

forefront of ecumenism, but whose relations with ecumenism must now be fully explored: the role of women in the Churches, white supremacy and racism, colonialism and imperialism, and commitment to a greater focus of ecumenism onto the parish churches. The *Handbook* is an invaluable foundation of Ecumenical Studies, but it does not sufficiently introduce the shape of things to come. Perhaps now that should become the subject of the second volume of the *Handbook*.

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Andrew Chandler, *British Christians and the Third Reich: Church, State and the Judgement of Nations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 288. ISBN 978-1-107-12904-7.

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This is the most comprehensive study yet published of the British churches' response to the rise and fall of Nazi Germany, and of major importance both for historical understanding and for theological and ethical reflection on the perennial issues of the challenges faced by faith in the political arena. Andrew Chandler, professor of modern history at the University of Chichester, is no stranger in this area, thanks especially to his authoritative work on George Bell, bishop of Chichester. What makes this book outstanding is its collation of detailed historical and biographical narratives combined with a grasp of the wider and longer context of British and international history within which the story of what happened from 1933 to 1945 finds continuing significance. Chandler argues that the challenge of Nazism and the ensuing war were decisive in shifting British Christianity to a new and permanent awareness of responsibility at international and ecumenical level. This chapter in church history has wider import than the purely religious. Chandler states: 'a conventional perception that what was essential to the trajectories of British history was generated only within the British Isles has often reinforced a sense of national detachment from the narratives of European history' (a sense, one might add, all too apparent in our recent experience).

Chandler introduces these wider reflections with a suggestive chapter on British Christianity immediately following the 1914–18 war and the mindsets of public and international concern which church leaders inherited. In many cases personal – indeed familial – links with Germany were significant, together with the growing international ecumenical movement which had begun well before 1914 and which was now bolstered by horror at what had been launched then. At Hitler's accession in 1933, British Christians, while taken aback, were by no means wholly lacking equipment to face the crisis. In their own ways, each church and denomination – Anglican, Free Church, Roman Catholic or Quaker – viewed events

from within a preceding story and experience. By and large that meant an instinctive revulsion at what Nazism represented, as inimical to Christianity. Almost immediately the church press, from the *Church Times* to the *Baptist Times*, was full of alarm at the evident threats to religious freedom and – above all – the initial anti-Jewish brutalities. Resolutions flowed at nearly all the major church assemblies, and from 1934 most leading church opinion was firmly sympathetic to the Confessing Church, founded in opposition to the Nazification of the Protestant churches. There were notable exceptions. A.C. Headlam, learned bishop of Gloucester, was for a long time an apologist for the Hitler regime, supportive of the nationalist German Christian movement, and caustically dismissive of Martin Niemöller and the Confessing Church. Countering this was George Bell's unswerving commitment to the claims of the Confessing Church as the authentic Christian witness inside Germany and within the ecumenical movement, and his championing of the plight of 'non-Aryans' seeking refuge in Britain and elsewhere. But not to be overlooked is the role of Cosmo Gordon Lang, archbishop of Canterbury, often portrayed as the least prophetic of prelates but who was never in doubt as to who was in the right in the German Church Struggle, along with Hensley Henson, bishop of Durham and A.S. Duncan-Jones, dean of Chichester. But what was remarkable was the truly ecumenical front that emerged in Britain. The Free Churches' leadership was impressively vocal and studiously informed on the main issues, the Congregationalist Nathaniel Micklem being the outstanding Nonconformist spokesperson and writer. The Baptists agonized over the probity of the Baptist World Alliance assembly being held in Berlin in 1934 – the outspoken *Baptist Times* was in fact banned from sale at that meeting by the subservient German Baptists. The Quakers, as so often, were to the fore in advocacy and aid for the victims of Nazism. Dorothy Buxton actually visited Germany and gained access to concentration camps in order to report on conditions there, and memorably had a heated personal confrontation with Reich Minister Hermann Goering. In fact, thanks to the cooperation of British embassy staff in Berlin and (later) Vienna, the reports of the *Berlin Times* correspondent, of Dorothy Buxton and other Quakers like the courageous Corder Catchpool and Bertha Bracey (who for long worked within Nazi Germany), the British church constituency was well supplied with first-hand information. Not all the information, still less its sources, could be publicized. George Bell was highly dependent on what came from his closest German friend, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and the Swiss pastor Alphons Koechlin.

The British ecumenical front was widened and strengthened by the increasing cooperation of Roman Catholics in response to the crisis, encouraged by the enlightened approach of Cardinal Arthur Hinsley – even if joint statements, or even united prayers, involving Catholics and non-Catholics were not yet deemed possible. The inter-church 'Sword of the Spirit' movement which germinated in 1940 was a fruit of this development. Moreover, the crisis generated a growth in Christian–Jewish relationships, at personal, local and national levels. These had been developing informally since the start of the crisis, imbued with a sense that Christians and Jews had to be in alliance in face of a common adversary. In 1942 the Council of Christians and Jews was formed under the chairmanship of William Temple, strongly supported by Cardinal Hinsley, and with the (cautious) agreement of Chief Rabbi J.H. Hertz. Before long it was an established feature of the British scene.

All this, and much, much more of the complex story, is carefully chronicled by Chandler in a non-partisan way, resisting the obvious temptations simply to demonize a Headlam or beatify a Bell. He seeks not just to narrate but empathetically to show how the minds of the participants had in part been shaped by their past experience and domestic concerns, and how even the most courageous and far-sighted of them were at times constrained by circumstances and events beyond their control.

Beyond words, and a measure of humanitarian action, what could the genuinely concerned Christians of Britain offer? Problems arose here. Whenever more vigorous protests to the German government, or proposals on actual British policy, were mooted, caution seeped in: would Berlin be thereby provoked into still greater repression (not that the Nazis ever needed much stimulus)? Lang felt this keenly. Even Bell was, just occasionally, hesitant. In 1939 came war with its own dynamic of the Nazi invasions westward and eastward, and the British Vansittart policy of unconditional surrender. Nevertheless, there emerged the ecumenical Peace Aims Group, led by the Presbyterian William Paton, with its clandestine contacts via Geneva with the German resistance. There was much public debate on the shape of a post-Hitler Germany and post-war reconstruction in Europe, fed especially by organs like J.H. Oldham's *Christian News-Letter* (sometimes including reports from within Germany). In 1942 George Bell had his remarkable meeting in neutral Sweden with Bonhoeffer, returning to London to inform the British government about the nature of the German resistance. Publicly he used his seat in the House of Lords to plead the case of the 'other Germany', and famously, to protest against the Allied area bombing policy.

The story is in many aspects inspiring, but overall makes sobering reading in a contemporary world of resurgent nationalisms and autocracies. By 1940, even the peaceable Bell saw no possibility for the peace of Europe without a military victory over Hitler, just as in Germany Bonhoeffer was praying for that grim result to engulf his country. At the end of the day, no church or political figure had any other answer to Hitler. The questions are still with us, as is our debt to our forebears for bequeathing them to us. Chandler concludes appositely: 'The story of British Christians and National Socialist Germany may now be regarded as a subject for historians. But it is not yet a dead history.'

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Steven Nemes is concerned about the problem of truth, and the capacity to address this problem openly and thoroughly. Specifically, he is interested in the capacity to explore the question of truth in a way that cultivates dialogue and not division.