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Peer reviewed

“Do unto Others before They Do unto You”

A Review Essay

of

Josh Green, *Devil’s Bargain: Steve Bannon, Donald Trump, and the Storming of the Presidency* (New York: Penguin, 2017), 247 pages + notes. \$27.

and

Damon T. Berry, *Blood and Faith: Christianity in American White Nationalism* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2017), 206 pages + notes. Hardcover \$60 Paper \$29.95.

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1. Steve Bannon and White Nationalism

A little while ago, many readers might have questioned why a chronicle of Steve Bannon’s part in Trump’s storming of the presidency merited extensive review, particularly in the wake of his banishment from the Trump White House? But, as recent events have shown, they would have been mistaken. Bannon began in earnest to

execute his plans to remake the GOP in his/Trump's own image. In Alabama, handpicked establishment "Big Luther," gone, and gun-toting pedophile, Judge Roy Moore installed as Alabama's GOP senatorial candidate. Highly regarded Senator Bob Corker, gone. So, too, Arizona Mormon moderate, Jeff Flake, gone – both frightened off by angry Trumpsters ready to unseat them.

Still in Bannon's cross hairs are incumbent GOP senators, Roger Wicker in Mississippi, and potential Utah GOP candidate for Senate, Mitt Romney. True, Bannon's back at Breitbart beating the drums, and rumors even circulate of his making a play for the GOP presidential nomination in 2020. And, oh yes, there's the small matter of Bannon still having Trump's private cell number, and Trump's being a faithful reader of *Breitbart*. So, it may be somewhat premature to write off the guy who not only shaped the strategy of Trump's presidential victory, but who even now may be setting the direction of Trump's presidency or his own! Part of what I want to accomplish in this review essay is, first, to convey a rounded sense of the sources and species of nationalism sitting at the heart of Trump World. In particular, does Bannon stand in any of the recognized traditions of American white nationalism, whether Christian or not? Further, setting aside cartoonish representations of Bannon, what ought we to conclude from the common cause Trump/Bannon made with socialist, Bernie Sanders, in regard to the nature of the nation?

Tremendously complicating, but also immeasurably enriching my assignment was to review Damon T. Berry's *Blood and Faith* alongside Green's book. And, not just to produce two separate reviews, but one that caught sight of the other. I have tried to do this by first noting that Berry seeks to identify a tradition of American "white nationalism," that *excludes* the more likely suspects, the KKK, Christian Identity and other "racialized Christian" groups.¹ Berry claims that pagan white racist religious groups have become dominant over the better-known neo-Christian groups like the KKK or Christian Identity. The Norse neo-pagan movement, known as Odinism, recently came to the fore in the spectacular August 2017 Tiki Torch "Unite the Right" nighttime march and demonstration in Charlottesville. Berry wants to know how and why the neo-pagans have supplanted the Christians among white racists, and to identify who they are. Why has Christianity, even in its racist politicized forms, fallen out of favor with white nationalist American racists?

Berry's answer to this riddle does not fit neatly into some formulaic 'nutshell.' But, if one did exist, it would be that Christianity doesn't offer white racists the kind of full-throated, absolute and explicit commitment to "protect the white race" above all. Like other 'paranoid' groups – Myanmar's Buddhists vs. the Rohingya, ISIS vs. the Yazidis --Berry's white racists feel endangered by American racial pluralism. Feeling

¹ Berry first defines "white nationalism" as "a Pan-European ethnonationalism committed to the survival of the imagined global white racial community. Damon T. Berry, *Blood and Faith: Christianity in American White Nationalism* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2017): 1. But, later, Berry introduces philosopher Henri Bergson's analysis of "closed societies" to deepen his critique of White Nationalism as potentially "genocidal." As such, Berry defines White Nationalism as "a closed society organized around the mythology of whiteness to form an imagined racial community that the white nationalist is obliged to defend in the face of imagined racial enemies."

threatened allows these violent groups to attack before receiving an attack themselves. They, in effect, devise a legitimizing creed that makes protection of the biological and ideological purity of the white race its first and foremost obligation.²

I have in mind Dylann Roof, the mass murderer of congregants at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston. Christian affiliation threatened to confuse Roof's White Nationalism with its Jewish Jesus, turning the other cheek morality and such. So endangered do some feel that they need to make a 'first-strike.' Roof wanted to launch a race war in order to protect whites.³ With Roof and those of his ilk, their Golden Rule seems to be "Do unto others, *before* they do unto you." And, for Roof, these Emanuel AME Church Christians were very much "others" -- both racially and *religiously*.

Given the tumult attending our perverse politics, it may be too easy to get inundated with the abundance of topical, but gloomy, writing about the stirrings on the right. It would be a mistake, however, to overlook these two books to escape information overload. Berry, notably, has got his arms around the profoundly important "discourses of self-protection and social purity."^[5] Although I cannot develop this theoretical line until later in this review, a 'must-read' for those drawn to Berry's theory of group violence is Mark T. Anspach's brilliant analysis of what he calls

² Ibid: 3.

³ Ibid: 4.

the “tangled loops of violence, myth and madness” – *Vengeance in Reverse*.⁴ Taken together with Green, as well, they inevitably pose questions about Bannon’s suspected relation to white nationalism. Can we draw a straight line between Bannon and those individual historical flashpoints of American white nationalism that Berry has unearthed? Does Bannon likewise conform to the self-protectionist profile of Berry’s white nationalists? If not, what does account for the apparent warmth Bannon (and Trump) showed for the Charlottesville “Unite the Right” marchers? Do all drink at the same fetid ideological well? Does Bannon show signs characteristic of this racist white nationalism *de jour* – such as the anti-Semitism of the “Jews Won’t Replace Us” crowd, so prominent in Charlottesville? Getting to that question in particular will, first, demand our following the fuller, but highly instructive, story of Steve Bannon’s nurture and rise, as provided here by Joshua Green.

2. *From Richmond to Harvard to Hollywood*

Josh Green’s *Devil’s Bargain: Steve Bannon, Donald Trump, and the Storming of the Presidency* was not written to be pulped at the slightest hint of a change in presidential fortunes. To the extent Bannonism is very much in play, besides being shown to have masterminded Trump’s election, informed readers will benefit greatly from Josh

⁴ Mark R. Anspach, *Vengeance in Reverse: The Tangled Loops of Violence, Myth, and Madness*, (Lansing, MI: University of Michigan, 2017).

Green's well documented and personalized ethnography, researched over a period of some years. Particularly impressive, as well, was how early Green had been on the project of understanding Bannon, the Alt-Right and so on – really long before most other political journalists even had Bannon on their radar. In October of 2015, Green published a long piece in *Bloomberg News*, in many respects sketching an argument that gets matured and enhanced in the book.⁵

Green's nose for a good and consequential story has given us an account of Bannon, as one of the most thought-provoking characters to play a major role on (or *behind*) the scenes of the national political theater since Watergate. Bannon's earliest schooling took place at Richmond Virginia's Benedictine School, a military school and bastion of Traditionalist Catholicism. We will see more about its triumphalist Islamophobic theology, anon. Fresh from Benedictine, Bannon went off to Virginia Military Institute, then into the Navy for several years.

But after serving two years, Bannon was soon chafing at the glacial pace of advancement, and so completed his term of duty without re-enlisting. Setting his sites on Wall Street, where the "action" spurred by the Reagan presidency was stirring a pace; Bannon followed the advice of a colleague and enrolled in Harvard Business School, a virtual breeding grounds for Goldman Sachs. The Harvard credential would

⁵ Joshua Green, "The Most Dangeous Political Operative in America: Steve Bannon Runs the New Vast Right-Wing Conspiracy -- And He Wants to Take Down Both Hillary Clinton and Jeb Bush," *Bloomberg News*, October 8, 2015, <https://www.bloomberg.com/politics/graphics/2015-steve-bannon/>.

usually have been enough to land a coveted place at Goldman Sachs. But, again Bannon's plebian background would under normal conditions keep him out. So, Bannon's only route to Goldman lay in showing that he had truly exceptional abilities – something that Bannon did at considerable emotional costs to himself and his young family. Bannon prevailed in one of his first forays into the golden circle of American elites. Thus, upon graduation, so to Goldman Bannon duly went, and from they're to the tangled Hollywood career.

Colorful as the earlier Watergate characters may have been, Joshua Green paints an even more vivid picture of Bannon as a kind of dynamic Hollywood action figure. The deregulatory mood sweeping Wall Street and Washington in the 1980's, beginning with Reagan and carried forward with gusto by Bill Clinton a decade later, found Hollywood mass media properties ridiculously undervalued, and ripe for the picking.

Sent to Hollywood to learn how to exploit these opportunities in the "media and entertainment business" by his seniors at Goldman Sachs, then banker Bannon set out to do just that -- and at furious pace. [72] With his Goldman credentials in hand, doors opened and Bannon was soon learning the business from the inside as a TV production company head. Then, whether as producer behind Billy Crystal's films, or as personal advisor to Sylvio Berlusconi on the value of his film library, Bannon seems to have devoured opportunities presented to him. (Green 2017, 78) He, for instance, checks in as

the strategic brains promoting a nobody young rapper, later to become known worldwide as Ice Cube.

Ever restless, Bannon dealt, sometimes not so artfully, across a “dizzying array of platforms” -- “ not only recording and films, but also concerts, clothing, animation, video games, and television.” [78] ““He had his hands in everything,”” said Hollywood mover/shaker, Scot Vorse. At one time, Bannon served on company boards that made products “ranging from homeopathic nasal spray to branded video games.” [80] As conceived by Goldman, part of Bannon’s portfolio was facilitating mergers, acquisitions and so on. But, media properties were notoriously hard to evaluate and thus hard to promote to investors because they fluctuated with the capricious tastes of moviegoers and the ephemeral nature of the product itself. Bannon’s uncanny genius was to be able assess both, and sell that assessment to potential investors. [74] He bought and sold companies like widgets, inevitably wreaking havoc for the ‘little people’ in the process.

Then, as a farsighted visionary, he saw that the syndication of *Seinfeld* would insure its national takeoff. On its own, the *Seinfeld* syndication has netted all its investors a total of over \$3.26 billion internationally [79].⁶ No one has ever disputed Bannon’s raking in his share. And, Bannon himself says he underestimated his take by a

⁶ Noah Kirschand Madeline Berg, "Steve Bannon Worth as Much as \$48 Million, Blockbuster Filings Reveal In Forbes," *Forbes*, April 1, 2017, Noah Kirschand Madeline Berg, "Steve Bannon Worth as Much as \$48 Million, Blockbuster Filings Reveal In Forbes," April 1, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/maddieberg/2017/04/01/steve-bannon-worth-as-much-as-48-million-blockbuster-filings-reveal/#50d4d27e1f59>.

factor of *five*. [79] While the Artful Dealer at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue may imagine himself without equal, Bannon's glittering career in Hollywood dabbling in "small deal moguldom" reveals the same rough and tumble transactionalism often noted in Trump's brutal style of doing business. [77]

Bannon in Hollywood was also special in the way he has come to be known in present-day politics – as an anti-establishment wrecker, a creator of chaos. Green reports that those who knew Bannon in Hollywood said that he was "'constantly telling stories about great warriors of the past, like Attila the Hun, people who had slain empires'." [74] That's what Bannon's being among the "'pirates'" of Hollywood meant, no small part of which was in the thrill of "'shocking" Hollywood to its establishment core.

I emphasize Bannon the "pirate" because it picks up one of the lead themes in my story – whether we might link Bannon to white racist nationalism and its signature anti-Semitism? Consider what the situation of such a "pirate" might be. After a while, this boisterous, energetic, over-achieving, but brilliant, outsider would have hit one too many of established Hollywood's well-placed glass ceilings, glass walls, glass doors, etc. Anti-Semitism enters here insofar as the Hollywood of Neal Gabler's *An Empire of Their Own* remains relatively true.⁷ Is it too much to think that Bannon, the self-styled "barbarian at the gate," would not have found himself up against the "Empire" of

⁷ Neal Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York: Random House, 1988).

Hollywood's conspicuously Jewish establishment? And, if so, how would we know if *Bannon* saw Hollywood Jewry at the root of his troubles?

3. *Far Too Many Chanukah Books*

I do not raise the subject of anti-Semitism arbitrarily. Under conditions of stress, *Bannon* has been alleged to have gone on an anti-Semitic tirade or two. These were so heated, for instance, that during his divorce proceedings, reported by the author of over one hundred articles, veteran West Coast Bureau Chief of the *New York Daily News*, Nancy Dillon, *Bannon* flew into a rage of anti-Jewish anger.⁸ In a concurrent story, the Associated Press confirmed Dillon's report of the same day, 27 August 2016: In a sworn court declaration following their divorce, Mary Louise Piccard said her ex-husband had objected to sending their twin daughters to an elite Los Angeles academy because he "didn't want the girls going to school with Jews...He said he doesn't like Jews and that he doesn't like the way they raise their kids to be 'whiny brats,'" Piccard said in a 2007 court filing.⁹

8 Nancy Dillon, "Anti-Semitic Trump Campaign CEO Stephen Bannon Not a Big Fan of 'Whiny Brat' Jews, Ex-Wife Says," *New York Daily News*, August 27, 2016, <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/election/trump-campaign-ceo-bannon-complained-jews-daughters-school-article-1.2767615>.

9 Brian Melley and Jill Colvin, "Ex-Wife Says Trump Campaign CEO Made Anti-Semitic Remarks," *Associated Press*, August 27, 2016, <https://apnews.com/d24510891f274aa1acc721880b4b195b/trump-campaign-ceo-faced-domestic-violence-charge-1996>.

Bannon's remarks about Jews followed other comments that caught Piccard's attention when they were visiting private schools in 2000. At one school, she said, he asked the director why there were so many Hanukkah books in the library. At another school, he asked Piccard if it bothered her that the school used to be in a temple.¹⁰ "I said, 'No,' and asked why he asked," Piccard said. "He did not respond." Piccard said Bannon wanted the girls to attend a Catholic school. Finally, in 2007, when the girls were accepted at Archer, he told Piccard he objected because of the number of Jews in attendance.¹¹ Dillon does add to the AP report that a spokeswoman for Bannon coolly denied that he had made any anti-Semitic remarks.

Green doesn't really try to account for these alleged incidents of Bannon's anti-Semitism, or for its provenance. Yet, it seems there, if only latently. How else does one presume *to know* how Jews raise their children, *to know* that a school had once been a temple, and *to know* that Chanukah books were conspicuously numerous in the school library, unless something in addition to garden-variety anti-Semitism drives that presumed "knowledge"? How had Bannon's curiosity has been constructed to focus with laser-like keenness on the *number* of Chanukah books in a school library or of the previous use of a school building? You had to have been nurtured in a particular *culture*

10 Actually, if reported accurately, Bannon mistook the building Archer then occupied as a former Jewish temple. He may have done so perhaps because he thought that the original occupant of the building bore a conceivably "Jewish" name – the Order of the Eastern Star, a Masonic fraternal and charitable organization. (Personal correspondence)

11 Ibid.

to “look” at the world in a special way -- specifically to have had such relatively obscure facts leap out into your consciousness. But, what could that nurturing culture be in Bannon’s case? It would not be surprising if they had been nurtured in garden variety, lower class resentments, tarted up with a particular Traditionalist Catholic historical *mythos*. What I am suggesting is that Bannon’s outbursts may have been more deeply rooted in that theology of Jewish deicide in pre-Vatican II Traditionalist Catholicism.

But, things are rather complicated today on this score. Bannon hooked up with proudly Jewish Andrew Breitbart. That intense relationship, as well as their new shared focus on radical jihadi Islam, may have effectively drained the charge from Bannon’s the kind of anti-Semitic furor, seen in his quarrels over the education of his children. We know that Traditionalist Catholicism pushed back against Vatican II. Of the more “radical” branches of Traditionalist Catholicism, The Southern Poverty Law Center reports that they were “incensed by the liberalizing reforms of the 1962-65 Second Vatican Council, which condemned hatred for the Jews and rejected the accusation that Jews are collectively responsible for deicide in the form of the crucifixion of Christ.” In addition, the SPLC reports that “‘Radical traditionalist’ Catholics may make up the largest single group of serious anti-Semites in America.”¹² It would then seem fair to query how much of this theologically-inflected construction of Jews stayed with Bannon, latently, or, as we have seen, otherwise erupting in public invective?

12 “Radical Traditional Catholicism,” <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/radical-traditional-catholicism>

4. *Mel Gibson Meets a "Jewish" Traffic Cop in Malibu*

Just to strengthen my case against Catholic Traditionalist theology as the culprit in Bannon's early anti-Semitism, let us look with new eyes down the bumpy ethical road traveled by another, contemporary Hollywood, "Traditionalist" Roman Catholic -- Mel Gibson. For both Bannon and Gibson, we see their anti-Semitism in full color in their sudden violent, emotional outbursts, perhaps bespeaking suppressed frustrations of a minority or curious expressions of hatred emerging when under stress. They are worth pausing to examine because both Bannon and Gibson spontaneously blame their misfortune on Jews. Why blame the Jews? Why, when one explodes in violent outbursts of anger, do Jews emerge as the source of their problems?

Consider, an incident when Mel Gibson is stopped on suspicion of DUI in Malibu. At one point in the arrest procedure, Gibson launches into a bizarre anti-Jewish tirade against an apparently East Asian Sheriff's officer.¹³ The online organ, *TMZ*, broke the story and cited the police report of the incident: "The report says Gibson then launched into a barrage of anti-Semitic statements: "F*****g Jews... The Jews are responsible for all the wars in the world'." Gibson then capped his surreal performance by asking the East Asian sheriff's deputy, "are you a Jew?" Puzzled about such weird

¹³ For the story step by step, see *TMZ*, <http://www.tMZ.com/2006/07/28/gibsons-anti-semitic-tirade-alleged-cover-up/> and the LA County Sheriff's Dept report, <http://www.tMZ.com/person/james-mee/>.

and contextually bizarre remark, the attending Sheriff's Deputy James Mee, commented later to *TMZ* reporters, "'for a drunk driving arrest, is this really worth all that?'"¹⁴ (Staff 2006) Indeed, frustrations need a scapegoat. And, in a Hollywood perceived as Jewish, for Traditionalist Roman Catholics, the cause of one's troubles – whether that be the frustrations of a messy divorce or a traffic stop – always seems easy to find – the Jews. This is not, of course, to deny that, like paranoids, Traditionalist Catholics also have their enemies – something that cannot realistically be discounted. Nor is it to identify Bannon with Gibson, even while analogies are hard to resist. But when under stress, both Bannon and Gibson assume a *default position of blame* for life's difficulties, however, irrelevant: the Jews did it.

Green says just enough, as well, for the imagination to conjure up scenarios of how this shared Traditionalist theology of apocalyptic, sin-guilt-expiation via bloody sacrifice and martyrdom, with its insinuations of Jewish deicidal guilt, took hold of the young brains of Bannon and Gibson, respectively. Recall the snuff pornography of Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ's* endless scourging of Jesus into a bloody pulp. But, for our purposes, recall in particular the riotous succeeding scene of a priest-led Jewish mob crying out to Pilate for Jesus's crucifixion. Traditionalism's dark apocalyptic theology may just as easily go on to inform Bannon's prophetic warnings of the coming bloody *Ragnarök* with radical Islam... lest we fail to make America great again, and build walls to keep out the barbarians.

14 *Ibid.*

5. *From Hong Kong to Breitbart*

If frustrations with life's bad turns sometimes led Bannon into anti-Semitic outbursts, one wonders whether his transgression against Tinsel Town's elites e caused Bannon other difficulties? Although the details are unclear, why did Bannon up and leave Hollywood for Hong Kong, apparently without cause? Green fails to explain why, after a couple decades in Hollywood, in 2005, Bannon inexplicably cans his go-go Hollywood career for a new venture in Hong Kong – as a video game entrepreneur, no less! Is this how one disposes of disruptive, piratical types? True, Bannon's new video game environment, the *World of Warcraft* is no small potatoes, with its 10 million subscribers; but it's still not Hollywood. Whatever the circumstances and causes, whether Hong Kong was a step up or banishment, it changed his life. It was the way he stumbled into the world of virtual reality, into the discovery of the virtual worlds inhabited by flocks of gamers – later who would become template in later political campaigns.

Then, no sooner had this new media experience begun to take hold of Bannon's creative mind, than out of a perfect autumn day the attacks of 9/11 struck without warning. But, now back in Los Angeles. (Green never says how or why), Bannon had just found the financing (Green never says how, why, or from whom) to make a film, *"In the Face of Evil"* (2004), an ideological love-letter to Ronald Reagan for his steadfast, decades-long war on "communism" – but a film that ends by identifying radical Islam,

as successor to the Red Terror. In Reagan, Bannon recognized the same radical spirit that he felt needed to be reanimated against the threat from radical Islam. For in Bannon's eyes, seen against the backdrop of traumatizing 9/11, the flood of Muslim refugees into Western Europe threatened the very existence of traditional Christian culture.

Equally by accident, at the same time, Bannon met Andrew Breitbart at the right-wing film festival where he and his film were being feted. Andrew Breitbart saw in Bannon a fellow rambunctious rightist spirit, and a common foe of Islam, to the bargain. Thus, united in purpose began Bannon's long association with *Breitbart* and its Los Angeles team of merry pranksters. Despite the embarrassing anti-Jewish tirades, Bannon's anti-Semitism does not seem to be highly charged, perhaps because it could be set aside so swiftly to confront a far more lethal foe of both the Jew and Christian alike -- radical jihadi Islam. Bannon's association with Andrew Breitbart thus will always complicate speaking simply of Bannon's anti-Semitism without qualification, as Bannon himself notes. In Bannon's 2014 Vatican video-talk, he rather casually disposes of the importance of anti-Semitism for the rightist traditionalist movements, noting that they may exploit anti-Semitism where useful, but then discard it when an opportune time arrives. The Traditionalist Right is not defined by anti-Semitism, in Bannon's view.

[2013]

6. *Bannon Knows that the Catholics Won the West ... from Muslims*

While one may yearn for more details of Bannon's Traditionalist Irish Catholic nurture in a parochial military school, there are enough bits of evidence to get us started. Of theology, Green tells us a little – specifically, of Bannon's religious formation in his father's "Traditionalist," anti-Vatican II, Latin Mass, Tridentine Catholicism, celebrating martyrdom and sacrifice. Like Mel Gibson, too, with his equally Irish Catholic "strong father," Bannon's young mind was then forged in the military academy ethos of Richmond's Benedictine School. Most of all, however, there, at that tender age, Bannon was informed with a sense of the Judeo-Christian – actually "Catholic" -- identity of the West, forged on the anvil of battles with Islamic armies. Bannon's Benedictine School set in place a powerful historical myth of "Catholic" armies repelling Muslims forces from the West. It begins Charles Martel's victory at Tours in 732 BCE, then repeated with Ferdinand and Isabella expulsion of the Moors from Spain in 1492, to Jan Sobieski's miraculous rout of Ottoman forces in 1683 in Vienna.

This *mythos* of the West's identity was then distinctly *Catholic*, and one informed by sturdy militant opposition to the Muslim Other. As a good Traditionalist Catholic, one must never let Islam threaten the heartland of the West, again.¹⁵ If anything was central to a Western European foundational *mythos*, and to Bannon's worldview, it was this sense of an endangered Christian West heroically holding back a relentless Muslim

¹⁵ Joshua Green, *Devil's Bargain: Steve Bannon, Donald Trump, and the Storming of the Presidency*, (New York: Penguin, 2017): 51.

wave, as taught at the Benedictine School. Notably, then, when compared to Damon Berry's mainline American White Nationalists, Catholic triumphalist myth informs Bannon's Islamophobia, not the homegrown nativist, White Protestant nationalism of America. For what it is worth, Bannon's *mythos* leaves Jews out of the cultural story of the West.

As for the mature development, Bannon's Islamophobia, that took its rise from Bannon's alarming Navy shore leaves in the Near East, 9/11, and events like the Iran hostage crisis of 1979. The experience of humiliation and defeat marked Bannon in the wake of Jimmy Carter's ill-fated raid to free the hostages held by Iranian rebels in Tehran. Bannon was then serving at sea with the navy, just as his contingent was leaving Persian Gulf duty. Firm in his memory was the sense of contempt for a helpless president Carter.

Then, also, second, Bannon's fear of Muslims came from his own apprehensions about the Muslim world after seeing first-hand the roiling anti-American tumult while abroad. Then and there, Bannon became convinced of the rising threat of radical Islam to the West, especially as it, decades later, opened its doors to a flood of refugees from the Syrian war and impoverished Africa. Ever since 1979, Bannon's conviction of the threat posed by Islam has only increased. In the interim, Bannon had ample time to do extensive reading and to let his political thinking marinate. Specifically, Bannon sees the

West at war with “jihadist Islamic fascism” [207], thus, requiring a “‘global war against jihadi fascism.’”[58]

7. *Bannon Matters: Borders, Culture and Nation*

The topic of Islamophobia provides a natural way to transition to Bannon’s nationalism, tied as it is with his antipathy to immigration. But, we should distinguish two different motives at work here. Bannon recently concluded that a nation needs to “‘control three (sic) things... borders, currency, and military and national identity.’”[207] But, in opposing Muslim immigration, Bannon is putting a *cultural* or *political* policy into action – protecting the West from Islam – not a strictly *economic* one. But, in opposing Latino immigration, Bannon’s policies seemed aimed at *economic* ends – protecting the jobs of blue collar US workers from Mexican “cheap labor.”

Roman Catholic Latinos are not *cultural* threats in the way Muslims are, in Bannon’s view. Their danger to the US is *economic*. These two different planks in a Bannon’s immigration platform together might be said to make up Bannon’s “America First” policy. In the next few pages, let me develop the subject of Bannon’s view of the need for secure borders, especially as that has to do with national *identity*. I shall also take the opportunity to question at length the assumptions of Bannon’s thinking here especially as these bear on whether Bannon may have a case that Islamic and Western

values are incorrigibly incompatible (Sections 8 and 9). Then, in Section 10, I shall address the fundamental basis of Bannon's anti-globalist economic ideas, which naturally include his opposition to Latino immigration across the southern border.

7a. *Borders*

First, is the *political* thesis that immigration and control over our borders are essential to the being of a nation-state. In a way, Bannon only reminds us of the Treaty of Westphalia's virtual definition of nations as bounded political entities, over against the somewhat more amorphous transnational entity of Papal Christendom. In the new Westphalian regime, polities required *meaningful* borders. Nation-states are *bounded* political entities, which, as such, must define and *control* their borders.

Bannon argues, reasonably enough, that a nation-state must be able to say what and where its borders are, and who may enter within them. Unless the nation-state cannot fulfill these requirements, then it will become hopelessly confused and fail at what a nation-state should be. This, in turn, means that espousing, "open borders," whether explicit, deliberate or not, entails the virtual dissolution of the nation-state that does so. The rhetoric of "open borders" sounds compassionate and progressive; what if tiny Costa Rica or Switzerland opened their borders and were overwhelmed with US citizens, all permanent residents with the vote? Would there be a "Costa Rica" or a

“Switzerland” anymore? Of course, we could always use the same names as before. But, the names would not have the same meaning as before the borders were opened.

Progressives seem sometimes to stumble over questions regarding borders because they confuse compassion for refugees or immigrants, and a desire for peoples to move about in the world where they will, with the ground rules of our legal-political structures governing what a nation-state is. Revulsion at the cruelty, if not economic stupidity, of deporting 11 million undocumented residents from the US should not distract us from *thinking* with the same single-mindedness Bannon has brought to what it is to be a nation-state, however cramped or sclerotic it may be. Indeed, Berry might query whether Bannon’s “nation” is to be considered “closed,” in the sense Berry has spelt out, and that he feels is so dangerous?

Quoting the French philosopher, Henri Bergson, we are told that a “closed society is that whose members hold together, caring nothing for the rest of humanity, on the alert for attack and defense, bound, in fact, to a perpetual readiness from battle’.”[Berry, 14) Damon T. Berry finds this definition perfect for bringing out salient features of the White Nationalist groups, especially their bellicosity, wreathed as it is in a verdant mythology and sense of religious commitment to the group.

Bannon gives us tantalizing indications that he sees the American nation as a “closed society.” Admittedly the bellicosity is not salient, nor is the armed and ready attitude, one meets in certain anti-immigrant vigilante groups. Yet, there are

indications, at least of the xenophobic notion that “members hold together, caring nothing for the rest of humanity.” Thus, beyond, frequent administration attempts to lay down a “Muslim ban,” recent Trump deportation decrees tend in the direction of callous, ethnocentric “closed society” policies – first, deportation of the young people, “The Dreamers,” permitted to remain in the US under the DACA program, but just recently in the decision to deport 50,000 or more Haitians, now living in the US as refugees from the devastating January 2010 earthquake. Do these two administration decisions, alone, well marked as Bannon’s handy-work, not amount to “caring nothing for the rest of humanity”? And, in being so, push Bannon’s idea of nation toward the “closed” end of the spectrum?

Yet, progressives must counter with more than compassion. They need to articulate an alternative and coherent theory of the nations-state. In North America, for instance, this might mean refusing to permit our border relations with Mexico and Canada to be frozen in the constraints devised by the *17th century* Treaty of Westphalia. Is something like a European Union – its present problems notwithstanding -- possible and desirable in North America? Conditions of habit, culture, language and such might keep our respective populations pretty much in place. Quebeckers don’t really want to become Floridians, as much as they love winter sunshine. So, there would be considerable movement to and fro over the borders of the three nation-states without really changing the character of any.

Here, I imagine not only the aforementioned Quebeckers, but Guatemalan Dry Wall wizards, Mexican artisans, arborists, *jardineros* and other skilled folk coming north, then returning south enriched in the process, but also movements in the opposite direction. US citizens might seek enclaves both north and south of the border for their correspondingly different reasons, with apologies – to Canada for calming doses of civility, to Mexico for liberation from work-alcoholism, and the lure of hundreds of miles of undeveloped coastal real estate. So, taking him at his best, Bannon's realism about borders should challenge progressives to think more consistently and creatively about how, why and where we want to erect walls between "us" and "them."

7b. *Who Is "Us"?*

But, dispute over what counts as "us" -- "our culture" -- requires interrogation, and more than I can possibly undertake here. But, for starters, what counts as "our own kind" doesn't come with its name written on it. We decide, we *construct* what counts as "our own kind." Addressing his motley assortment of fighters before the Battle of Agincourt, Henry V memorably said "he to-day who sheds his blood with me, shall be my brother." I don't recall Henry checking pigmentation – mostly because it would have been arguably anachronistic of him so to do. Racism is very much *our problem*, a *charged feature* of our social and political lives. The Tudors doubtless recognized skin

color, e.g. Othello. But, while pigmentation entered into an identification of Othello, it was his being *Muslim* that charged up the Elizabethans.

From the constructivist point of view, human “kinds” do not exist in nature, except in trivial ways. So, when White Nationalists declare their love for those folk with “white” skin because that fact defines them and their “kind,” I can only feel a kind of pity for an identity literally ‘skin deep.’ It imputes intrinsic value to skin pigmentation – it “elevates whiteness itself as a transcendent mode of valuation, a means of identification and a motivating moral trope.”(Berry 2017, 12) I’d count “black” Barak Obama as “one of my kind” long before I’d even consider counting lily-white Richard Spencer. Our view of virtue and goodness coincide; our love of beauty, Hawaii, jazz and basketball are identical. So, is Spencer telling us that we should feel more akin to him just because he can’t take the summer sun without burning for more than 20 minutes? To make the fact of skin color why we share the same species seems nonsensical and/or misguided.

But, the “whiteness” of course, means more to White Nationalists than claiming some kind of magic powers in low melanin levels in skin. We must not forget Berry’s definition of White Nationalism as a “Pan-European ethnonationalism.”[7] As such, skin color signals a certain cultural identity. The “whiteness” of this kind of White Nationalism means identifying with a certain pantheon of the heroes and achievements of Europe and the Americas. Shakespeare, the Vikings, Julius Caesar, Benjamin

Franklin, Jefferson, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Paul of Tarsus, Harriet Tubman, Jazz, Justinian's *Corpus Juris Civilis*, Chartres cathedral, Joan or Arc, Luther, Brutus, Marcus Aurelius, Jesus, Socrates, Plato, Pope Gregory VII, Samuel Gompers, Samuel Goldwyn, Johnny Leguizamo, Pushkin, Constantine the Great, Martin Luther King, Jr., Calvin, Erasmus, the Mexican-American War of 1847, JFK, LBJ, Florence Nightingale, Beethoven, Sarah Bernhardt, Tolstoy, Chopin, Maimonides, the Glorious Revolution of 1688, Boadicea, Jack Warner, John Donne, Cecil Rhodes, Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt, Wordsworth, Henry Miller, Jelly Roll Morton, Queen Elizabeth I.

But, it also means two further moves – one, stripping away the contributions of the many Black, Latino, Jewish, Arab, Turkish, and other makers of Western culture, and two, it also means suppressing the Crusades, Holocaust, the anti-Indian policies and practices of British and American settlers in North America, the Conquistador “destruction of the Indies”, WW1, WW2, slavery, the slave trade, innocent civilian casualties of American forces in Viet Nam, Korea, Iraq and Afghanistan, or the voiceless victims of Belgian, British and French colonial enterprises. How does this shameful side of the Western European story make “whiteness” a desirable criterion of what it is to be of “my *kind*,” as well? In short, even whiteness as a marker of a culture does not dictate some specific *coherent* object. Whiteness brings triumphs as well as calamities, honor as well as shame.

8. *Facing Up to Difference*

Let me the make a perhaps the best case possible for Bannon's skepticism about immigration, especially from Muslim countries. The argument would go something like this. It, in effect, constitutes the second fundamental principle behind Bannon's thinking. Despite Western civilization's ability to absorb and refashion cultural differences, perhaps there are limits? Indeed, the belief that some value systems, such as Islam, are just *too different* to ever form part of the fabric of American society seems behind the particular resistance to Muslim immigration by the likes of Bannon et co.

Worse yet, the fears of Bannon and his kin in the Rightist movements in France, Poland and such, that Muslims are about to invade and sweep over the West betray a version of the same fear. In perhaps a fit of "racial religious panic," Muslim migrants -- legal or not, refugees or not -- threaten no less than a "civilizational jihad" by swamping the populations of Western Europe. [207] In the process, Bannon feels any coherent idea of the West is all slipping away, even if quite the opposite may be more likely true, if we pay attention to world fashion.

Yet, let us grant Bannon a measure of his fears. What if the values governing Islamic culture are *too different* ever to be wholly at peace with the West, at least as historically constructed at the moment? In essence, Bannon, in effect, seems to have given credence to the complaint that Muslims, in France, say, resist taking up French ways has merit. Young women are now *more* likely to go about in public "covered" than

earlier. Muslims don't permit their women to *marry out* of Islam, although men may take non-Muslim wives. To someone like the panicky Bannon, this means that Western culture cannot possibly *digest* Muslim culture, but that the West is in danger of itself being digested! Oddly, Bannon seems unaware of the terrifying allure of the West. A Saturday afternoon's ride from the northern suburbs of Jerusalem on the city's light rail into the center of the city will delight the dedicated people-watcher with the sight of young *hijabed* Arab women donning make-up, preening, all excited by the prospects of their night out on the big town. And, how many of the millions of young Iranians, thousands and thousands of whom, demonstrated in the streets as recently as a few years ago, really want to retreat from the world?

Bannon, further, might readily admit that, for instance, that Islam is congenially *egalitarian*, and thus in sympathy with Western values undergirding democracy, social interaction and such. Yet, by the same token, Islam is illiberal, *anti-individualist*, and thus deeply at odds with Western mores. The role and rule of the family or community count much more than in the West. The public roles open to women may be more circumscribed than the European *norm*. Some Muslims insist upon dressing in a uniform manner, whether men or women. Religious discipline is far greater, forbidding conversion and inter-marriage with non-Muslims.

Of course, not all, or perhaps even most, Western Muslims feel this way. Tariq Ramadan's *To Be a European Muslim* has argued about how actually adaptable to

European society Muslims are.¹⁶ Looking to the future, the Muslim world is in turmoil and change, as the recent liberalizing reforms of Saudi crown prince Mohammad bin Salman al Saud indicate. Such ‘reformed’ Muslims may embrace *both* an ethic of equality and individualism – in which case, Bannon’s concerns would have little basis.

But, what if adaptation to liberalism hit a wall? What if Western Muslims in the end resisted individualism, liberalism and so on? What if they could not abide what is essentially a code of personal freedom and liberality that has defined Western life? Would that make Islam “indigestible”, would that not be a *difference* too great, a gap too wide to span? What if European Muslims required their children to *remain* Muslims, so that they were not *free* to adopt another religion, or marry whom they wished? What if they inculcated unquestioned conformity to religious authority? What if they made it impossible for their female children to develop as they chose, such as making it impossible for them to pursue an education? What if they denied privacy to their children and other family members? What if they insisted upon marking their differences with distinctive styles of dress, such as “covering” women, insisting upon men wearing untrimmed beards, and such other sartorial markers? Wouldn’t such resistance to fundamental Western values, such as those of individual freedom make such Muslims *too different* from folk in the West and thus, always at odds with the Western societies in which they lived? This is why, Bannon might add, we should not welcome Muslims among us, and why they should not be permitted to immigrate into

16 Tariq Ramadan, *To Be a European Muslim* (London/Geneva: Islamic Foundation, 2015).

the West. Islam and the West are just too different, and would best keep clear of one another. How high can this view fly?

9. *The Liberal Uses of Illiberality*

My answer is “not very” high. As I kept adding up the cultural and value impediments Bannon might present for Muslims to become European or American, I kept thinking of my Polish Roman Catholic grandparents. At almost every turn, I could have plugged their names and their immigrant community into the list of difficulties Muslims might have had adapting to Western values, like liberalism or individualism. In most of the respects just mentioned, many, typically immigrant, Catholic or Jewish Americans have been hostile to, or at least uncomfortable with, the theoretically unbounded individual freedom of Western liberalism -- what *New York Times* opinion columnist, David Brooks recently called “naked liberalism.”¹⁷

Irony of ironies, Bannon’s own life story shows his nurture with the illiberal anti-individualist constraints of an intransigent Traditionalist Catholic military school education and family life. In my Catholic grade and high schools, analogous illiberal regimes ruled, as well. Like young Muslim, we were taught that discipline was a paramount value. And, we were proud of the advantages in life having self-discipline

17 David Brooks, "Our Elites Still Don't Get It," *New York Times*, November 16, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/16/opinion/elites-taxes-republicans-congress.html?_r=0.

meant. There, we constantly were lectured about the superiority of our -- disciplined -- illiberal, parochial, Catholic education in contrast to that in the loose -- undisciplined -- "naked liberalism" of the public schools. Similarly, many of my Jewish friends keep a kosher kitchen, even though some other Jews as 'backward sometimes criticize them' because they had been raised in a more liberal form of Judaism, where *kashrut* had ceased being observed. But, others still will choose estrangement from their families and religious community, instead. American literature and theater is rich in tales of the tensions these struggles between community and self. The plays, "Abie's Irish Rose", even metaphorically about America, as in "Fiddler on the Roof" or the recent film about interracial marriage, "Loving," then movies like "My Son the Fanatic", "My Big, Fat Greek Wedding," and a host of others, all play on this theme.

Nothing is terribly new here in terms of these conflicts on the American scene. But, interestingly enough, the very challenges Judaism and Catholicism, in terms of their illiberalism have presented to American individualism offer reasons to be critical of our own conventional wisdom about "naked liberalism" or individualism. Are we a better nation for having some brakes put upon individualism? Depends where, of course. In the economic realm, surely the trade union movement, led largely by Jews and Catholics, has mitigated the predations of capitalist economic liberalism or individualism in behalf of the common -- collective -- good.

The West may have similar gains to expect from what may seem at first like undesirable aspects of Muslim illiberality. A good dose of Muslim concern for *social discipline*, often in the service *social justice* would be more than welcome, notably as evident in some Muslim groups prominent in the US. Although of dubious orthodoxy/praxy by those considering themselves *real Muslims*, Ahmadiyyas, Malcolm X and other Nation of Islam Black Americans, set an example of discipline, order and restraint. Orthodox or not, they've made an effort to project these Islamic values of moral seriousness into our otherwise looser liberal moral world. So, in these ways their Muslim illiberality, like Jewish and Catholic illiberality, might temper "naked liberalism" to the benefit of us all.

10. *Nations Have Economies, Not the Other Way Around*

Alongside Bannon's resistance to Muslim immigration are his arguments against working class Latino immigration, which, in effect, can be seen as part of his anti-globalist vision for the American economy. We can better understand Bannon, if we note that his Islamophobia is motivated primarily by considerations of borders as they bear on *cultural identity*, while his opposition to Latino immigration seems mainly about borders as they affect the *American job market and labor economy*. Muslim values clash

with Western ones, in Bannon's view, so constitute an argument for a Muslim ban. But by, permitting large-scale Latino immigration across the southern border, we militate against our national interest of protecting the jobs of working class US citizens.

Bannon's economic nationalism, reflected in his proposed immigration policies clash as well with globalist notions of a free movement of labor (and goods) across national boundaries. Bannon's fundamental objection to Latino immigration and globalization can, therefore, be put into a neat slogan. "A nation has an economy, not the other way around." Nation-states should be in control over their economies, and not cede control to the free movement of labor, remote international trade bodies or multi-national corporations. Bannon thus rejects – at least makes a show of rejecting -- such trans-national trade agreements as NAFTA, or the TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership).

If Bannon's notions recall Bernie Sanders presidential campaign for economic nationalism, it is partly because he and Bannon share a common – dare, I say, "socialist" – impetus of seeking social justice – another theme with which Bannon would have been familiar from his days at the Benedictine School. But, Sanders appeals to populist themes of mistrust of concentrations of great (ultimately trans-national) wealth or corporate power, Trump-Bannon would rather appeal to populist themes such as jingoism and resentments rooted in feelings of national powerlessness arising from commitments binding the USA to international agreements. But, both Bannon and Sanders lock arms as socialist patriots who feel that our economy should be at the

service of the nation, rather than the nation serving the interests of some remote, trans-national economic body, such as a multi-national corporation.

In that limited sense, both Bannon and Sanders are, in a way, “national socialists,” or at the very least *both* “economic nationalists” and “socialists”? And, if that is to conjure up the rank ghost of AH, so be it. The Bannon/Sanders view that a nation should have an economy and not the other way round is certainly one iteration of AH’s economic vision for the Germany of the 1930’s. It is also the anti-economist vision articulated in the great progressive, Karl Polanyi’s *The Great Transformation*, if anything a blueprint for a humanistic society – one in which the market is embedded in society, and not the other way around.

That we have not solved the riddle of how to avoid the Scylla of National Socialism for the Charybdis of neo-liberal globalization only testifies to the difficulty of the task. Still, an honest reader will at least give Bannon his due in stating this principle clearly and forcibly. Globalization comes with certain costs, and the election of 2016 gave voice to them. Just what is the globalist response to Bernie and Bannon – that better jobs are created, as low skilled ones are out-sourced abroad? That didn’t exactly meet with a resounding welcome in the election of 2016.

Bannon has never shied away from airing his populist class resentments. Nor is Green hesitant to record them. Green breaks the silence about the unglamorous foundations of Bannon’s populist moral outrage in the peculiar conditions of being

poor, Southern, Irish and Catholic in a world where all the action lay in being a rich, well-connected WASP from the Northeast. This matured into Bannon aiming to assemble a “proudly populist and ‘unclubbable’ plebiscite rising up in defiant protest against the ‘globalists’ and ‘gatekeepers’ who had taken control of both parties” was to Bannon a fight worth having. [139]

Full perhaps of blue-collar resentments, Bannon cannot hide how much he seethes with the desire to unseat the “globalist elites.” [92] As if in uniform, Bannon dresses in a calculated way to give maximum offense to polite company – layered tee shirts, cargo shorts, flip flops, stubbly beard and all. Unspoken, Bannon’s contempt for the conventions of the elites bespeaks, as well, that shame keenly felt for being poor. We know of the Bannon family’s modest means; we also know, thanks to Thomas Kenealy’s *Great Shame*, of the class sensitivities of the Irish diaspora forced, either by poverty or deportation, into conditions of shameful penury. It was no wonder that Bannon never tired of stoking the feelings of victimization of “the forgotten Americans” from the ample reservoirs of his moral outrage against class inequality. Green’s accounts of Bannon’s status anxieties shows us how the wounds of this class resentment, hidden in the heart of a déclassé Irish Catholic, “ever alert to the signifiers of class,” plays in his ascent through corporate America. [61]

Let me conclude this review essay by collecting what we have already, in part, gathered about Bannon's relation to white nationalism. And, to be precise, is Bannon a white nationalist – at least of the fully fitted out kind whose genealogy Damon T. Berry attempts to trace? I submit that it is only when we compare Damon T. Berry's sharp theorizing of white nationalism in *Blood and Faith* to Bannon's deep orientations that we can see how shallow such previous discourse has been. Bannon may be a triumphalist Catholic Traditionalist cultural Occidental nationalist, but that doesn't brand him "KKK," or even a white nationalist, as Berry exactly understands that term. For one thing, the range of White Nationalism is quite broad in itself, ranging from neo-Pagan Odinism to the new post-WW2 white nationalist "'esoteric racialism'" that focused on protecting the white race (whatever that is) from "Jewish Christianity." This last strand of White Nationalism put particular emphasis upon defending and protecting what was deemed "white culture." And, more than anything else, it is an American Protestant thing?

While I do not demean Berry's scholarship in telling the story of major figures in American white nationalism, one must wonder about at least two issues.

First, it is one thing to identify points of white nationalist thinking, but another matter to have identified a *wave*. That is to say, one could read Berry's accounts of the several white nationalist thinkers he's identified, but still see them as isolated points. Except for Greg Johnson's dedication of the first volume to his journal *North American*

New Right to Francis Parker Yockey, there are few if any such similar references of white nationalist thinkers to those came before them. Thus, as disturbing as white nationalist thinkers may be, such as in their mass rally and “Unite the Right” march this August in Charlottesville, they seem less like part and parcel of a raging forest fire sweeping across a landscape than occasional flash fires erupting here and there. On the other, linking some of these North American thinkers to equally eccentric European ones, such as *nouvelle droitiste*, Alain de Benoiste, as does Berry, does start to show that a wave-like movement may be afoot in the present day. The same cannot be said with the same authority about the points of white nationalist thinking Berry identifies in the balance of his book.

Second, one also wonders, therefore, about an appropriate sense of scale, as well. Readers will, of course, be familiar with Charles Lindbergh’s anti-Semitic America Firstism, but who has heard of such featured WH thinkers as Madison Grant, Revilo Oliver, Else Christiansen, Lothrop Stoddard, Francis Parker Yockey, Tomislav Sunic, Michael O’Meara, or Greg Johnson? Numbers matter here. Berry does not even try to tell us what circulation their books had. It is always possible to research an esoteric element and to trace it to its roots, and then to call this a “tradition.” But, it is not a *tradition*, in the strict sense of the term, unless one can show substantial debt of past thinkers to the present. Further, for a book done for political scientific purposes, the question must always remain how significant the subject is? Berry documents folk who make grandiose claims. But, for all their grandiosity how much influence did their

words really have? Francis Parker Yockey receives frequent mention and cross-citation to the studies of other first-rate scholars of radical racist politics. But, again, numbers matter. Yockey may well have been “deeply influential” to the American white nationalists in his ambit, and even later in our own day among the Alt-Right. But, what are the numbers?

Recall that those opposed to them hugely outnumbered the Tiki Torch marchers of Charlottesville, so much so that their follow-up demonstration was canceled. Again, a sense of proportion and caution is needed in these. One cannot be unduly impressed by splashy shows of political ritual or drama; nor can one be complacent about their occurrence, either. This means that the magnitude of damage and death wrought by Timothy McVeigh, and the sheer numbers slaughtered by Norway’s white nationalist, Anders Breivik might make one reconsider the matter of impact on the public scene.

[Berry 5]

Superficial similarities between Steve Bannon and the motley crew of white nationalists can therefore be found. But, the problem is how to evaluate them. In both a good portion of the White Nationalist movements Berry identifies and in implications one might draw from Bannon’s attitudes, there is the shared desire to protect one’s own – whether that is white race/culture/religion etc., or America for the Americans.

Bannon articulated this view in his Vatican speech of 2014 largely in terms of his view

of the danger of the threat to the West from Islam, a conviction held by Bannon, as we know, since the Iran hostage crisis of 1979.

As recently as that 2014 speech to a Vatican conference, Bannon summed up a number of unconnected trade mark subjects, from the “global” nature of both the populist “center-right revolt” against modernity, as well as Islam’s preemptive strike in a war of civilizations to the “Judeo-Christian values” undergirding an “entrepreneurial capitalism.” In response to these realities, the West needs first to “take a very, very, very aggressive stance against radical Islam,” and like Putin’s assertion of “traditionalism,” inspired by Putin’s version of traditionalism, Alexander Dugin’s “PanAsianism,” America should decide to be one of the “strong countries and strong nationalist movements.” [Green 207]

Of other alleged links, such as his occasional citation of rightist thinkers like anti-modernist, Traditionalists, René Guènon and Julius Evola, cited by Johnson and other White Nationalist thinkers, these amounts to a somewhat watered-down nostalgia for an imagined Christian West. But, anyone with a modicum of religious studies education should feel frustrated, if not outraged, that blue-collar Steve Bannon can trade in the trendoid lingo of semi-skilled intellectuals, harkening to a return to “medieval,” “traditional”, “Judeo-Christian” (sic) values without paying any price.

“Medieval”[208]? Which is more “medieval,” the 1417 Council of Constance’s declaration of its authority over the Pope, or Pope Gregory VII’s assertion of a papal

authority over the Emperor beginning in 1075? “Traditional”? Which is more traditional, the strict all-male, celibate priesthood, or the older, more flexible priesthood that existed in the early Church and still does today for most of Eastern Christianity?

“Judeo-Christian”? Why is this Christian usage absent from the way Jews talk about cultural values, most of whom do not even recognize the existence of something called “Judeo-Christian values,” with its dull ring of Christian supercessionism? In sum, it would be a mistake to attribute to Bannon any more than a superficial intellectual debt to any of the rightist intellectuals he frequently cites – Evola, Dugin, Guènon, and so on. For all the references to arcane French or Russian thinkers, there’s not a lot of there, there.

12. *Nationalism Is Loving Your Own Kind*

Does Bannon, nevertheless, in other, more obscure ways, fit into the White Nationalist mold, proper, as it is frequently charged? He and Trump are hospitable to the rightists linked tightly with *Breitbart*, of course, but also to others trailing off in the direction of the likes of Tiki Torch marchers at Charlottesville. Are such perceived sympathy more than the product of a progressive’s fevered imagination? Where, then, *specifically* would we *locate* Bannon and his thinking among the White Nationalists about whole we read in Berry’s book?

Frankly, the more we learn in detail about the Alt-Right and White Nationalists, the more we see in Bannon the same semi-skilled intelligentsia's eclectic genius at assembling resonant pseudo-systems, ready-made for the campaign trail. What we do *not* find are links of direct indebtedness and/or influence that stand up to sharp philosophical or historical analysis. So, yes, Bannon natters on about saving the West and its "Judaean-Christian" (sic) values, but never trades in the language of Berry's neo-pagan racist, white nationalism with its frequent references to racial purity, Aryan spirituality, and acute embarrassment about the Jewish Jesus. [Berry 192]

Some commentators, perhaps eager to lump him together with the worst of the right, see Bannon's campaign strategies against Muslim or Mexican migrants, whether documented or not, as waging a "nationalist, hateful campaign." [Green 204] I think the evidence shows a more complex set of facts at work in Bannon's attitudes to immigration, as we have already, to some extent, seen. Without absolving Bannon of bare-knuckles politicking, with Bannon, what one finds, instead, is something of the same curiously benign-sounding spin White Nationalist spokesperson, Richard Spencer has given White Nationalist's projects – love of one's own kind, and the duty to protect them. Whether Bannon's relation to the White Nationalists is only his coy way of enrolling these "good people" of the Charlottesville "Unite the White" march as Useful Idiots for Trump, one can only speculate. Many things are possible in the hallway of mirrors that is politics. Describing his ideological inclinations to an interviewer, Bannon tried to clarify his relation to White Nationalism to reporter, Louis Jacobson.

He [Bannon] describes its ideology as “nationalist,” though not necessarily “white nationalist,” the article said. “Likening its approach to that of European nationalist parties such as France’s National Front, he says, “If you look at the identity movements over there in Europe, I think a lot of (them) are really “Polish identity” or “German identity,” not racial identity. It’s more identity toward a nation-state or their people as a nation.”¹⁸

Bannon at least wants to make out that he defines his “nationalism” positively. As such, Bannon’s nationalism defines the collective identity of a people, and along with that, by implication from his European references, entails preserving and protecting such national identities.

Thus, Bannon’s nationalism urges us to *love* and *protect* Western culture – in particular, that culture he imagines has been shaped by those problematic Judaeo-Christian values forged on the anvil of defensive warfare against Islam. But, intentionally or not, by defining his nationalism in the positive sense of love for Western culture, Bannon affirms what White Nationalist, and originator of the term, “Alt-Right,” Richard Spencer also claims this.¹⁹ Is this an accident? Thus, when interviewed about the alleged racist hate mongering of White Nationalism, Spencer was

¹⁸ Louis Jacobson, "Are There White Nationalists in the White House?," *Politifact*, August 15, 2017, <http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2017/aug/15/are-there-white-nationalists-white-house/>.

quick to reject the charge. He explained, instead, that *love for fellow whites* (whatever that means?) and *white European culture* motivated his White Nationalism, not hatred of those who were different. Love for *one's own kind*, love for white civilization, love for white European culture and religion – these drove White Nationalist, not hatred of others, said Spencer.

In that great movement of racial integration spearheaded by Martin Luther King, Jr., and by the globalists, pushing international economic integration, Spencer and his movement feared that a mulatto future of unknown destiny would water down white European culture. He wanted something different. Instead of broad integration, let those who loved this racial integration and “diversity,” who also advocated open borders, take up residence in that diverse world, in a world of unlimited migration. Let them have their great centers of global diversity -- LA, NYC, Miami, London, Paris and such. But, allow white nationalists as well to have their own places, where we can live among them as they choose. Let White Nationalism folk live with the folk and culture they *love*, and not be forced to share with those they may not love. Whites, they say, only want the chance to live among their own *kind*. In a recent *Rolling Stone* story, Spencer is quoted as saying the following, “Saying that you want a culture of life, or

19 Sarah Posner, "Meet the Alt-Right 'Spokesman' Who's Thrilled With Trump's Rise: Trump's Campaign Has Legitimized Richard Spencer's Movement, And Spencer Couldn't Be Happier About It," *Rolling Stone*, October 18, 2016, <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/features/meet-the-alt-right-spokesman-thrilled-by-trumps-rise-w443902>.

Christian values,' he said in a recent podcast, 'that's just basically saying you want to live in a white country that's normal and decent'."²⁰ (Posner 2016)

13. "Closed Societies"

Spencer's idea of the creation of a set-aside racially separatist state as a solution to racial tensions borders upon sheer fantasy. It will never happen. And, so, short of that, White Nationalism seeks, as much as possible to become what Berry describes as a purified "closed society." [Berry 14] Surrounded by the larger diverse, 21st century, cosmopolitan 'rainbow' world, Berry argues that "closed societies" will imagine themselves endangered, if not outright threatened by the greater world surrounding them. Berry thus helps us makes sense of why the White Nationalist marchers that came to the "Unite the Right" march in Charlottesville wielded clubs, swords and shields. They showed how ready (itching?) they are for war, because they felt that the larger society surrounding them was hostile. This is classic "Do unto others *before* they do unto you" – the tactic of gearing up for an offensive war, even provoking attack, by cloaking oneself in the rhetoric of noble self-protection. But, Berry explodes the pretense of a harmless loving vision, here. Going further, he presents us with a conundrum, that gives the lie to the pretended innocence of the rightists. "White nationalists prove their loyalty to

²⁰ Ibid.

and love of the white race in their emphatic hatred of the mythical racial enemy.”[Berry 14] Love cannot be *proved* by hate; it can only disguise hate.

Berry’s insights about “closed societies,” in turn, let us see how these hyper-paranoid anxieties motivated a Dylann Roof, the White Nationalist mass murderer of congregants at the Emanuel AME Church in Charleston. Berry tells us his model predicts that “closed societies” will strike pre-emptively. Roof precisely sought to “do unto others *before* they do unto you.” He incredibly says he was convinced that blacks – even those peacefully worshipping in Emanuel Church, mortally threatened the white race! Therefore, he was obliged to kill blacks -- but only for the benign reason of wanting to *protect* his “white” race from the existential threat to it from African-Americans. And, so Roof’s murders showed that a White Nationalist “closed society,” like every other, will inevitably become genocidal.

Berry credits French philosopher of the early 20th century, Henri Bergson’s *The Two Sources of Morality*, for many of the insights into the logic of “closed societies.” And, Bergson himself in 1940 identified Nazi Germany as exactly the kind of genocidally-inclined “closed society” he had envisioned decades before. Berry is pleased to note that like the American neo-pagan White Nationalists, the Nazis too found Christianity, with its Jewish Jesus, hard to stomach, thus opening the doors to attempts to restore pre-Christian Germanic religions. Finally, Berry feels that Bergson’s theory of “closed societies” has more than proved its utility in understanding his anti-

Christian American White Nationalists. Not only did the Holocaust fulfill Bergson's prediction of Nazi genocide, but Hitler's simultaneous attacks upon the neighboring states exploited the rhetoric of the pre-emptive war of self-protection, as well. [Berry 271]

The purpose I have been trying to serve here is one of care and accuracy in our thinking about white nationalism. As tempting as it may be to draw a straight line between Steve Bannon and the White Nationalism exposed by Damon Berry, doing so would perhaps conceal more than it would reveal. Bannon's Traditionalist Catholicism cannot be collapsed into either Christian (e.g., KKK, et al) white nationalism or even less to the neo-pagan forms of white nationalism that appeared among the "Unite the Right" marchers in Charlottesville. Nevertheless, when read in relation to one another, these two books point well beyond their topical popular subjects, to deeper things. It is Berry's "discourses of self-protection and social purity" animating both the thinking of Bannon and Berry's White Nationalists from greater depths that should center our attention than the drawing of simple lines. [Berry 5] Both Bannon's rightist Catholic Traditionalism and Berry's various White Nationalists came to the conclusion, quite independently, that something we could call The West, whether racialized or not, was in existential danger, and needed the protection that they, respectively, wished to provide. If Berry is right about the genocidal tendencies of "closed societies," one only hopes that Bannon's iteration of the conviction that American society needs protection

from outsiders will not lead to more drastic measures than already meted out by us, shamelessly, to Haitian or Syrian refugees, or the tragic DACA “Dreamers.”