami, etc. Even if you did not start out with any particular racial animosity toward such groups, the wealth of materials that you perused in exploring Pagan history might well acclimate you to imagine an idealized past of perfect whiteness. And, you would also find images of Pagan gods and goddesses who also embody whiteness and by implication, an exclusion of non-white Others.

Now if you were a person who came to Paganism already inclined to a liberal, pluralistic worldview, you might well look at these same materials and apply your modern social justice sensibility to interpolate the possibility of non-white presence, because this would seem normal to you, based on your present day

reality. If you belong to a Pagan community you would likely welcome members of different ethnic and racial backgrounds. But going back again to our hypothetical racism-inclined Pagan, if he or she grew up in an environment that was all-white or largely white, as many small towns in America are, or highly racially segregated as much of America is, even in supposedly liberal bastions like Boston, they might find it natural and comfortable to imagine a homogeneous white-only European past and Pagan pantheon, finding in this a pleasing reflection of their own preset-day social and racial comfort zone. In their present-day Pagan community, people of diverse ethnic backgrounds would probably not be banned, but people of European descent might well be made to feel more welcome if the group placed heavy stress on European ethnicity.

How about the view of the Pagan future? Would our "Unite the Right"-supporting, pro-racist Pagan friend be more likely to imagine being part of a racially mixed Pagan community, or would they prefer an all-white or mainly white Pagan community? The same question could be applied to their view of the afterlife. Will they be hoping to join an all-white community in the hereafter, or will the Other World be open to Others? Will race and ethnicity be transcended in the Beyond, or is there no place beyond ethnic identity? I have some afterlife survey results that touch on this that I can perhaps share if there is time.

Some of these questions I am raising may strike you as unnecessary or absurd, and I know that some might prefer we let ourselves off the hook by conveniently claiming that only a very, very small percentage of our lovely Pagan community are nasty racists, but the ugly reality remains that the combination of predominantly European-based religious traditions with predominantly white, European or European-descended participants combined with deep roots in a romantic glorification of European ethnic traditions and identity will always leave the door open for racist sentiments and white supremacist ideologies to stroll right in and take a seat in any Pagan community. That is to say, Paganism may not be a religion of racism, but it is often racism-adjacent. It may not be racist in essence, but some of its key components may have massive appeal to racists. Think of it: If you were a young neo-Nazi skinhead, looking for a religion that would complement your racist outlook and white supremacist ideology, wouldn't European-derived Paganism, particularly and unfortunately Norse-Germanic Heathenry, look pretty good to you?

So, what can we do? We obviously cannot prevent neo-Nazis and other such racists from taking an interest in Paganism. Any such person can wander into any bookstore and find a popular history book on Vikings, then do a search