

**Holger Arning.** *Die Macht des Heils und das Unheil der Macht: Die Diskurse von Katholizismus und Nationalsozialismus im Jahr 1934 - eine exemplarische Zeitschriftenanalyse.* Politik- und Kommunikationswissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Görres-Gesellschaft. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 2008. 467 pp. EUR 59.00 (paper), ISBN 978-3-506-76436-2.



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## Old News

This massive work examines in minute detail the weekly issues of a Catholic newspaper in the Münster region for the early months of 1934. In the author's opinion, this was a crucial period, when the ambivalence of the Catholic attitudes towards the newly established National Socialist regime was displayed. The disadvantages of such a study are clear: it analyzes only one expression of Catholic views in only one locality for only a few months. Moreover, the early part of this study is mired in sociological jargon, which is bad enough in English, but even more off-putting in German. Historians of the National Socialist period will not be likely to find any new revelations here, since the story of Catholic illusions and misapprehensions about Nazism are already well known.

Holger Arning's contribution is to quote chapter and verse on the readiness with which leading Catholic spokesmen, in this case the publication's editors and contributors, allowed themselves to be seduced by the myths and misrepresentations put out by Nazi propagandists. The book also demonstrates the effective limits to such efforts. In 1933, to be sure, many Catholics, especially

in the staunchly reactionary diocese of Münster, succumbed readily enough to the National Socialist call for national renewal along with its opposition to the communist threat, imposition of new patterns of leadership, new social and economic goals, and the revival of Germany's international position. The signing of the Reich Concordat in the summer of 1933 seemed to virtually all Catholics to herald a new era of collaboration and an unprecedented opportunity for Catholic participation in national life. Adolf Hitler's announced goals seemed to reflect closely the political stance of Germany's conservative elites, so enthusiastic support was justified. Reservations about some of the Nazis' more radical ambitions were brushed aside and warning signals ignored. Journalists seemed to be charged with mobilizing support for the new experiment and overcoming the reluctance of the Catholic laity to become involved.

But a year later in June 1934, when Hitler launched a putsch against his internal opponents and had a prominent Catholic lay leader murdered, the atmosphere of honeymoon quickly evaporated. However, by then, as

the columns of this newspaper show, Catholics had given many hostages to fortune. Their enthusiastic endorsement of Nazi campaigns, especially against both communism and parliamentary democracy, and to a lesser extent, against the alleged influence of the Jews, only served to stress the commonality of views and their approval of antidemocratic, hierarchical patterns of leadership. Many of these authors found common ground with the Nazis in their hostility to modernism, pacifism, and liberalism in their various forms. Although the newspaper also sought to uphold Catholic doctrines in the purely theological sphere, its editors saw no reason to sense any conflict with their newfound political sympathies. Not until late 1934 did the more farsighted among them begin

to realize that Nazi goals were far more comprehensive and aggressive than they had supposed in earlier assessments. Only then did they see the need for more coherent Catholic opposition to the group's totalitarian ambitions. But by then, it was too late to begin to mobilize any effective Catholic ideological resistance, which in any case would have had to have been based on an admission of their earlier misjudgments. The obligation of loyal obedience to the *Führer*, to his party, and to the nation had been so loudly proclaimed that any alternative was ruled out. Their leaders misled the Catholics of Münster, but willingly so. This is the sad, familiar story that Arning fills out with explicit and compendious detail.

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