

Blood: A Critique of Christianity. By Gil Anidjar. Columbia University Press, 2016. xx + 441 pp. ISBN 978-0-231-16721-5.

Blood: A Critique of Christianity is an unconventional book that asserts the ubiquity of Christianity in the West, even amongst non-Christians. This is already problematic, if only for the debates over terms such as ‘religion,’ ‘Christianity,’ and ‘the West,’ not to mention the palpable affectedness or even duplicitousness in idiosyncratic definitions that would be rejected by most (on p. xi the author even wonders if this is a ‘book’). While Anidjar is at liberty to define terms like ‘Christianity’ as he wishes, and to claim that “It is obvious that Christianity has no essence” (p. 258), the mainline Evangelical is at liberty to wonder why Anidjar’s ‘Christianity’ is so far removed from the familiar and simple concept of a Jewish god-man’s soteriological act. Similarly, the Muslim, and especially the Jew (as the progenitor to the Christian), might wonder why they have been spared this ‘honour.’ It seems that to Anidjar, Christianity, which he associates with literal and metaphorical blood, is largely responsible for the evils of the contemporary West. As someone who often critiques Christianity, and American interventionism, it would be remiss of me to disagree. However, how Anidjar goes about his critique is both unconvincing and confusing.

It is unconvincing not only because of its vagueness, but also because much of Anidjar’s case defies logic. For example, the focus is on a critique of Christianity, though he notes that the blood metaphor can also apply to Ancient Greece. Additionally, the same is true of many Christian elements. There is hardly a Christian teaching or concept that cannot be traced back to Mesopotamian or Mediterranean Paganism, Far Eastern thought, and so forth. And while it is true that much of Christianity concerns the curbing of human nature or life itself, the same could be said about Confucianism, Buddhism and other major religions. Likewise, capitalism has a bloody history, but surely the same can be said about communism and other economic systems. Given the narrow-minded and superficial associations Anidjar draws, it is difficult to swat away the suspicion that *Blood: A Critique of Christianity* is just another in a long line of irrational attacks on the West; on the fashionably hated ‘Western culture’ that makes critiques by the likes of Anidjar and myself possible, and allowed for the proliferation of science and liberal values. After all, instead of America’s “carnival of blood” (p. 103), Anidjar could have just as easily focussed on the blood-drenched histories of the pre-colonialist Middle East, Asia, Africa, and the New World; vast swathes of which are still today superstitious and regressive, even barbaric. With such work, readers can be forgiven for thinking that the Earth before the rise of America, or the British Empire, or Christianity, or the Greco-Roman world, was a violence-free and egalitarian utopia.

But *Blood: A Critique of Christianity* is also deeply perplexing. We are left to wonder why the metaphor of blood is employed, rather than water, spittle, or the dirt/earth/mud from which the Judeo-Christian Adam was supposedly formed. Adding to the confusion over Anidjar's forced and possibly pretentious links, he continuously struggles to define the terms he had been liberally throwing about, even in the conclusion to his book (see p. 255 for his uncertainty over 'Christianity' and p. 257 for yet more speculations about 'blood'), and seemingly even celebrates this on the very last page: "The argument I have advanced in this book hinges on yet another oscillation, a confusion of sorts that, as with the literal and the figurative, I have tried not to disambiguate. For the concept I have sought to engage is obviously dual at least: Blood and Christianity. Blood is that with which, and through which, Christianity becomes what it is" (p. 258). Readers that find that quotation profound will likely find some value in *Blood: A Critique of Christianity*. The rest of us may well ask, as Anidjar himself asks after yet another pointless speculation (this one is about whether Sigmund Freud was a Christian), "then what?" (p. 243). *Blood: A Critique of Christianity* seems anything but, and asks many questions, though it provides few answers.

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