

**NEW RIGHTS NEW ZEALAND:  
MYTHS, MORALITIES AND MARKETS**

By **DOLORES JANIEWSKI and PAUL MORRIS**  
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*New Rights New Zealand* is an intriguing addition to the literature on the economic and social reforms of the late 1980s and 1990s. Janiewski and Morris are professors of, respectively, history and religious studies. This book presents the findings of a research project entitled "Marketing morality: The campaign to remoralise NZ, 1984–1999" for which they received a Royal Society of New Zealand Marsden Fund grant. Not all readers of this journal will be aware that the aim of the Marsden Fund is to support research that incorporates originality, insight and research excellence. A further goal of the Marsden Fund is to foster the development of research skills and, to this end, projects are encouraged to support postgraduate research. Janiewski and Morris' research incorporated work done by a Master's student that is the basis of Chapter 10.

The authors set out to investigate New Zealand's ideological encounter with the New Right. The distinctive and novel feature of this particular examination of the neo-liberalism of the 1980s and 1990s is its concern to highlight the *moral dimension*, which they consider has often been neglected in analyses of the same economic and social phenomenon. Other analyses, they argue, typically focus on elections, Treasury influence and public policies. And while intriguing in that this research does present some new material and fresh insights, there are also some weaknesses with the analysis of the New Right that detract from its contribution to scholarship on the reforms of the 1980s and 1990s.

On the one hand, Janiewski and Morris identify similarities between New Zealand's New Right and the New Right in other countries in the 1970s, particularly the United States, Britain and Australia. On the other, they argue that there are pre-existing economic, political and ideological differences that result in distinctive forms of the New Right. In addition, other oppositional social movements that often emerged alongside the New Right have shaped the form taken by the New Right. Janiewski and Morris refer to these other movements somewhat confusingly as new rights. Indeed, they refer to an analysis of United States newspapers in the 1960s that revealed that the term "New Right" was used in relation to the growing demand for equality for African Americans, women, people with disabilities and other similarly disempowered groups (pp.36–37).

Given that the term “New Rights” appears in the title of the book, one anticipates that the book itself is about these social movements. Instead, it is about the New Right. Indeed, there is no further substantive treatment of egalitarian social movements and how they impacted on the development and implementation of neo-liberal economic and social policies in this country; instead there is a brief discussion of new rights social justice movements in the final few pages (pp.174–175). This topic remains a fertile ground for original research: the impact of environmental, disability, Māori sovereignty and feminist groups on public policy, in particular, during the period of the fourth Labour government, which implemented a number of distinctive socially liberal policies, such as employment equity legislation, Māori development policies emphasizing whānau, hapū and iwi, anti-nuclear legislation, and biculturalism in the state sector.

Janiewski and Morris aim to “uncover the religious imperatives often only partially disguised in the promulgation of New Right doctrines by self-identified missionaries and evangelists” (p.6). They emphasise, appropriately, that morality is not necessarily sexual morality. Less appropriately, they reduce morality to religious morality. New Right discourse is heavily and self-consciously imbued with a religious dimension.

Throughout the analysis presented in *New Rights New Zealand*, there is an overwhelming and almost exclusive focus on a religious reading of New Right discourse. This flows through into the organisation of the material in the book. Comprising eleven chapters, the book is in six parts. Each part has been given a title that intentionally employs biblical imagery and indeed corresponds with sections of the Old Testament (e.g. Part 1 Genesis: Myths and Travellers’ Tales; Part 2: Exodus: Rescuing us from Bondage, Part 3 Leviticus: Encoding the Law of the Market). While this is used to highlight and demonstrate the appropriateness of the research’s focus on religion, the Christian biblical labeling feels somewhat heavy-handed, accompanied as it is with much use of religious metaphors within each chapter. The authorial voice is preponderant throughout. For example, New Right proponents are typically described as evangelists, missionaries, pilgrims, disciples etc. Further, words like “spirit”, which can be used without a specific Christian connotation, are assumed to have a religious interpretation when, in fact, the word is intended in its secular sense (its first definition, as it happens, in the Concise Oxford, “seat of emotions and character”).

Also confusing for the reader is that the endnotes do not clearly distinguish the sources of quotes. Often one endnote that comes at the end of a paragraph contains two or more references. It is not clear which reference applies to which quotation in the main body of the paragraph.

The first three chapters form Part 1, which (as indicated above) is associated with the Book of Genesis. Janiewski and Morris argue that historical accounts of New Zealand prior to the election of the fourth Labour Government were used by opponents of neo-

liberalism to the effect of invoking images of a Golden Age akin to the Garden of Eden (p.16). The authors explain that their aim is to provide an alternative account of the rise of neo-liberalism in contrast to existing scholarship, which emphasizes economics and individual personalities. However, much of their analysis in these three chapters highlights individual biographies. This research on the influence of individual actors is, in fact, important and does not need to be viewed through the authors' lenses of biblical or other religious metaphors. In particular, Chapter 3 brings together in one place significant historical and biographical details about the formation of key actors in New Zealand and overseas.

The authors conclude Part 1 with the following:

Although most existing studies have looked at New Zealand or Australia in isolation, this analysis has demonstrated the advantages of tracing the overlap of ideas, personnel and missionary strategies during the promotion of the New Right gospel. Pilgrimages to Washington, Wellington, Canberra, Sydney, Melbourne and London, traveling evangelists from Britain and the US and the circulation of sacred texts converted key figures on both sides of the Tasman. By the early 1980s there were significant congregations of believers actively testifying on behalf of their new-found faith, preparing for the advent of political power.

Whereas numerous previous accounts have scrutinised neo-liberalism as ideology, here neo-liberalism is scrutinised as Old Testament theology. The religious imagery in the quote above is just one of many such instances of very heavy authorial framing of the research. Ultimately this was less than convincing and somewhat unsatisfactory. The imposition of a reading that filtered the account of "New Zealand New Right" (as opposed to "New Rights") through the lens of biblical imagery and discourse does not greatly enhance our understanding of this phase of economic and social change. It may be possible to present the late 20th century emergence and dominance of the New Right as being an interesting parallel to the story contained in the first books of the Old Testament, and indeed quite novel and entertaining to do so, but my preference would be for an analysis that has more explanatory incisiveness. One needs to be cautious about applying contemporary discourse analysis to discourse of an earlier period (for example, texts by Hayek) and, in particular, where language involves political rhetoric where religious metaphors are likely to be found even in supposedly secular societies.

Part 2, comprising Chapters 4–6, is associated with the Book of Exodus and the myth of the escape from bondage to the Promised Land. Part 3 is a less incoherent collection. Chapter 7 is chronologically and ideologically distinct from the three preceding chapters, being about the economic and social reforms of the National governments led by Jim Bolger and Jenny Shipley. As such it does warrant being in a separate part from Chapters 4–6. However, the only other chapter in this Part is about the rather

different experience of New Zealand compared with the United States in relation to moral conservatism and public policy around sexual morality. The connection between these two chapters, invoking the book of Leviticus, is tenuous at best.

Parts 4, 5 and 6 contain a single chapter each and this begs the question of why the division of the text into Parts is needed. It appears merely to provide the authors with the opportunity to create a structure modeled on the Old Testament with Parts 4 and 5 being named, respectively, "Numbers: Learning the Law" and "Deuteronomy: Saving us from Corruption". However, Part 6 "Beyond Myths and Market Morality" does not have any connection to an Old Testament Book.

In Chapter 6 there is a retreat (no religious implications intended by this reviewer!) from the preceding overriding preoccupation with religious dimension of the New Right and a recognition that there are many New Rights, not just a moral one. The authors here argue that that the nature of much public policy in New Zealand, both that of seeming ideologues in the 1980s and 1990s and since, is driven by pragmatism. They attribute to the "individualist feminism" of key National Party figures (Jenny Shipley, Ruth Richardson and Katherine O'Regan) – overly sanguinely, in my view – the failure of a morally conservative coalition around sexual morality and family values, in the late 20th century in New Zealand.

The book is described as being based on extensive research and this appears to include documentary analysis of writings and speeches by New Right adherents, academic analysis both from the right and left, journalistic commentaries, biographies, as well as other media (e.g. documentaries), and interviews with key representatives of the New Right in New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States. More transparent and extensive use of these interviews would enhance the analysis. In Chapter 4 there is some reporting of material from an interview with Roger Douglas, but typically there are only brief references and very little direct use of interview data.

An enjoyable feature of the book is the inclusion of cartoons of the time, some of them long-forgotten, others ones I had not seen previously. The cartoons selected frequently do not have any religious metaphors or language and as such provide little empirical support for a theological or religious reading of the events depicted.

Some discussion of the methodological approach would also have been useful. There is reference to the research encompassing an "exegesis of existing scholarship". This is a vital role for social science research and critical assessment of the strategies used and insights gleaned would assist future researchers in this area and, indeed, researchers who might undertake similar research on unrelated historical or public policy developments.

Janiewski and Morris have provided social policy researchers and practitioners with rich historical information about individual biographies and the role of think tanks in the 1980s and 1990s. This is the strength of their research. However, overall, there seems to be a fundamental ambivalence around their concern to prioritise the role of moralizing discourse. Despite the weight they place on such discourse, they conclude that the ideologues are also pragmatists and that contemporary public policy post-neo-liberalism is essentially pragmatic and there are many divergent approaches to conceiving the relationship between morality and the market.