

White Blood, White Gods:  
An Assessment of Racialist Paganism in the United States

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**Preface:**

This is a study about a particular expression of Asatru otherwise known as Odinism. This is a neo-Pagan revival of ancient Norse traditions drawn primarily from the Eddas and Sagas. What is important to mention before reading this study, as I was reminded by a Pagan I met at a recent conference, is that not all people who follow this path of expression are racially motivated or oriented. This is a particularly sensitive point for many Pagans who are already a religious minority. The concern she had was that Pagans may face further discrimination if people see them as racists. The differentiation between racist and non-racist Odinists will be expressed in the body of the paper. But for the benefit of those who may be sensitive to the comments about Odinism/Asatru that I make in this work I am exclusively dealing with racist Asatru, which is clearly not representative of all Asatru. It is not accurate to think that racist Odinists are representative of all Asatru just as it is not accurate to think that racist Christians are representative of all Christianity.

**Introduction:**

Since the 1995 bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City there have been more than 60 terrorist plots from the “extreme right-wing” within the United States that have been uncovered and investigated by federal and local law enforcement. Some of these plots have involved little more than stockpiling of fire arms. Others have involved attempts to obtain or manufacture biological and chemical agents and explosives for the express purpose of using them on targets within the United States (Blejwas 46). Some say this is symptomatic of a revival and radicalization of neo-Nazi and neo-Fascist activity worldwide since the 1980's. One indicator of this radicalization, according to author Matthias Gardell, is that there is a shift in the

radical racist community from a Christian based mythology to that of a revived Norse paganism called Asatru or Odinism.

This assertion is the thesis of Gardell's book *Gods of the Blood*. He says that this construct of Asatru does more for the "Aryan activist's" reality that they make for themselves in the sense that it appeals to both racial survival and a warrior mythology that promotes and justifies dramatic action and that activists are attracted away from the older Christian narrative resulting in a more radical and dangerous movement (Gardell 1-2 & 333). For Gardell, the attraction to this "religion" parallels that of the beginnings of National Socialism in Germany in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Gardell 343). The inference is clear: this movement-- and he does see it as a global movement-- is dangerous.

Is this the case? Does this revivalist tradition represent or engender a more radical point of view of ethnocentricity and consequently inspire more dangerous behavior in the white power community? Further, what can be done if that is the case? In this paper I will examine and attempt to understand the phenomenon of Odinism/Asatru as an expression of a white power racist world-view that informs, constructs, motivates, and justifies behavior, ideals, and community. The implications of what I may find or interpret are meant to be more than an existential exercise in hermeneutical theory. Beyond their academic value, the findings and conclusions in my study are to be applicable to the way policy writers and law enforcement, including local and federal agencies, respond to those who may identify themselves as Odinist. That said, this will not be, nor is it intended to be, the definitive understanding. This study is a contribution. My fullest intention is to begin the exploration of this phenomenon, not to bottle-cap the discussion. Other studies must be done on this issue from many disciplines for a full

understanding of it and effective policy in the future.

**Methodology:**

I am approaching this phenomenon through a strategy of hermeneutics. By this I mean the method of social philosophy in which one is concerned with the investigation and interpretation of human behavior, speech, and institutions as these are revealing of motivations and desires (Flew 146). There are several influences in my approach. There are also many tools that each contributor adds to the richness of a study. One of the primary influences among these is Max Weber via one of his more well known followers— Clifford Geertz. Geertz continues Weber's ideas with respect to the notion of "meaning" as central to what and why people do what they do by adopting the strategy of "understanding" the meaning of specific ideals, attitudes and values as the way we begin to explain what is going on in culture (Pals 239). Geertz states, "Cultural analysis is not an experimental science in search of a law, but an interpretive one in search of meaning (quoted in Pals 233)." He calls this effort "thick description". Geertz borrows this idea from English philosopher Gilbert Ryle as way of arguing that one ought to not only describe what happens in a simple description but to go further in describing what was or may have been intended. The goal for Geertz is not just to describe structures and behavior but also to discern meaning from what he observes about these structures and behaviors (Pals 240-241).

This emphasis on meaning and is very attractive to me in this study and very useful in an understanding that may lead eventually to policy and action that can deter and/or counter racially motivated crime and violence. For this reason the hermeneutics of Hans-George Gadamer, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, and Carl Hempel are useful as well. Gadamer had

assumed that all people were hermeneuts, interpreters of their world and the phenomena in it, and what he needed to do was to refine and apply this natural inclination in a way that is more informed and focused (Howard xxi). Schleiermacher and Dilthey used hermeneutics in conjunction with the effort to find an epistemology for the data with which social scientists were working. The goal of this effort was what they called in their native German “Verstehen”, or understanding. This was different than the explanation that was, and in many cases still is, offered by social scientists (Howard 1). This hermeneutical understanding was to be more than a collection of facts but, as Schleiermacher put it, an understanding of the “inner dynamic” or motivations of the actions or words of the subject (Howard 9-10). Hempel added a way to do this that still makes social scientists cringe at the thought of a hermeneutical approach to the study of culture— what he called the method of “empathetic understanding”. What he meant by this is that the hermeneut tries to get inside the subjects head, so to speak, and see the phenomenon through the sympathetic eye of the participant. The objective is to try to see an inner logic in the mind of the subject and not simply dismiss what they do as nonsense (Howard 29).

A difficulty that this approach will present in a study such as mine, beyond a theoretical subjectivity issue, is the possibility of being considered too empathetic. Is it possible to empathize without condoning? Can one successfully adopt the point of view of someone who’s ideas are a pariah in society and the continuation of an ideology of oppression, slavery, colonialism, and violence without becoming, at least in eyes of others, what they are? This complexity in mind, I am also influenced by Paul Ricoeur. He said that an empathetic approach is necessary for a full understanding. He made this point clear when he said, “To make one’s

own what was previously foreign remains the ultimate aim of all hermeneutics (Ricoeur 91).” However, he changes the dynamic of this adoption or empathy by suggesting a supplement to it. He said, “...the concept of appropriation is in need of a critical counterpart... (Ricoeur 92).” Thus he has a two part inquiry into phenomenon which he calls “disclosure” and “appropriation” (Ricoeur 93). Giles Gunn in *The Culture of Criticism and the Criticism of Culture* describes this notion of a two-part inquiry as the “hermeneutics of suspicion” and the “hermeneutics of recovery”. In suspicion one “problemetizes” the phenomenon by posing critical questions, in Ricoeur’s terms disclosing facts and structures. In recovery one then empathizes with the subjects to develop an understanding of what could be called in Schleiermacher’s terms the “inner dynamic” (Gunn 194). The complimentary aspect of hermeneutics is not new. It was recognized early on by Gadamer who said, “Fundamentally in our world the issue is always the same: the verbalization of conventions and social norms behind which there are always economic and dominatory interests (quoted in Heckman 138).” This compliment was recognized by Ricoeur as well who suggested that ultimately critical theory and hermeneutics are complimentary approaches (Heckman 138). This is what I do in my research. I use different, even opposed, theories as complimentary forces for a thicker description of phenomena and a deeper understanding of Asatru.

Accordingly, the question becomes, what is the best way to problematize the empathy? Marxist, neo-Marxist, Durkheimian and Weberian approaches are all well suited for this task. One person that sufficiently brings these influences to bear on contemporary issues for me is Bruce Lincoln via the ideas he puts forth in his books *Discourse and the Construction of Society* and *Holy Terrors*. For example, he problematizes myth as that which makes the “contingent”

appear to be “eternal”. Ritual is for him a means of reinforcing patterns of behavior set out in the discourse. And taxonomies are a means to reinforce social structures and classifications taught in discourse and reinforced in ritual (Lincoln, *Discourse and Construction* 5&6). It is demonstrated in his work that mystification of existing structures and ideas via myth has political aspects in so far as it elevates a particular ideology from the level of an historical thought to something true in itself and outside of history (Lincoln, *Discourse & Construction* 32). Then there are myths which are not about the past, but rather are set in the future. These, like the myths of the past, are formed in the present about the present, set around contemporary concerns (Lincoln, *Discourse & Construction* 38). Thus myth, ritual, and taxonomy are demystified to demonstrate the present power oriented concerns of whomever is adopting and telling them. This then forces questions such as, who benefits from these constructions? Who is in charge or wishes to be in charge by these constructions? Why do the followers choose to follow these constructions? This is exactly the direction that the critical counterpart to empathy or recovery needs to go. This approach problematizes the basic assumptions of the community allowing one to see deeper into the construction of the community itself.

In his book *Holy Terrors*, Lincoln goes further in that he offers a structure for this problematization via his understanding of how to determine if something is properly “religious”. He does this by looking at four “domains”: discourse, practice, community, and institution (5-7). Discourse he defines as the “...concerns that transcend the human, temporal, and contingent and claims for its self a ... transcendent status (5).” Practices he defines as that which has as its goal “...to produce a proper world and/or proper human subjects as defined by a ... discourse to which these practices are connected (6).” Community he defines as group in which “...the members

construct their identity with reference to a ... discourse and its attendant practices (6).” And institution he defines as “...that which regulates ... discourse, practice, and community, reproducing them over time and modifying them as necessary, while asserting their eternal validity and transcendental value (7).”

As these structures apply to terrorist activity Lincoln asserts that this discourse creates an attitude in which the “outgroup” is demonized and presented as “debased, benighted, even demonic”, transforming what would otherwise be simple disagreements and squabbles into a commitment of cosmic significance from which there can be no retreat or compromise (Lincoln, *Holy Terrors* 74). As this applies to violence from America’s ethnocentrically motivated groups we will see that this is very much the case. And while I am not looking to prove that Asatru is “religious”, as Lincoln put it, this structure offers an effective method for carrying out the hermeneutic of suspicion. What I am doing is demystifying this phenomenon of Asatru by using Lincoln’s four domains, and then coming to terms with what is discovered there by interpreting what all that means for those involved. So the hermeneutic of suspicion exercised via the four domains, and a hermeneutic of recovery (i.e., an interpretation of meaning) work together for this common goal of a fuller, thicker understanding of Asatru.

There may be some who may say that I don’t appreciate the differences in Lincoln, Ricoeur, and others from whom I draw in this study. That is something I do not entertain because my approach thrives on differences. Gunn says that the practice of what he calls “interpretation theory” is to deal with the “...difficulty of understanding of minds, or the expression of minds, separated from us historically and culturally (131).” This theory is particularly helpful in the understanding of the white supremacist community, as one could

hardly find a group so closely associated with the West and yet are so far from the mainstream in the West today. To accomplish so difficult and unusual a task one must use all means that are helpful to that end.

**Sources:**

It is important to understand that there is no singularly revered text or figure that defines Asatru for all people. As is true for most neo-Pagan movements there is a wide variety of contributions from many people, both from within and without the community of Odinists. That said, there are two main categories of source material that I use in my paper: primary source material and secondary source material. The primary source material is drawn from the expressions from those who follow the path of Asatru. Gardell makes mention that these are found in publications, white power music lyrics, and especially on web sites (1). The web is an invaluable resource for this material. As a view that is certainly not popular in contemporary American society, mass publication via a reputable publishing house is rarely possible. Therefore, the Internet is a major source for the words and ideas of those that are self identified as Odinist. Also, reliable secondary sources from those outside the community are relatively few. This is a challenging aspect of this particular subject. Thus I draw heavily from those sources that are available, such as Gardell's book, among some other works, and publications by the Southern Poverty Law Center and the Anti-Defamation League.

**Terms :**

The first term that requires explanation is religion. Wach, Eliade and Otto treat religion as something *sui generis*, unique and distinct from all other experiences and expressions. Each resist reductive explanations offered by Marx, Durkheim, Freud, and the like. Geertz sees

religion as a particular aspect of culture, an expression distinct from politics, family, etc., and yet for him it informs these things. However Geertz recognized a peculiar problem for scholars of religion. He states in *Islam Observed* that, “The comparative study of religion has always been plagued by this particular embarrassment: the elusiveness of the subject matter (1).” When Lincoln defines, or rather sets up a set of criteria for the discovery of a religion, he says that it will have at least four “domains”: discourse, practices, community, and institution (Lincoln, *Holy Terrors* 5-7). Here Lincoln identifies religion as having certain structures, something different than a response to something holy (Otto) or sacred (Eliade). And still there is a difficulty. Talal Assad and Wilfred Cantwell-Smith say that religion is a concept that has a particular application to the West, and particularly the Protestant Christian West. So the question looms large-- what is religion? The debate continues strong today.

I avoid the problem of trying to define religion by not choosing a side in the debate. My goal is to understand the community or movement, not to fit them into a preformed box of my making. This is the purpose of adopting the methodology that I have. This stance allows me to remain as opinionless as possible so as to allow the community to define itself. What is at issue is what they think religion is, what it does for them, and how it is manifested for them. In short, the question that preoccupies me in this study is, what does Asatru mean for them?.

This same concern is why I have used the term racialist or ethnocentric more so than any other descriptor. It is a term that is used to self identify in the white nationalist community more commonly than “racist”, which even for many of those who would be defined as racist has a decidedly negative connotation. They do not think of themselves as wrong. They view themselves as “racially conscious”, aware of the need and reality of racial difference as they

understand it. This distinction is not one I or many others outside the community would accept or have thought of ourselves, but is a key distinction for a person in the community. To define what they are doing or believing as a religion or racist in our terms may cause us to miss an opportunity for a deeper understanding; therefore, I do not use those terms.

Another term that is important to understand is “Pagan” and its alternative, one especially used in the Asatru community, “heathen”. Both words have been used by Christian communities to describe those who were not followers of the Church. However, the etymology of these words is related to location rather than to affiliation. Pagan comes from the Latin *paganus*, meaning “rustic” or “country dweller”. The country side was a bastion of the older forms of belief and ritual in the Roman Empire after the rise of the predominantly metropolitan Christianity, hence those who were outside the Church were defined as outside the metropolis or civilization. However, Pierre Chouvin has theorized that the word pagan comes rather from the Latin *pagani* meaning “followers of the older religions”. The word heathen has a similar connotation, coming from the Germanic specifying “ruscticity”; referring to the people of the North who lived in outlying areas where Christianity was not as strong (Hutton 4). So the term neo-Pagan is a reference to those who are reviving and redefining the old ways to the contemporary world and society. As will become clearer as we proceed the new heathens definitely view themselves as outside the metropolitan society, followers of an older way.

A third term of great importance for this paper is race. I have used the term racialist, and will do so for the same reasons that I use religion— because they do. What is generally meant by this is someone who is aware of the “racial struggle” or is “racially conscious”. That said, I will avoid the term “race” as often as I can where it is not used by the subjects of the paper. And in

any case race does not hold for me the fullest meaning of what is going on in the community. Rather than racist I use the term “ethnocentric” in its place. The term as I am using it originates with William Graham Sumner. He stated that the term carries two main ideas. The first is that groups are always in a state of conflict. The second is that peace is only possible within a group when that group is in conflict with another, giving rise to feelings of belonging and loyalty (Forbes 22). This Orwellian formulation is particularly appropriate for this topic as it addresses elements of fascism that linger in the ideology of this community that are better focused upon in the mind set of group conflict. This allows the discussion of racialist Asatru to transcend the personal prejudices of the subjects and to think about groups and group relations in the context of this movement (Forbes 27).

The term terrorism has also been in wide debate. One commonly heard phrase is that one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter. Terrorism is usually defined as a “...strategy of violence designed to promote desired outcomes by instilling fear in the public at large (Bandura 162).” The victims are not the target but rather society through them (Bandura 163). Terrorism is, then, a specific kind of violence, calculated and measured to produce a reaction oriented to specific goals, and is usually differentiated from state violence such as war and police actions of arrest and detainment.

*Terrorism 2000/2001* was distributed by the Department of Justice for the FBI to help them in their counter-terrorism efforts. In this publication the Department of Justice states, “There is no single, universally accepted, definition of terrorism.” That said, they define terrorism as,

*...the unlawful use of force and violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment*

*thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives .*

And though the FBI considers all acts of terrorism criminal, a distinction is made between domestic and international terrorism. The publication defines domestic terrorism as,

*...activities that involve acts dangerous to human life that are a violation of the criminal laws of the United States or of any state; appear to be intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; to influence the policy of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnaping ;and occur primarily within the territorial jurisdiction of the United States.*

The primary distinction then between international and domestic terrorism is jurisdiction; and therefore, the level of criminality involved in the act. Consequently international terrorism is defined as those acts that “...would be a criminal violation if they were to occur within the United States...”. Terrorism so defined is then inseparable from concepts of legitimacy and criminality.

Though this definition seems to leave little to question about the substance of terrorism and how to conceptualize it, terrorism’s origins and the strategies for dealing with it are complex and varied. Walter Reich states that, “Terrorism is a complex problem: its origins are diverse...”, and that, “Any attempt to understand the motivations and actions of terrorist individuals and groups must obviously take into account this diversity.” Thus he concludes, “...no single field of scholarly study can possibly do that (1).” This complexity is not easily accommodated by a priori assumptions of any kind. Martha Crenshaw writes in *Terrorism in Context* that,

*Both the phenomenon of terrorism and our conceptions of it depend on historical context-- political, social, and economic-- and how the groups and individuals who participate in or respond to the actions we call terrorism relate to the world in which they act (3).*

Crenshaw also notes that we should not overlook the “[e]qually important... symbolic, or perceptual, context...”, the aspect she calls the “subjective” which aims at a more full

understanding of terrorist phenomena (7). The structure of my paper, employing the two hermeneutics, is an effort to do just that which Crenshaw and Reich suggest in addressing the layered complexity of terrorism and those that may perpetrate it.

### **What is Asatru?**

An appropriate way to begin this exploration is to try to offer a definition of Asatru. It is more accurate to say that this is a presentation of definitions that others have attempted. Asatru literally means “faith of the Aesir”, describing a loose polytheism practiced in the Germanic northern regions before the coming of Christianity in the 9<sup>th</sup> century (Geer 38). However, there is more to it than that in Asatru today, especially in the racist community of Asatru. Professor Gardell defines Asatru as one of many “reconstructions” of ancient European religions, one that focuses on Norse and Germanic religions from ancient times (31). Further, Gardell describes this “racist paganism” as the “biologization of spirituality” (17). Racist Asatru then is connected to the past, at least an idea of the past; but it is also connected to a concept of biological taxonomy or “race” that plays a large part in how it is conceived and constructed.

As Asatru is a reconstruction it is important to understand from what the reconstruction is derived. What we know of old Norse religion comes primarily from the Sagas and the Eddas scribed in the 13<sup>th</sup> century by Christian monks. Officially the Northern lands became Christian around the year 1000 ce., hence the legends and myths contained in these writings are largely the product of Norse Christian culture in Iceland and Norway. The most famous of these writings is the Prose Edda written by Snorri Sturluson (d. 1241). There are some archaeological finds that contribute to this knowledge, but by and large the writings inform views of Odinism today (Polome 3445-6).

The perception from within the community is certainly that they are practicing authentic Asatru. An Odinist named Ed Fitch, author of *The Rites of Odin*, describes Odinism as “the old ways continued and recreated (xxii).” An emphasis is placed on community, or the “folk”, of those who follow the old ways. If there is a sentence that condenses Asatru from the view of the practitioner it is that from Fitch’s book in which he states, “We know our Gods and we know our people (2).” The literature for The Asatru Kindred concurs with this emphasis on the folk. It is stated in the introduction to the kindred, “...we must work hard to rebuild our ancestral tribes. The Kindred is vital to our survival as an indigenous people (Murray).” On Odinic-rite.org this emphasis on the “folk” is given more detail. It is stated on their article “What Is Odinism?” that all “peoples” have their own “natural religion” and that of the “Indo European peoples” is Asatru. This is seen by them as the “path” that is “...ideally suited for [their] folk.”

Asatru is also for them is a “living religion”, one that is changing and evolving. On Odin.org there is an article in which the author states that all “religion” is “natural and ancestral”, that “genuine religion” comes from the “...pre-history of a particular people or race (Wodanson).” The site for the Asatru Folk Assembly, Runestone.com, continues to emphasize the connection to one’s “Germanic” ancestors. Asatru in the ethnocentric community of Odinists as it is presented on web-sites, as well as Fitch’s book, is concerned about the Aesir, but always in conjunction with the people they represent or are connected to. This is something expanded upon later, but it is important to understand that Asatru as it is largely defined in the ethnically oriented circles is largely about the people or the “Folk”.

### **Trajectory:**

Though I do not use the terms religion and race, they are nevertheless intertwined in the

history of the United States. The use of religion in the sustenance of ethnocentric division and even outright hatred has likewise been a part of this trajectory. The story of “racist religion” actually begins in England with the development of a theology and pseudo-history that ironically started as an expression of affinity between Anglo-Saxon Christians and Jews. This theology was called “British Israelism” or “Anglo-Israelism” (Barkun 3). This was the belief that the British are the lineal descendants of the ten “lost tribes” of Israel. Its roots were in 17<sup>th</sup> century puritanism in England by those who felt a connection with, though not yet a biological connection, the “chosen people”. They felt because of this connection that British Christians would play a central and essential role in the return of the Jews to the Holy Land, and thus initiate the return of the messiah and the 1000 years reign of Jesus on Earth (Barkun 4-5). However, as the British empire grew this theological position began to change.

The movement from a theological view to a pseudo-historical view within this belief began with a book called *Lectures on Our Israelite Origin*, written by John Wilson, the self educated son of an Irish weaver, in 1840. He claimed to have discovered that the origins of the Northern European peoples lay in the migration of the ten tribes of Israel, who moved from the lands of their captivity to the North lands and intermarried with the original inhabitants of those lands. As proof for his claim Wilson used biblical prophecy, history and British place names. Besides the British peoples Wilson also included Slavs, Germans, Swiss and the French as descendants of Israel. At this point no one was suggesting that the Jews were not a part of “The House of Israel”; however, they would still need to convert to receive salvation. At the same time Thomas Carlyle was developing racial superiority claims relating to the expansion and preservation of the British Empire, something that began to influence British Israelism very soon

after the publication of these works (Barkun 6-8).

Within a few years this movement in its more theological form reached the United States via New York and the belief that the United States, not England, would play the vital role in placing the Jews in the Holy Land began to take shape (Barkun 17-18). This ideology had a profound effect upon many of the religious movements in the United States from that point on. The Apostolic Faith, Pentecostalism's Azusa Street Revival, and even the Mormons were inspired by this notion of a new Israel in America (Barkun 20-21). This general attitude is expressed nicely by a quote by the famed author Herman Melville in which he said, "...we Americans are the peculiar, the chosen people-- the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of the liberties of the world (Barkun 20)." One sees in this a transition from a focus on relocating the Jews in the Holy Land to seeing America as the new holy land, and the American people, particularly those of Anglo descent, as inheritors of the promises and blessings of God.

The idea that America was the new Israel and its people the true Israelites was no where more clear than in the use of this theology and pseudo--history by members and proponents of the Ku Klux Klan. In 1921 an Oregon clergyman with deep connections to the KKK by the name of Reuben Sawyer published a series of articles blending this "Identity Theology", as it came to be called, and right-wing political causes. The Jews came to be no longer identified as co-Israelites, but as usurpers and frauds. They were no longer idealized but rather demonized. In his writings, Sawyer drew the distinction between "authentic" and "inauthentic" Jews. Anglo-Americans and Europeans were now the only true Israel (Barkun 23-25). Other writings to this effect began to appear. One of the most famous, or infamous, of these was that by a British Israelite believer and journalist William S. Cameron, which was published by Henry Ford, called

*The International Jew*. This publication is one example of the popularization of the image of the demonic, world dominating Jew as it sprung from the minds of American Identity thinkers. An image which began to influence many in the United States and started a theological movement in its image (Barkun 33).

### **Christian Identity:**

From these ideas came a uniquely American form of racialist theology blended with “right-wing” causes that has been known since as Christian Identity (Barkun 47 & 49). In this theology the Jew is something more than a pseudo--Israelite. He is the very spawn of Satan, the result of the mating of Eve with the serpent in the garden. As the statement of belief the Aryan Nations affiliated Church of Jesus Christ Christian states:

*“We believe that there are literal children of Satan in the world today. These children are the descendants of Cain, who was a result of Eve’s original sin, her physical seduction by Satan... We believe that there is a battle being fought this day between the children of darkness (known as the Jews) and the children of light (God), the Aryan race, the true Israel of the Bible (Barkun 189).”*

This is the culmination of the development of Identity mythology and ideology. Out of this came many of the major groups of the racialist Christian community such as Aryan Nations, Covenant Sword and the Arm of the Lord (CSA), and Posse Comitatus that today continue to oppose the “Jewish conspiracy” to control Anglo-Christian America, which they call the Zionist Occupied Government, or ZOG (Barkun 69-71 & 107).

### **Asatru’s development:**

The development of racist paganism or heathendom began not in the theological circles of England and America, but rather in the esotericism of Central and Northern Europe. In 1930's and 40's Germany, occult notions of ethnicity were driven to the heights of power and

destruction in the coming to power of the Nazi party in Germany (Goodrick-Clarke 1-2). The origin of this movement lies in 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany in which many people there were concerned with a “religion” that was connected with the land. Many sought a religion that was somehow unique to the Volk, or German people, and pre-dated the coming of Christianity. From the early 1880's the old gods of the north became popular subjects in both fiction and scholarly works. In 1893, Viennese folklorist Guido von List began to write about the ancient priesthood of Wotan, or Odin, in an attempt to understand and reconstruct, in a sense, the old religion from the Norse sagas. He furthered this effort by creating the High Armanist Order, and then a few years later in 1912 a similar group called Germanenorden. These were quasi-Masonic orders that put in the place of deity the Norse gods of the old mythology (Goodrick-Clarke 257-258 ). Other orders and groups followed along these same lines in the following years and into the Weimar era. One of the most influential of these groups was Die Nordigen, founded in 1924. This group saw religion as an inherited aspect of one’s life and identity. They felt that one’s gods were like one’s ancestors who could not be discarded for new ones at whim. Realizing that a full revival of Norse religion would not be possible, the group favored a blend of Norse and Icelandic mythology with the German Idealism of Kant, Schelling, and Fichte (Goodrick-Clarke 258 ).

The modern revival of this attempt at a reconstruction in America really began in the 1960's and 70's with the promotion of a specifically racialized form of Asatru propagated by Else Christensen in her newsletter *The Odinst* (Goodrick-Clarke, 259). This marks a time in American history of revolutionary change. And along with this came explorations into alternatives to the Christianity of the generation before. An interest in Eastern esotericism,

Native American and African spiritualities, as well as Paganism in general was explored by many as an alternative. Wicca and other forms of revivalist traditions were rather open and liberal, but Asatru was taking a different perspective. There were two organizations that represented the main thrust of this movement. The first was that of Christensen called Odinist Fellowship. In this group, Christianson offered a more political and racial interpretation of Asatru. The second, founded by Stephen McNallen, was called the Viking Brotherhood, which later became Asatru Free Assembly. His group offered a more “spiritual” interpretation focused on the ethic of “ethnics” in Odinism (Gardell 137 & 151-2). This marked an early divergence in the ethnocentric Odinist community that persists today.

From the 1980's to the present Asatru was seen as separable from the more ethnocentric aspects, and was seen by some more liberally minded Pagans as a legitimate Pagan path. Asatru Free Assembly was established in the mid-1990's, in some sense, to counter this non-ethnic view of Asatru (Gardell 152). I am compelled to say that however powerful the racist camp may be in spreading their interpretations of Asatru there is much representation by those who are not racist. There are over 100 “kindreds”, or organized groups of Asatruers, who are not racist in motivation. Examples of which are Ring of Troth founded in 1987 and Raven Kindred founded in 1991 (Gardell 162). However the legacy of Christianson, McNallen, and the other more ethnocentrically motivated Odinists looms large over the web sites and publications on Asatru today.

### **Hermeneutic of recovery:**

The first thing to mention is that there is difficulty in presenting this diverse and complex subject matter with only a few sources. Also, as I mentioned, there is no single text that all of

the tradition draws from to inform their beliefs, ethics, practices. The material that I have chosen to include represents in a sense the more well spoken versions of what seems to me to be commonly held ideas of what Asatru is and what it means to those who adhere to it. Again I am not considering all those neo-Pagans who admire and practice “the old ways” derived from the Norse and Germanic influences, only those who may be considered racial activists and/or writing on this ideology’s behalf. Also, in this section it must be remembered that there is a specific kind of exercise that I am doing to begin to understand what is going on inside the Odinist community. Like Weber, I am not looking for essences, but rather the “conditions and effects” of this social phenomenon. In this case I am not seeking to understand Asatru from “external causes” but the inner dynamic of “subjective experiences” (Weber 1). Through the heuristic categories of belief, ethic, ritual, and the appeal of this to those who follow it that is what I will do.

**Belief**– In a sense belief is a hidden matter but it follows that basic idea of the inner dynamic. What I mean by belief is that which is valued as an idea or ideal. In some sense I am thinking of this as I do myth. That is to say myths as they represent the interpretation of the world and the phenomena therein reflected in the mores and perceptions of the world around the believer. It is important to understand that when I say myth that it is clear that this is not how the subject sees it. To them their construction of interpretation is the world seen as it really is. Eliade states in *Myth and Reality* that the foremost function of myth is to “...reveal exemplary models...”; that is it offers a paradigm for human action (8). The goal of this section then is to understand what the interpretations of the Odinist are. What do they value as ideas or the ideal? Through this I will understand to some greater degree what it is they believe, and consequently

something about what is happening in the inner dynamics of Asatru.

Put most simply the belief in the gods of the Norse pantheon, called the Aesir, is the defining factor of what defines one as an Odinist. But there is a strong and pervasive sense that these deities are deeply connected to the Folk. However, there is much more tied into this belief in the Aesir and their connection to the folk than mere fact of existence. There are aspects of this belief that speak to a certain value placed upon racial integrity and survival which is often stated as one in the same. For the racially oriented Odinist the value and ideal of race and racial preservation is carried into what it means to follow the Aesir. This is one of the central factors to ethnocentric Asatru belief and ideology. On Odinist.com, Edred Wodanson comments that the core of Asatru is that one is to be, "...true to the Ancient Gods and Goddesses of Northern Europe." He also states, "We believe that religion is natural.", and that true religion comes from "...the ancient, pre--history of a particular people or race." The principle is that all peoples have an ancestral connection to their racial deities. Wodanson says so much when he states, "we are descended from an ancient pantheon of gods and goddesses." At the end of this particular article Wodanson states, "We must look to the past if we are to secure the future." The key to the future of Odinists and indeed all Europeans can only be secured by the wisdom and guidance that their racial deities can provide them. Loyalty to the gods then is equated as loyalty to one's people and heritage. This loyalty is believed to be that which will secure the future for them.

This sentiment of racially oriented deities continues from the early days in Central Europe to today among ethnocentric Odinists. Another expression of this is found on the website for Asatru Folk Assembly. In an article called "Asatru- A Native Religion", the relationship between Northern Europeans and Asatru is compared to that of "Native American religion" and

Native Americans. It is “tribal”, a unique expression of that particular people. It is said in the article that Asatru is, “...a native European religion... developed by the German people from the very essence of their soul.” This is contrasted with other “expressions” that they feel were “imposed” upon the folk by an outside, alien force. It is no secret that they are referring to Christianity which is seen by many Odinists as the most pervasive alien belief imposed upon Northern Europeans. Again it is stated that there is a connection between “spirituality” and one’s ancestry, one which cannot be ignored without a price.

These concepts of the racial orientation of the gods and the danger of alien beliefs and ideology imposed upon the folk are not exclusive to the spokesmen of Asatru. Rather these sentiments are expressive of the point of view of most ethnocentric Odinists. On a popular blog called Heathen.net, a particular Odinist entered a blog in which he stated that Christianity was a “judaic cult” that imposed a foreign ethic of “absolute moralisms” upon the people of Northern Europe. Odinism is more pragmatic in its beliefs than to hold killing as always wrong, or sex before marriage as always wrong. For them belief is about one’s orientation to the rest of the community or folk. All beliefs are measured against this one standard before any other. It follows that the belief in the ethnically centered deities and their connection to a particular ethnic group are central to the ethics of the community of ethnocentric Asatru. Concern for the preservation, integrity and security of the folk are the most often repeated and widely preached aspect of contemporary Asatru and is consequently the main ideal from which Odinists derive their ethical view of the world.

**Ethic**– As the connection between the gods and the folk is key to Odinist beliefs that paradigm is expressed as the highest Odinist idea. Thus that paradigm guides the mores and

actions of those in the community. In other words, this belief informs and guides the ethical position of ethnocentric Odinists. The concept is that belief begets ethic. Ethic, therefore, offers a window into the thoughts of those in the community to further explore the inner logic of the world of racialist Asatru.

In the same post from Heathen.net previously mentioned, the author proclaims, “In our Odinist Faith Honour is everything.” This ethical statement is put in contrast to that of the “judaic cult” of forgiveness. The ethic of honor, as described by most Odinists, allows no room for the offender to see himself as an independent actor in an offense of dishonor. This person states that one’s personal behavior is in fact connected to that of the entire race and community. The author states, “To dishonor one’s self is to dishonor one’s folk and race.”

This notion of honor is widely held in the Asatru community. In the “9 codes” of the Kindred Folk of the Odinist Fellowship the first mentioned code is that of honor. It is defined as behaving with honesty and integrity in all of one’s doings. It is also mentioned that honor is lived out in a reverence toward all of one’s people and family. This is for them a “... mark of strength...” as well as honor. This last phrase in which strength and honor are parallel is key to understanding the ethical position of the racially motivated Odinist. In the following eight codes is this common thread of strength and honor. They are protect, flourish, knowledge, change, fairness, balance, control, and conflict. In each case the idea of racial survival is also present, tied into strength and honor as their goal or purpose. In the conclusion of these codes it is written, “Win, prevail, and survive.” The ethical position of the Odinist is clear. One is to be strong and to behave with honor toward the goal of group racial integrity and survival.

This ethical position is certainly supported by the words of one of the most famous, if not

infamous, contributors to Odinism, David Lane, who is serving a 190 year sentence in a federal penitentiary for his involvement in the crimes perpetrated by a group called The Order or The Brüders Schweigen. He was prosecuted and imprisoned for his involvement in the most well known of the crimes committed by this group, the murder of a Jewish talk show host Alan Berg (“Dangerous Convictions”). Apart from this, he has gained notoriety in the white power community as the founder and, until he turned the position over to his wife Katja, chief contributor and editor of 14 Words Press. This title is taken from a phrase that has become extremely popular among white racials, which is, “We must secure the existence of our people and the future for white children (“Extremism in America: David Lane”).”

Lane’s writings revolve around the idea of a racial conflict that transcends all other concerns. In one of his many contributions called “Wotanism (Odinism)” he states, “... the first and highest law of nature is the preservation of one’s kind.” This theme nature and survival is repeated again and again throughout his works and is the reason he sees Christianity, even in the form of Christian Identity, as an alien creed imposed from the outside of the white race. Lane has an almost apocalyptic concern for the fate of the white race, for which he sees a future in which white men will be killed off and white women and children will be carried off for sport (Goodrick-Clark 273). This is clearly seen in the previously mentioned article by Lane, in which he says that the efforts in which he was engaged were to “... struggle against genocide...”. His goal in writing about Asatru/Odinism was to develop a creed that would “... stop the mixing and murder of the white race.” Again integrity and survival are intertwined into the beliefs and ethics in Asatru, and from this came an ethic for manhood in which honor would play a key role.

For Lane and many other Odinists the protection of their folk meant the formation of the

creed of the warrior in line with the creed that Lane mentioned. It would be a creed of strength and honor. For Lane the best embodiment for this ethic was found in the Odinism of Else Christensen. For him this brand of Odinism offered a "... religious creed that might appeal to the genetic memory of the largest body of [their] folk." He changed the name from the specifically Norse distinction of Odin to that of the more Central European distinction— "WOTAN", as he felt that it served the added purpose of offering an acronym for "Will Of The Aryan Nation" ("Wotanism (Odinism)").

In this same article, Lane also expresses his feelings of the inefficiency and alienness of Christianity in no uncertain terms. He concludes that Christian Identity, though it inspired some in The Order, ultimately could not provide for the needs of the white community as well as Wotanism could. Indeed, he accused Christianity of being "... the most powerful weapon ever used against the freedom and existence of the white race." So as many in the ethnocentric Asatru community agree, Christianity is less of a solution to the problems of the white race than it is an alien hindrance to its progress. In some cases Christianity is even viewed conspiratorially as a plot to weaken the "natural" disposition of the white race as rulers of their destiny and conquerors. This is certainly the perception of Lane.

To win and prevail is the prime ethic for the ethnocentric Odinist in which an emphasis on meekness and forgiveness, as they see is the prime ethical concern for Christianity, would hinder the full exercise of the natural power of the folk toward that end. A belief in the genetic pre--assignment of one's deities is justification for the fear that an alien ethical system could only weaken the ability of warriors to protect the Aryan people. The creed of strength and honor in Asatru could do more to aid in survival. And as we will see this ethic is reinforced in the

ritual behavior of the Odinists in which the folk is elevated to the central focus.

**Ritual**– This section progresses further into an understanding of the inner dynamic of this community by looking at outward expressions of belief and ethic. The simplest term for this is ritual, as it is the most familiar to the non-specialist in the study of religion. The perspective that I take on ritual in this case is one from Weber’s *Sociology of Religion* in which he states, “... religious or magical behavior or thinking must not be set apart from the range of everyday purposive behavior (1).” In other words, there is some motivation or goal that compels a certain regulated behavior to produce a desired effect. As this behavior is shaped by a certain mythos, analysis of ritual can allow one to see something of the desires and concerns of the Odinist by how and why they engage the deities. Therefore, the rituals express a different way, again, to look at the inner dynamic of values and concerns of the Odinist.

The festivals and holy days in Asatru correspond with many of that of the general neo-Pagan community, following seasonal celebrations of solstices and the traditional times of sowing and harvest. The leaders of group ceremonies are called Godi, translated as priest, and the female counterpart, Godia. It is preferable that one or both of these rankings would be represented in a group ceremony, however solitary practice is permissible and even encouraged (Fitch 40). The seasonal festivals, as mentioned, are scheduled around the ancient times of harvest, planting and so forth. The rituals specific to this revolve around the myths regarding the changing of the seasons and the sowing, ripening and harvest of food as they are understood from the available texts (Fitch 44).

There are also less temporally oriented rites in which the practitioner is pursuing communication of a particular need to the “powers”. These rites can be done as a kindred (local

group of Odinists), a household, and/or solitary (Fitch 71, 117 & 141). There are of course rites that are held around the events of a person's life as commemoration. For example, when a



From neopax.com (non--racialist site)

friendship is solidified between two Odinists a rite of “Bonding of Brotherhood” is performed (Fitch 193). Betrothal and wedding ceremonies are also held to mark preparation for and fulfillment of nuptials (Fitch 198 & 201). And there is the dedication of an infant in which the child is presented to the gods and the folk (Fitch 207). For the growing child in the Asatru path there are rites for “Coming of Age” in which the child becomes a full Odinist (Fitch 209 & 214). There is even a rite for divorce (Fitch 224). And of course there is the “Funeral Rite” for the passing of the Odinist and to honor the departed (Fitch 227). And there are the “Rite of the Flaming Spear” and the “Lust Seid”. The “Rite of the Flaming Spear” is a rite that revolves around the warrior’s practice and ethic, done as a visualization of battle during the ritual weapons fighting practice (Fitch 245-49). The “Lust Seid”, the ritualization of sexual union of man and woman, elevates coitus to a spiritual experience of life sustaining power (Fitch 250-52). The goal of both of these last two rites is specifically the increase of power for the practitioner, where as the others are focused on the solidification of the community and the individual within the community of the folk.

In each of these rituals there is not just an attempt to contact and approach the deities but also to do so to the idealized past. The ethics of community survival and collective honor are key to those rituals. As one engages in ritual that person engages with the mythical past and the identity that they derive from it. They also find themselves in a past that is made real for them in the present— timeless and a-historical. The dress seen in the photograph along with the instruments used point to this. The practitioner can act in such a way that they feel shows honor to the gods and community, gives themselves honor as a warrior, or reifies their sense of the goodness of the reproductive act which perpetuates the community. In each case the beliefs and

ethics of the Odinist are reinforced and affirmed.

Though it is unclear how many professed Odinists engage in the rituals with any regularity there is a practice that seems to be of vital importance for the community of Odinists— participation in the web blogs and sites of Asatru. What does this participation offer for Odinists? Certainly it offers a forum like no other in the history of the world for communion and communication. A forum in which the folk from all over the world can communicate and commune at the same time. This is key to a community that holds to ethnocentric ideologies that are unacceptable to say the least to the larger society in which the individuals exist. On these sites one can find ample opportunity to express views that are otherwise repressed, and in so doing find community. This is another way in which the Odinist can immerse themselves in a world of their own making that fits them more than the one offered by general society. On these sites one can find instruction on the beliefs and ethics of the community and feel a sense of connection to something greater.

These virtual localities offer community and education apart from ritual. But the question that emerges from this is, why do they feel the need or desire to do so? Why would someone be attracted to Asatru?

**The appeal**— Is there something or a combination of things in ethnocentric Odinism as it is broadly represented that would bring in recruitment, especially that of young white males? One certain attraction is the element of myth, which is for the believer a paradigm, a pattern for the perception of and action in the world. The attraction for the racist youth may be that Asatru offers a full and comprehensive world view in which the individual can situate their racist ideals and their identity. This certainly is the claim from those that propagate Asatru

(“What is Odinism”). It also offers is a sense of community for those who see the world in a similar way and a place where their minority views. The Internet in particular is a spectacularly uncritical environment where these views can be told and retold among the registered bloggers on sites where the concern of reprisal under equal opportunity statutes or racial intimidation laws. So the main attraction to Asatru is that it offers community and a mythology for the individual racist to find his place in the world and justifications for the meaning which he draws from it. One of the main mythologies that Asatru supports, as we have seen, is the myth of the warrior. In James William Gibson’s book *Warrior Dreams*, he discusses how popular culture created a warrior mythology since the post-Vietnam era of the lone male or group of males that battle the forces of corruption and injustice in society. The imagery of the warrior Viking in Asatru as defender of his clan and conqueror of the alien threat goes hand in hand with the popular culture imagery of Dirty Harry and Rambo. Part of this mythos in both instances is the atmosphere of the immanency of defeat if action is not taken by a brave few.

This sentiment of urgency is true in the white power movement in general as well as the Asatru community. Since the 1980's, the racist community has perceived a trend toward multiculturalism as a result in ever increasing globalization and its subsequent results of cultural liberalism and Third World immigration and migration and the corruption of society (Goodrick-Clark5-6). In some ways this reflects the similar concerns in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century volkish movements in Germany and Austria that eventually lent their support to National Socialism (Goodrick-Clark 257). Young white males may see multiculturalism as a force of corruption that they can fight and thus find a place in the world in doing so. Asatru in this equation can provide an ideological paradigm and social group to support this attitude of

opposition, more often in rhetoric if not in action.

The discourse of race in our society and within the Odinist community offers another dimension to this attraction as race is itself a myth, or an "... imaginary social construct..." (Carroll 141). David Carroll writes that this construction's "fictive nature" allows it to be easily molded into a motivating mythos to create a paradigm in which a high priority is placed on fighting the alien other. Because ethnocentric mythologies are a fiction they are a--historical. And because these myths are a--historical they can be used to create a new history that conforms to the views and desires of the Odinist (Carroll 145-6). This aspect of being out of history and then integrated into an alternative history is prevalent in Asatru, as was discussed in ritual. Gardell confirmed this when he said, "Odinism offered a new grand narrative...", through which members could find belonging in something larger than themselves ("The New Romantics").

The idea of an alternative history is a repeated theme on the web sites that I examined. On the site for Asatru Folk Assembly they say about Asatru that it is not a passing fad, comparing it to how they see many other new religions. They say that it has "ancient roots" that are deeply connected to specific to people of northern European descent. The site for The Asatru Kindred says that they offer "... a place for spiritual growth, and a place to share common social values." On the site for The Troth it is said that they form community to "... seek to practice the moral principles followed by our ancestors." And again on the site for The Odinic Rite, they say that they are trying to "... reclaim their unique heritage and play a role in heralding a golden future...". As is clear, Odinists are calling back to a mythical age of purity and honor, a time when the warrior was leader and protector of his tribe or clan. Through this ethic and mythos they hope to bring a time when their values were upheld in their society. The myth is for them a

way to conceptualize their past, present and future, and thereby give them meaning.

As I stated, this construction also gives those who feel this way a community to which they can belong. They have a clan or folk even if it is only a virtual one. Within these communities they can express their views and even be heard and responded to. By this their views are given validity which they could never achieve in mainstream society. The individual who feels out of place in the ever more multicultural world can find a new context in which to situate themselves. This coupled with a mythology that motivates and informs them about their own uniqueness and strength is a powerful motivation for one to identify themselves as an Odinist.

### **Hermeneutic of Suspicion:**

There may be concern that I have been too sympathetic to this phenomenon and forgiving of the people involved in a “religion” that emphasizes ethnocentric separation and distinction. Rightly so the scholarly community has to guard against preferential bias and ethnocentric statements. However we ought not shy away from a deeper understanding of even those things that are not pleasant or strike us as repulsive. However, empathy is only part of a properly effectual approach for understanding. In the following section I problematize and query the discourse, practice, community, and institution of Asartu. This is the section that is less concerned with the subjective realm of meaning and more so with the relationship between this constructed meaning and those who are playing the larger parts in its construction and direction of the meaning and why they are doing so in that way. In other words, the relationship between this construction and power.

**Discourse**– Lincoln makes the point in *Discourse and the Construction of Society* that

discourse takes form in myth, ritual and classification; and that these are employed as ways dominant and non-dominant actors construct society (3). As opposed to the more generous view expressed in the section of the hermeneutic of recovery, the view of myth that I employ here is that which says myth is about creating sentiment and using that sentiment to some terrestrial end. Lincoln states that myth is a "... discursive act through which actors evoke sentiments out of which society is constructed (Lincoln, *Discourse 25*).” Dominant groups use it to maintain the order that benefits them while non--dominant groups use myth to change the order to one they desire (Lincoln, *Discourse 3-4*). The order of things, descended from contingent factors of human action and accident, is mystified into something non--contingent and purposeful, like the will of god(s). In the words of John Barthes, myth is about "... making contingency appear eternal...(qu. in Lincoln, *Discourse 4-5*).”

Ritual and ethic, seen as discourse, follow this same pattern. The common behavior coming out of sentiment is called ethic. Ritual can be seen as action regulated and specialized for the discursive purpose of reinforcing the sentiments. The area of classification, or taxonomy, is likewise about reinforcing social, contingent structures that are mystified through myth, and therefore cannot be deviated from or questioned. Attitudes of “affinity and estrangement” are important for the leadership to maintain their position of who is in the group and who is not, who are the enemy (Lincoln, *Discourse 53*). In *Holy Terrors*, Lincoln defines discourse as that which “... transcends the human, temporal and contingent, and claims for itself a similarly transcendent status (5).” Put together as a framework for the understanding of what is going on in the Asatru racist community the effort is about finding how the temporal interests of the group, particularly the interests of those who are in control of the discourse as writers and commentators

for the community, have been mystified. In a sense I am asking the reductive question, what is really going on in this discursive behavior?

Carol Swain says that the new white nationalism is different from that of the past in some important ways, especially in that it tries to inject itself into the mainstream of society, exemplified by the efforts of David Duke in his political campaigns and the establishment of a “Euro-American” rights organization in the template of the NAACP (Swain 3-5). Asatru is an exception to this effort to go mainstream. Odinists not only fall within the minority category of “New Religious Movement”, but they also hold vigorously to their racially oriented point of view unashamedly. This is easily demonstrated in the discourse they banter on the internet and in other forms of publication. On these web sites steadfastness in their beliefs and resistance to the mainstream is displayed as a virtue, even an obligation. On the site for The Odinic Rite, there was an article in which the author stated that they are not “universalist” nor are they nationalist. The article proclaims that nationalism based on state interests is a deluded and self-defeating prospect for their larger interests of an “Odinic nation” (“Odinist Nationalism”). The site’s contributors also reject the political direction of the white nationalist in an article titled “True Leadership is Needed”. In this the author proclaims, “True leadership of the masses will emerge, is emerging, not from the political sphere but from religious and spiritual realms, from Odinism and the Odinic Rite.” On an ongoing blog from Heathenfolk.net, beginning with a post from January fourth, 2005, in which Wyatt Kaldenberg, a self-identified Odinist and the administrator for this site, posted that he had no interest in the traditional nationalism. He saw himself as a “white internationalist”. He sees the traditional notion of national boundaries as divisive and a hindrance to white international interest. Subsequent responses to this post

support this idea that nation states are a problem for true white nationalism.

What is important with Asatru is that the point of view of many Odinists is that white nationalism will need a spiritual focus that only it can provide. This places Asatru and its visible leaders at the forefront of spiritual change within white nationalism, at least in their mind. This in turn provides a larger place in the mythical future of the world for the leaders of this community. They are not only to be priests, but kings as well. If this does nothing to place them actually in that seat it does give them status, at least in their own eyes, as the elite participants in the making of the new order of things. They then may ensure their place at a table set in their own honor. They become more than leaders of an amorphous sect on the Internet, but spiritual guides to the white nationalist community at large.

This is clearly the case for David Lane, whom I have already introduced. He is one of the most prolific Odinist writers in cyberspace or in print. As the founder of 14 Words Press and a former, and incarcerated, member of The Order he enjoys a certain clout. He states that a good part of the motivation for his adoption of Asatru involved this desire to solidify a specific kind of white nationalism. He said in his “Wotanism (Odinism)” article, of which I have already made mention, that this was his motivation in seeking out a “religion” that could act as a “vital weapon” against what he saw was a “genocide” of the white race. For him it offered a “... religious creed that might appeal to the genetic memory of the largest body of [his] folk.” Disparaging Christian Identity, non--racialist Odinism, and the “universalist” New Age movements, he sees Asatru as a means to the end of Aryan empowerment to the highest of “God’s laws... the preservation of one’s own kind (“Wotanism (Odinism))”.

Of course this use of “religion” by Lane and others mystifies the political issue of white

nationalism, or the desire for the rule of whites by whites in an all white territory, into an expression of the “Godsense” of the white race. The racist angle of the discourse surrounding this religiosity is desperately important in the imagery of the community, even for those that profess no faith or religion at all. This is certainly the case for Tom Metzger’s White Aryan Revolution, or W.A.R.. Metzger states plainly on his web site that he understands the use of religion for a “cultural mythology”, but is concerned that if anyone “...believes in some spook in the sky...” they may present a problem for the goal of revolution (“Religion”). Yet W.A.R. does not hesitate to use the imagery of Asatru to create the warrior sentimentality that is helpful in a revolution the likes of which Metzger and others fantasize about on these sites.

White nationalism is clearly an aspect of how a contingent reality is mystified into a non-contingent mandate that, as Lane states in his article, is in keeping with “Nature’s law” and therefore the laws of God. However, this is not the only way that transcendent discourse is used to elevate terrestrial motivations and ideals. The classifications of human beings are obvious in the discourse beyond that of racial taxonomies. Hyper-masculine discourse is very much a part of the expression of values and concerns of the community of Odinists. Using David Lane again as an example of this discourse, it is easy to see the mystification of sexuality and gender roles. The protection of white women and the role of men as warriors to that end is quite common in nearly all white nationalist discourse in the United States, and Odinism is no exception. Lane’s article “Valhalla– Fact or Fiction” serves as one of the clearest examples of discourses on gender and sexuality. Manhood is defined as a position that requires a choice to be made by the man. He can be what Lane calls a “thrall”, or a man can become a “warrior”. The thrall is clearly the



Above image taken from W.A.R.'s main page on Resist.com.

despised of the two, and there are only these two options for male identity. The thrall is the man who chooses not to fight for the cause of white survival. In Lane's terms this man is destined for well deserved scorn by the community and Odin. Their destiny is to be "dissolved" into the void of chaos in the region of creation called Hel of the Norse cosmology. The thrall is not to breed nor to enjoy the rewards of Valhalla nor the sweetness of the victory that is to come. The warrior on the other hand is the fulfilment of the plan of the Allfather for what a man is supposed to be. For him there is the sweetness of the rewards of Valhalla and the maidens, called Valkerie, that give untold pleasures to the warrior after his battles. The common theme in racist Asatru of natural law, the law of struggle and strength, is reinforced in the warrior ethic. While the thrall perishes, the warrior wins, prevailing against any foe regardless of death or defeat. This is because they are reincarnated innumerable times to fulfill the purposes of Allfather Odin. Lane states, "Allfather created lions to eat lambs, ...and the races of men to battle for women, territory, power and life." Therefore, the warrior fulfills a "divine command" that, not surprisingly, Lane sees as encapsulated in his fourteen words.

The expression of an immanency of the demise of the white race plays no small role in this construction of manhood. The promised peril requires warriors to defend the women and the community. This construction also bears upon what is expected from and valued about women. Lane's article states quite clearly that their value is in the sexual gratification that they can provide the warrior. That is the function of the heavenly maidens and it is no different for the terrestrial ones. This is also woman's "greatest desire"; to be "...desired by a great warrior." And as the advancement of a man's "soul" is in his identity as a warrior, so the advancement of a

woman's soul is in her physical beauty so that she can attract that great warrior. This is her "greatest happiness" in life and no other pursuit will do.

These sexual and gender constructions are quite common, and are not justified by anything less than that of the will of the god's, most expressly that of the Allfather. As a "nature religion", Asatru draws its justifications from the world around us. It is commonly stated that nature decrees these differences in gender and the roles they play in sexuality. But "nature" also decrees the differences in "race" as well. The same mystification that is employed in the construction of the gender and sexual hierarchy is employed in a stratification of race. Race is the most obvious of the constructions that is used in this community, and is arguably the central one. In the previously discussed "Valhalla" article, David Lane equates the natural distinction between lions and lambs and the ensuing destruction of the lamb by the lion as symbolic of the conflict among the races of men. In an article called "No Alliance with Wicca" on Odinic-rite.org, it is stated in similar terms that mirror that of Lane. Nature is the ultimate expression of the will of Allfather, and thus reflects his desire for distinction in the races of men. Unity with the other races of men is part of the larger conspiracy to bring on the "...destruction of [their] folk." This is the connection that many racialsists find so powerful with Asatru, as it provides what they see as the ultimate expression of that difference in a "religion" that is inherently "white".

Discursive mystifications like those just discussed shield preferences from the harsh questions they would otherwise be subject to if they were not transformed into non-contingent fact and gives them justification. The discourses in the Asatru community are based upon the

mystification sexual and hierarchal preferences that allow those who engage in them to elevate their wishes to destiny and their desires to rights. Practices informed and motivated by this discourse then ensure that the discourse is activated and perpetuated in a manner that is conducive to that end.

**Practice**– Lincoln defines this as ,

*“A set of practices whose goal is to produce a proper world and/or proper human subjects, as defined by religious discourse to which these practices are connected (Holy Terrors 6).”*

Practices are about activating the discourse of the community. How does the behavior of the members of the community reflect the discourse in racialist Asatru? There is a particular challenge in this aspect of the investigation of the movement as the direct observation rituals and daily practices of Odinists was not available due to the structure of the community, which will be discussed. This is perhaps another justification for the need for further study of this phenomenon by those with greater time and resources than what was available to me. Nevertheless, there is ample material to analyze two aspects of common practice in the racialist Asatru milieu and how they enforce and reflect the discourse of the community. These are the rituals, as defined largely by Ed Fitch, and the posting of blogs and articles on the Internet.

Rituals are the best starting point as the idea of ritual as a practice may seem less abstract to the non--specialist in religious studies as a distinctly “religious practice”. As I have already laid out the major rituals for the common practice of Asartu, I am free to simply analyze the use of them as it pertains to the discourse in Asatru. It has been seen that nationalism, the warrior ethic, gender and sexual differentiation, and racial taxonomy are major aspects of the discourse

in racialist Asatru. An irony is that the major focus on ritual has been done by people like Fitch who are not as overtly ethnocentric as are the major contributors to the discourse. This distinction is noted by Goodrick-Clark who states that some of the more activist oriented Odinists are less concerned about “spiritualities” and “ceremonies” and are more focused on Asatru as a locus for the perpetuation of ideas of “...aristocracy, power and the propagation of the white race (264).” There is, for example, less of a focus on ritual in the writings of Lane and the like than what I expected to find. It can be assumed that the more ethnocentrically oriented Odinists are performing these acts in a somewhat regular fashion, but there is at this point no evidence that I can bring to bear on the subject. It is equally likely that the ritual aspect for some Odinists is not quite as important for them as having a mythos upon which to hang their existing perceptions of the world.

It can be said that in ethnocentric Asatru, the purpose of ritual is that it touches most easily the discourse of ancestry and the distinction of being of European descent. Edred Thorsson writes in the forward to Fitch’s book that in ritual one can find access to one’s “...inherited spiritual treasures... (xiv)”. Fitch writes in his introduction that a solution to the problems that plague modern people can be alleviated by a going back the “...the most basic aspects of life...”, and away from the “... artificial and alien creeds...” that circulate today (xxi). This is a common retort in the Asatru community, as we have seen– that which is alien is also destructive. Practicing the rituals is a way in which the Odinist can escape the dangers of these “alien” influences and get back to the simpler aspects of life, or to connect with the power in one’s ancestry, as Thorsson pointed out. For Fitch ritual is central to what being an Odinist is

about, though others may not see it that way. He states, “We know our gods and we know our people (2).” Being close to the gods in ritual is about accessing the divine wisdom that is offered in one’s mind as it is connected to the divinities and ancestors, both of which are peculiar to one’s genetics.

In this context it is easier to see that ritual reinforces and reflects a certain point of view about the alien and what it means to be of the folk. However, to be a part of these rituals, according to the racist point of view, is only suitable if one is of this genetic lineage. Asatru and its rituals are about the “unique folk” to which the Odinist belongs (Fitch 21). Other aspects of the discourse that are reflected and reinforced by the rituals are pursuant to this central dialogue of racial separation. But other aspects of the discourse in the community are reflected as well. The Flaming Spear ritual as reflecting and reinforcing the warrior ethic, and the Lust Seid reflecting the emphasis on sexuality, are two examples. What is most important is that there is a ritual or rite available for most every aspect of one’s life, from birth to divorce, and death. All of life is connected to the ethnic deities, and therefore all of life is lived, for the Odinist, in the sacralized ethnocentric environment.

The rites and rituals seem to be, as already stated, focused upon by those who are less overtly politically concerned than people like Lane. More activist individuals, like Lane, seem to focus primarily on their writing and on--line contributions for the expression and reinforcement of their views. Here the average racist follower of Asatru can have a voice as well. Sites like Stormfront.org, a more generally white nationalist site, and specifically Odinist boards like Odinist.com and Heathenfolk.net have no lack of posts by those who claim a deep connection

with Asatru and often vocalize their opinions informed by Asatru. In this virtual locality Odinists of various levels of interest, knowledge, ethnocentrism, and radicalization can mingle and share ideas. Participating in these sites then becomes an important act of the Odinist who is likely separated in actual distance from an actual community of like-minded people. It is true that there is an effort to form local kindreds for Odinists, but it is easier for one to simply log on for advancement in knowledge, discussion, and the expression of ideas. Doing so becomes a ritual that reinforces the discourse within the mind of the participant. Logging on also becomes a way to access the thoughts of the community so as to become encouraged and further educated about the community through the discourses. The effect is then better informed racialisists who now are armed with the latest “facts” about the world and their faith.

How is this consequential? A paper by Professor Cass Sunstein called “The Law of Group Polarization” is particularly helpful. He argues that people in a deliberating body tend to gravitate toward predisposed positions on any given issue. That if the people in the group already have an opinion on an issue, say that Jews are devious, then discussion with people of like persuasion will produce a more radical position in further deliberation if the original position is unchallenged in the discussion. The Internet, as is specifically mentioned in the paper, offers an ideal setting for unchallenged group deliberation. The effect of this is that the discourse of the racist community is consumed in the secrecy of the blog and unchallenged by non--racist dialogue. The practice of blogging then reinforces the dialogue in a way that is less difficult and far less localized than is ritual. It is a small wonder that the Internet is the means of choice for most white nationalists to communicate their message, not just for Odinists but for racist

activists of all kinds and affiliations. In turn a community is created apart from the small kindreds that may come together in real time and in virtual space that has a broader reach and appeal for the average Odinist and general racist.

**Community**– This describes the general population of ethnocentric Odinists. In *Holy Terrors*, Lincoln defines this as made up of members who, “... construct their identity with reference to... discourse and its attendant practices (6).” The empathetic view expressed in the section titled appeal does have some communion with this section in that they address identity in the community. The difference here is that there are seemingly selfish aspects of this use of discourse that are not revealed in the more empathetic view. The appeal of a racially oriented discourse may be more than the feelings of anxiety over multiculturalism and immigration on the behalf of white males and the social forces that compel the adherents to identify with their “white heritage”. There are other reasons that white males may find a mythos that celebrates white masculinity attractive. James Gibson makes it clear in his book that many young white males, as well as many older ones, are in a state of anxiety. They see the empowerment of minorities and women and feel a sense of competition that was absent in previous American history (Gibson 11). Where white males once enjoyed favored status in American institutions every advance of equal rights makes many of them feel more threatened. This is likely one of the reasons why conspiracy theories are so prevalent in the white nationalist community concerning a Jewish plot. Someone must be behind this diabolical plot to marginalize white men in the “America they built”. Since it cannot be nature, as white men have been blessed by her, as they argument often goes, then it must be the evil Jews doing it. This kind of sentiment is easily observed in the

words of Wyatt Kaldenburg, who stated in an article called “Death of the White Race” that whites are in trouble. He points out the declining birth rate among whites as opposed to the climbing rate among non-whites in the U.S. and around the world as one example of why. This along with the Holocaust is a carefully chosen field of rhetorical battle for the “racially conscious” white person. Racial mixing and governmental regulations on access to birth control and abortion facilities are symptomatic of this battle which ZOG seems to be winning. The truth, so called, of what is happening is “hidden” from the public by ZOG, who “...doesn’t want the White masses to find out what is happening...”. The changing demographics that bring so much anxiety are not the result of natural changes in a world that is easier to move around in, but rather the targeted effort of a malevolent force aiming to destroy the white race.

The community then is composed of people who create a place where this status of superiority is restored and counter strategies by those who are “racially aware” can be formulated. As this community primarily exists in the blogs of the web-sites like those I have already discussed, what I am referring to is a primarily virtual community. There are groups that meet in person in their kindreds, but the largest site of community, certainly the more observable site, is that which is on the Internet. Here the discourse is exchanged and the practice of blogging contributes to the dissemination and inculcation of the ideas. The result of this is a virtual community of people that are coming together around these ideas and informing one another where the boundaries of time and space no longer apply in the same way.

Access to some of these sites, however, can be problematic. Though the statements of belief, articles, and other literature are open to view on the sites, often the blogs and message

boards are restricted to those who are members or have registered. The trick is that in some cases one must disclose one's "ethnicity", as is the case for [Odinist.com](#), to join in. The intent is clear though not specifically stated—only those of suitable "ethnicity" can be in the areas of the site where one can participate in posting. In this way the community is controlled, and since the administrator reserves the right to remove any "objectionable" material from the site even if one were to voice dissent one could be ejected from the site and the post would be removed. In this discourse and practice are united in the manufacture of community. This is however not limited to the Asatru sites but is common on other sites as well, such as the ever popular [Stormfront.org](#). White nationalists of all brands have picked up on the Internet as a tool for this creation of community since the inception of the Web. The result is a large gathering on the Internet of like-minded people discoursing on the virtues and values of white nationalism, and in part Asatru.

In a sense this community is carefully manufactured and its discourse is carefully controlled. It is far from completely spontaneous or an expression of different people coming together as an accident of common opinion. The on-line community is constructed around the kind of discourse that is found acceptable by those who have the means to manage and maintain their site. However, it cannot be ignored that many of these sites are managed by those who are more concerned with the "spiritual" aspects of Asatru and are less concerned with a political agenda. But the fact remains that the best funded and more easily found sites such as [Stormfront.org](#), WAR's site [Resist.com](#), and the sites where one is likely to find Lane's articles, are more concerned with white nationalism than Asatru for its own sake. In a sense the community of Asatru is spread beyond the borders of those sites specifically dedicated to it and

into the broader community of white nationalists. Yet the old division that began with McNallen and Christensen is still present. In some sense there are two kinds of ethnocentric Asatru, communities that are not necessarily in opposition but defiantly see the issue of white nationalism from different angles. In a sense this comes from the difference in the leadership in these camps as well as the leadership that has emerged in the larger community of racialisists, which I will discuss next.

**Institution**— This aspect of the study is concerned with the who construct Asatru’s racist community and discourse. Lincoln states that institution,

*“... regulates religious discourse, practices, and community, reproducing them over time and modifying them as necessary, while asserting their eternal validity and transcendent value (Holy Terrors, 7).”*

The leadership takes responsibility for the direction of the community, and thus drives the discourse and practices of the community. I have mentioned that the access to posting and blogging, and by extension to the discourse and indeed the participation in the community, is controlled by the administrators of the sites. What is also controlled is the public face of the Asatru community. The Internet has made the access and dissemination of information more democratic, but as the Napster situation has proven there are limits to this openness. Google yields 696, 000 references for Asatru and 36,800 for Odinit. Represented in both cases on the top ten listed sites are those groups that are racist in nature and those groups, such as the Southern Poverty Law Center, that oppose ethnocentricity. One can say that the non--racist Odinit are less visible by far on the web. This visibility of ethnocentric Asatru can be attributed in part to the successful efforts of David Lane and others to define Asatru as the new

religion of white nationalism. The imagery and community is easily employed for the purposes of promoting a revolution of white males against a society they feel marginalizes them and denies them what nature and/or god has given over to them.

This attitude of revolution is apparent in the writings of David Lane. In his article called “Wotanism (Odinism)”, which I have repeatedly referenced, he wanted to unite and motivate his fellow Aryans to action by this imagery and sentiment of the Germanic warrior protecting the Volk. The purpose of this is what he defined as the prevention of the genocide of his people, but is more accurately defined as a call to white revolution. Lane has a profound presence in the more radical circles of the white nationalist community and he has used his influence to spread his interpretation of Asatru. This is how he and those like him manipulate the sentiment of the community and those who find some sympathy for these views to call attention to their own ideas and concerns. For a man who is never going to taste freedom again this may be the only status that he can obtain for himself.

Another case in point is the use of this Viking imagery by White Aryan Resistance, or WAR. This group was founded by an activist by the name of Tom Metzger to mobilize whites to confront the same kind of perceived threat of “genocide” to their “people”. As is seen in the picture taken from the main web page of WAR and the other pics taken from their “gallery”, there is a blending of imageries. The Swastika and Images of Viking helmets and weaponry are clearly evocative of the kind of person the proponents of this site wish to be. They see themselves as berserkers of the old guard and as conquering Vikings, imagery that is also

popular in the white power music scene as well. The irony is that neither Metzger nor his WAR are explicitly Odinist in persuasion. He stated on his web-site that “If Odinism is used as a cultural mythology I see no harm. But I support no religion if it actually begins to buy into its own drug (“Religion”).” He is even more explicate than Lane in his ulterior motive for the use of Asatru imagery and sentimentality. Metzger, as do so many in the more radical circles of white nationalism, sees Asatru as good rhetoric, but a “White Aryan Resistance” is the point of their endeavors.

The connections among these individuals that are more prominent in the making of the public face Asatru can be striking. Wyatt Kaldenburg, administrator of Heathenfolk.net, is a fixture in the ethnocentric Odinist community and has been involved in it since the days of Else Christensen. While attending meetings of the Los Angeles chapter of Odinist Fellowship, Christensen’s group, Kaldenburg became acquainted with Tom Metzger. Since that time they have been associated with each other. Kaldenburg later joined Metzger’s newly formed WAR and became a regular contributor to the magazine and the later web site promoting his particular brand of Odinism (Goodrick-Clark 262). Though Lane is not as directly associated with these two, he too derived his inspiration from Christensen.

Kaldenburg, Metzger, and Lane each attribute their inspiration to Else Christensen and her more political brand of Odinism. Their subsequent contributions to Odinist discourse as a result of this association are unashamedly white nationalist. The result is a public marginalization of the less political, though still ethnocentric, forms of Asatru. So as racist Asatru in general has overshadowed in many ways the non-racist Odinists, white nationalism

has begun to overshadow and even marginalize the less political forms of ethnocentric Asatru. Further proof of this is in the two major scholarly works that discuss racialist Asatru: *Gods of the Blood* and *Black Sun*. The stars of these particular works are not the more ritually concerned Odinists like Ed Fitch, but rather those revolutionary minded like Lane and Kaldenburg. It is likely that the focus falls on them in part because it is sexier to have a personality such as theirs to make one's point. However, it is more likely that they become the stars of such works because they are far more visible. As the community of Odinists often overlaps into that of the larger white nationalist community, it is the case that the leadership and spokespersonship of Asatru does the same. As there may be different creeds among white nationalists there is one thing in which they do feel a commonality, as Wyatt Kaldenburg stated, "The prize is the survival and advancement of the White Race ("Death Of The White Race")." The difficulty in understanding Asatru in general may lie in defining first which kind of Asatru you wish to understand.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations:**

Given the information from the exercise in complimentary hermeneutics, what can be said about Asatru? First, if we separate racialist and non-racialist Asatru communities and focus on the ethnocentric expression we still see a variety within that ethnocentric group. The variety lays in the early division between Christensen and McNallen, between the political ideologues and those who see Asatru as a spiritual revival for European peoples. The imagery and dialogue are very similar in these two points of view, however it is the intended use that varies. Odinists like Lane and Kaldenburg are very clearly using Asatru to further a political stance of white

nationalism while men like Ed Fitch seem to be sincere, though ethnocentric, in their pursuit for spiritual fulfillment. And then there are those like Metzger who are not concerned at all with a religion whatever the name, but find the imagery of Asatru stimulating and use it, but unlike Lane Kaldenburg do not profess any sort of belief in it.

What is also clear is that there is a mythology of the past that informs Odinists about their present and future, guiding the ethics and behavior of the community. This is for many, if not most, a replacement reality for the multicultural society of equal rights for women and minorities, and what they see as a decline in white male control. This is connected to a larger phenomenon in American culture, what Gibson describes as the new warrior myth made popular in American entertainment. White American males have been raised on a steady diet of movies and books that project masculinity as defined by the warrior who opposes the agents of corruption in society whose governors care nothing of justice (Gibson 14). Many find satisfaction for the desire to become a warrior for a cause in the sentiment of Asatru.

Ethnocentric Asatru then is understood as a particular contemporary adaptation of the ancient Norse Sagas and myths that enable some European Americans, especially males, to find a sense of exclusive identity in a world where the old social and geographical boundaries that ensured white male dominion are continually blurred. This quest for identity then becomes for some a way of perpetuating those boundaries, if only in a local setting or on the internet. For others it is a means to gain power or control over a demographic that may be prepared to act to reestablish those boundaries. The Viking warrior of old is reborn in the minds and adolescent visions of those who feel no sense of distinction or belonging in the world they have inherited in

the era of globalization and diversity.

The question is then, does Asatru represent a radicalization and a consequently greater danger to America's multicultural society as Gardell asserts? What I have found in most cases is that the majority of Odinists are more closely connected to the desire to separate from the integrated society rather than destroy it. There are elements within the heathen community that are more militant, but it would seem that there is no more of a propensity for violence from this movement than in the Christian Identity, Creativity, or any other racist movement. The point of fact is that my conclusions are different than Gardell's. Also, Gardell had failed to adequately argue the point he was making. This is the conclusion of Mark Pitcavage of the Southern Poverty Law Center in his review of Gardell's book. Pitcavage states that Gardell's assertions are "...repeated throughout the book, yet not really supported." The problem he has is that Gardell "... seems to overstate the extent and influence..." of this milieu. I tend to agree for the same reason that Pitcavage states, and that is that there is a focus on fellows such as Lane and other more radical individuals to make a statement that is unsupported in other forms of evidence about the larger community.

What is also damaging to Gardell's assertion is that of the attacks since the 1995 bombing in Oklahoma, itself done by people that had ties to Christian Identity, were done by people associated more with the traditional white power affiliations like Neo-Nazi and Christian Identity and not that of Asatru groups. Some examples are the 1996 Olympic bombing and the rash of abortion clinic bombings all done by men like Eric Rudolph who were connected to the Christian Identity compound Elohim City more so than to Vahallah (Blejwas 34-46). The Order, or The

Brüders Schweigen, are given special attention by Gardell as an example of the kind of radicalization that he was speaking of due in large part to the self proclaimed Odinist persuasion of the founder Robert J. Matthews (Gardell 55). However, The Order was a mix of various ideologies dedicated to the common goal, until some were turned informer by the FBI, of white revolution. In an open letter from former member David Tate posted on Stormfront.org in October of 2004 he states he was himself a white Christian separatist and that the majority of the members were and still are Christian. In addressing the Odinist persuasion of the founder of The Order Robert J. Matthews, Tate reminds readers that Matthews was continually connected to the Aryan Nations leadership and remained sympathetic to Christian Identity throughout his activities in and with The Order. In fact the moto for The Order, Tate reminds us, was taken from the book of the Bible Jeremiah 51:20, “Ye be my battle axe and weapons of war.” The uniting factor in The Order was for Tate and others that which we have seen was and is , “...our Race, our heritage, and all things Aryan.”

In this sense, Swain, who sees white nationalism in general as a threat, is more correct than Gardell. I have already stated that there is no evidence or reason to believe that Asatru as an ideology represents a more dangerous motivation for terrorism. There is however very good reasons to believe that the white nationalist community does. Tore Blorgo of the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs states that terrorism from such groups has been on the rise in the last decade, referencing the bombing of the Murrah building and the assassination of a Swedish labor union activist. He sees a shift in target selection by these groups from the minorities they despise to the governments and media people they blame for the present power of the great enemy

“ZOG”. These are sentiments not exclusively located in Asatru but are more prevalent in the broader white nationalist scene (“Right Wing and Racial Terrorism”).

The question is then if and when law enforcement has to confront criminality seemingly informed and or motivated by Asatru, what are some caveats that can be offered from this study? In her book *How the Millennium Comes Violently*, Catherine Wessinger discusses her conclusions reached after many years of working on New Religious Movements and special interest in those that involve violence inspired by these movements. One of the conclusions that I would not argue with at all is the assertion that the stigmatic term “cult” should be avoided and the common practice of demonization of the people involved should likewise be avoided (Wessinger 9&10). Her other assertion is more problematic. She states that, “Religion is an expression of an ultimate concern,”, an idea taken from theologian Paul Tillich (Wessinger 5). This means that there is a thing or ethic that remains uncompromised for the believer for them to remain a believer. She makes the case for several of these movements through the book that the best way to advise law enforcement to handle confrontation with similarly motivated groups is to try to maintain the believer’s ultimate concern. In other words, to avoid outright assault that will cause the leadership and/or followers to react to a perceived threat from the enemies of their world.

My problem with her conclusion is certainly not that law enforcement must avoid outright confrontation if at all possible. A peaceful outcome to a warrant service or arrest of parties suspected of terrorist or other criminal activity is always preferable. However, viewing this milieu of white nationalism and/or Asatru as having a single motivation or ultimate concern is flawed. I lean more to Bruce Lincoln’s assessment of how to conceptualize what would

constitute a religion, allowing for a “polythetic and flexible” definition of Asatru and an understanding that is sufficiently “thick”. Through this the variables that may lead to violent activism from an Odinist group can be understood, assessed, and reacted to as the situation dictates. Far from being a simple monism of a single ultimate concern there are a plethora of variables to consider. History of the phenomena, cultural setting of the phenomena, internal debates that shape discourse, and external pressures that may compel violent action are only a few of these variables that we could mention.

Possible policies and strategies for dealing with the threat that white nationalism presents is another question that is addressed by Swain and Bjorgo. I would suggest that those who would define themselves as Odinists and engage in criminal activity are not motivated by Asatru but rather use Asatru to justify the criminality. They are motivated by other forces, as the articles by Lane and the use of Asatru imagery by Metzger suggest. Asatru does not represent a “radicalization” but rather the variety that is present in the white ethnocentric community today and in America at large. Asatru represents, however, a significant challenge to our sense of toleration and religious freedom. Ethnocentric Odinists expect to be assailed by society and indeed construct their mythology in part around that expectation. Wessinger’s warning about mutual demonization is poignant. We cannot permit ourselves to feed into the discourse of the most radical representatives of Asatru by limiting our open dialogues to people we agree with. Distasteful as it is we must engage these people beyond simply dismissing them as ignorant racists and allowing their dialogues to continue exclusively on a closed Internet site. Academics and

those who are engaged in policy must confront these people in a spirit of honesty and candid tolerance if we hope to win “the hearts and minds” of those who are not yet committed to these ideologies. The greatest weapon against terrorists who wish to assail and destroy our multi-ethnic and open society is for us not to abandon the principles that make it thus.

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