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## Calico's "Being Viking: Heathenism in contemporary America" (book review)

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# Book Reviews

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Calico, J. (2018). *Being Viking: Heathenism in contemporary America*. Bristol, CT: Equinox Publishing Limited. 526 pp. \$45.00 ISBN 9781781792230

In *Being Viking: Heathenism in Contemporary America*, Jefferson Calico, an Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the University of the Cumberlands, investigates the growing interest in the heathen religion taking place in America. Calico has provided a valuable piece of scholarship on what he considers a new religious movement. The religious movement he is discussing is Asatru, also called Heathenism, a Germanic Polytheistic religion that reveres the Old Norse gods. In his Introduction, Calico informs the reader of his research process. Calico claims he was first introduced to Asatru through a discussion in a doctoral seminar on new religions. He was basically told that it was a fringe religion with racial overtones. However, he found that the characterization did not fit with Asatru's "Nine Noble Virtues". For five years, he researched Asatru by fieldwork, attending large and small gatherings, interviewing adherents, and by reading the scholarly and organizational literature. What Calico found did not correspond with the predominant view. Therefore, in *Being Viking*, he attempts to provide a thorough overview of Asatru in America.

With the knowledge that for many his book would be an introduction to a new religion, Calico uses the first part of the book to provide a very good overview of the history of American Asatru and its evolution through the years. Where all pagan religions tend to be grouped together, Calico makes it a point to inform the reader of the historical, ethical, and philosophical differences between Asatru (Heathenism) and other pagan religions such as Wicca and Druidry. Though these religious movements came out of the "Neo-Pagan" explosion of the 1970's, they have very different origins and have developed different beliefs. Calico also addresses Asatru's racial overtones head on. Since the 1970's, there has been conflict within the American Asatru movement over its racial and ancestral position. He claims that the majority of practitioners reject racialism and believe that Asatru should be open to anyone who is seeking. However, due to its connection to Nazi religious belief, Asatru does appeal to too many within the white supremacist movement.

In the latter parts of *Being Viking*, Calico discusses the difficulty American Asatru has of building a community, the influence of the internet, worship practices and its religious belief. Separated geographically across the United States, the internet has allowed the small community of Asatru to communicate and have social contact. It

has also assisted the Asatru community in promoting itself to those seeking a different believe system. He also covers such topics as animal sacrifice and its importance to Asatru worship, the importance of family, especially children and the bond between family members, and the role magic plays within Asatru.

In delving into a new religion, Calico has produced an insightful, well-written and highly researched study of American Asatru. Those in the field of religious studies will find *Being Viking* a helpful look into the practices, history and beliefs of this new religious movement. I recommend this book to those interested in the changing landscape of American religion.

**Reviewer**

Samuel S. Richardson, University of Tennessee at Martin