

New Religions and the Nazis

By Karla Poewe

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Reviewed by [Alexander Andron, Ed.D.](#)

Professor Poewe's documentary text, *New Religions and the Nazis*, posed a most discomfiting challenge for me. The text is liberally sprinkled with German terminology, and while parenthetically translated as it goes, it contains no glossary to aid the non-German-speaking reader.

This is not a book for pleasure reading. It is an extensively researched and well executed study of the period, and of the key personalities who affected—and perhaps “infected”—their young target German population with their philosophies, their celebrity, and their influence. These were the intellectually elite of their time; and many followers, grounded and not, lived, hung, and moved on their every word.

For those engaged in research, this book might well be a volume to include on their library shelves. For those merely interested in what is clearly the largest political cult of its day and perhaps all of history, this is a formidable piece of quotable work, but it also is plodding. It certainly addresses strongly the reason for the popular expression that religion and politics don't mix. I was reminded of George Orwell's “Newspeak” as I read.

For me, the burden of constantly turning back to the author's first use to find the meaning of a word—to redefine the terminology as I proceeded, proved to be more than I chose to pursue. The book did not retain my interest, although it included topics of great personal interest and importance to me. Its views on the “others,” as in the then-failed German political and economic system, Christianity, and Judaism, are instructive for understanding Nazi intellectuals' thinking.

In summary, Dr. Poewe's conclusion states that

(Jakob Wilhelm) Hauer's, (Hans F. K.) Gunther's, and (Hans) Grimm's primary motives were to usher in a holy new society that respected and groomed its race-specific biological and cultural heritage. To bring this about, they [felt they] needed a race-specific religion. This religion was a form of paganism called German Faith. For Grimm, who was more comfortable finding religion in poetics, his friend Moeller van den Brock's notion of the Third Reich became the religious hope of salvation from the grinding needs of Germans during the Versailles era. (p.172)

As one reads, it becomes increasingly clear that this stance implies that any variation by anyone or anything on this theme is totally unacceptable. This is cult thinking. If one disagrees with the leader, to the extent of the disagreement the leader is always right and the one disagreeing is always wrong.

I wonder whether some of the ideas posited in this book have not influenced the radical thinking of contemporary extremist groups operating in our own era some 70 to 90 years later and who might still be thinking, "Tomorrow, the world."