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Were Nazis Christians? Are Christians fascists?
by Marvin Olasky

Christophobia is marching through movie theaters and onto the pages of books.

One much-discussed documentary, "Jesus Camp," concerns a fringe-Christian program in Devil's Lake, N.D., that the filmmakers suggest is representative of the evangelical world. The film has small children praying before a cardboard cutout of George W. Bush and swinging swords while dressed in combat fatigues.

One typical attack book, James Rudin's "The Baptizing of America," argues that "Christocrats" desire compulsory daily prayer sessions in every workplace and preferential treatment for Christians seeking "home ownership, student loans, employment and education." These tyrants-in-waiting would allow no opposition: "the mainstream press and the electronic media would be beaten into submission."

Another screed, Michelle Goldberg's "Kingdom Coming: The Rise of Christian Nationalism" also sees some Christian extremists as typical rather than, well, extreme. Instead of writing about Rick Warren or other laid-back pastors, she describes big churches as "temples of religious nationalism" and "tightly organized right-wing political machines." Even a Christian libertarian like myself cannot escape the dragnet: Since I was a Marxist before becoming an evangelical 30 years ago, in Goldberg's fantasy, I am "drawn to totalitarian ideologies."

The fear-mongers are not just at the publishing fringes. Kevin Phillips' rant -- "American Theocracy: The Peril and Politics of Radical Religion, Oil, and Borrowed Money in the 21st Century" -- hit the bestseller lists earlier this year. Nor is it surprising that the creators of these projects imagine crosses turning into swastikas, because they're drawing on writers a generation ago who thought that Nazism grew out of Christianity -- so why shouldn't it happen again?

That's why it's good, in this year of popular culture paranoia, to have a scholarly book that shows how those who developed the Nazi religion "were decidedly anti-Christian because they saw Christianity as a Jewish phenomenon in the 1920s to the 1940s to be anti-Semitic meant being anti-Christian and vice versa." This book by University of Calgary professor emeritus Karla Poewe, "New Religions and the Nazis," shows that influential pro-Nazi ideologues saw Christianity as "a foreign faith and psychology imposed on Germany."

Nazi theologians praised "Aryan religion" with its ethic of power and complained that "The Pauline-Augustinian-Reformed teachings about original sin (are) insulting to the ethical and moral feeling of the Germanic race." Nazis, Poewe notes, "learned their anti-Semitism outside of

the church, then hated the church because it would not affirm their anti-Semitism, and finally developed their outright rejection of Christianity."

Poewe also explores in depth attacks on "Jewish-Christianity" and Nazi romanticism concerning "the Indo-Germanic faith-world (that) included Hinduism, Buddhism and a pre-Christian Germanic Faith." Nazi theologians particularly admired the Bhagavad Gita, the most influential Hindu scripture, because it has the avatar Krishna telling the warrior Arjuna to kill his cousins and be psychologically detached from the deed: Nazi leader Heimrich Himmler "saw his destruction of the Jews in that light."

Some people cite an aged Martin Luther's criticism of Judaism and call him a Nazi forerunner, but Poewe quotes a statement of the pro-Nazi German Faith Movement: "We have no point of connection with Luther, for we have no sense of a relationship to the Bible as a godly holy book, nor to Christ as a Messiah-Savior." She also shows how Hitler himself wanted to kill not only all Jews but also fervent Christians who would not bow to him. He said, on April 7, 1933, "Nothing will prevent me from eradicating totally, root and branch, all Christianity in Germany."

Hitler, like many of today's Islamo-fascists, was out to kill Jews, Christians and leftists. And that's why it's particularly strange to see, in "American Theocracy" and other productions, the sense that George W. Bush and U.S. evangelicals are a fascist threat, rather than the defenders of liberty against those who would impose a new "final solution."

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