

1960s. The 1960s were in some respects part of the ‘long 1890s’ – as Schweighofer comments (p. 207), ‘the longing for a religious orientation, within, on the margins, or outside institutional religions and confessions, led to an enormous extension of the religious landscape’. She provides some fascinating family histories, noting that while some parents were deeply distressed by their children’s conversion, others positively encouraged it. The latter was the case with the philologist, Theodore Gomperz, all three of whose children converted in the early twentieth century: the philosopher, Heinrich, was interested in religion but personally agnostic; the artist and writer, Bettina, was a mystic; and the engineer Rudolf (who, like a number of the figures discussed in the book, was ultimately murdered by the Nazis) was an orthodox believer. Schweighofer conclusively establishes the importance of religious factors in at least some of the conversions in these years, though of course the dependence on surviving personal documents means that the focus is on a small elite group. Although she dismisses the role of missions to the Jews, their impact, if any, was probably on a different section of society. She makes her point partly by tracing the individual journeys of some of the most interesting individuals, including Arnold Schönberg, who ultimately reconverted to Judaism; the philosopher Edmund Husserl, who was strongly influenced by Protestant theologians while studying in Germany; the Richter sisters, both writers, who regularly attended Protestant services long before they formally converted; and the writer Otto Weininger, who was an extreme example of a convert from Judaism who in his brief later career (he killed himself at the age of twenty-three) denigrated all things Jewish. This is a well-researched and impressively thorough study. It is in some ways too thorough in that the important and convincing central argument is supplemented by many interesting, yet not always important details, as well as lengthy quotations from primary sources.

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

HUGH McLEOD

*The Church of England and the Home Front, 1914–1918. Civilians, soldiers and religion in wartime Colchester.* By Robert Beaken (foreword Terry Waite.) Pp. xvi + 272 incl. 1 frontispiece, 30 figs and 3 tables. Woodbridge–Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2015. £30. 978 1 78327 051 4

*JEH* (67) 2016; doi:10.1017/S0022046916000737

Two of the major themes of twentieth-century British history are the origins, nature and extent of secularisation within society, and the social and cultural impact of two total wars. However, until comparatively recently, most historians ploughed these two rich areas in parallel rather than in interconnecting furrows.

In this monograph, Robert Beaken turns our attention away from the issues of army chaplaincy and the religious culture of the British army most recently examined by Michael Snape and Peter Howson, to focus on the domestic experience of Anglicanism as reflected in the town of Colchester.<sup>1</sup> The choice of Britain’s oldest recorded town provides Beaken with a very rich landscape within which to draw out

<sup>1</sup> Peter Howson, *Muddling through: the organisation of British army chaplaincy in World War One*, Solihull 2013; Michael Snape, *God and the British soldier: religion and the*

the themes which have previously been subjected to a broader overview: prayer and worship, armistice and remembrance, evangelism and the work of the clergy and laity. At the outbreak of war, over 10 per cent of the town's population was housed in the garrison, with many more trades dependent on the economic activity that this brought.

Beaken has been able to draw upon extensive records from each of Colchester's seventeen parish churches, as well as his own conversations with Colcestrians who recalled the wartime era to provide a very vivid and engaging picture which strikes a good balance between maintaining the narrative and analytical flow, whilst never forgetting that the war was experienced by people who did not necessarily consider their lives in broad thematic terms. Furthermore, by examining events at a local level, Beaken is able to suggest that further revisions of the received wisdom on the role and importance of the Church of England in the First World War may be in order. Beaken demonstrates how the domestic clergy rose to the challenge of additional war work, including ministering to wounded soldiers in Colchester's large military hospital, as well as attempting to maintain their regular parochial duties, on a scale unique to such a significant garrison town.

Beaken's dual background, as an Essex parish priest and as a historian, allows him to paint an informed and critical, but generally sympathetic, picture of the work of the Anglican clergy and laity during the war. In recognising his own varying levels of sympathy with different characters within the ecclesiastical hierarchy of wartime Essex, Beaken is able to avoid some of the anti-clerical and anti-religious partisanship which has characterised the depiction of the Church of England between 1914 and 1919 that unfortunately became popular currency from the 1930s through towards the end of the twentieth century.

In a particularly enlightening section, Beaken seeks to challenge the received wisdom of the 1916 National Mission of Hope and Repentance as being a failed venture. From the Colchester perspective it proved a moderate success, particularly in maintaining the faith and morale of existing adherents, bringing clergy and laity closer together and maintaining, if not increasing, church attendance during the latter part of the war. Avoiding the pitfall of judging success or otherwise in static terms, Beaken's view of Christian faith as a pilgrimage, rather than within a binary in/out construct, has echoes of Richard Schweitzer's spectrum model of the ways in which British and American soldiers experienced religion and religiosity during the First World War.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore this approach allows Beaken to give a greater emphasis to the role of the laity within the Church of England, an aspect which has often been overlooked by writers focusing on the prelatial perspective.

Rather than ushering in a disconnect from the pre-war Church, Beaken claims that the Church of England in Colchester in the 1920s was very similar to that of a decade previously. It was only the subsequent historiographical revisionism of the 1930s and beyond which dragged the Anglican Church into a portion of the blame

*British Army in the First and Second World Wars*, Abingdon 2005, and *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department, 1796–1953: clergy under fire*, Woodbridge 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Schweitzer, *The Cross and the trenches: religious faith and doubt among British and American Great War soldiers*, Westport 2003.

in the 'Lions led by Donkeys' framework. This misinterpretation has only been seriously challenged since the mid-2000s, and Beaken's monograph is another valuable addition to this growing canon of work which examines the interplay between Christianity and global warfare in the twentieth century. This also suggests that the First World War was not the catalyst for the secularisation process, as has been widely assumed.

Interestingly, Beaken speculates on the trajectory that the historiography of the currently 'good' Second World War, and the role that Christianity played in the latter conflict, might take, with a potential greater emphasis on Britain's largely overlooked military disasters in Norway and Singapore, and the lingering negative psychological impacts on those who served. The microhistory approach has previously been successfully applied to the domestic wartime experiences of the twentieth century by Sarah Williams and Stephen Parker in their studies of popular religion in Southwark and Birmingham respectively.<sup>3</sup> Further work remains to be done on the perspectives of Christian civilians who were called upon to serve in the armed forces a generation after their fathers between 1914 and 1918. Beaken's work is a further step on the journey which is revising the view that Christianity in general, and the Church of England in particular, had a 'bad' First World War. This monograph joins an expanding historiography which suggests that the Church of England, from the laity upwards, managed the best that it could in unprecedented circumstances, and, moreover, performed a significant role in Britain's war effort. Whilst stopping short of concluding that it had a 'good war', Beaken's compellingly presented evidence leads him to conclude that the Church of England in Colchester had a 'mixed' First World War. This perspective is drawn from the nuances of the varying trajectories of the individuals and parishes that Beaken has presented, and serves as a timely reminder of the importance of ecclesiastical history having a strong voice during this period of centenary commemorations.

DURHAM UNIVERSITY

JOHN BROOM

*Bonhoeffer's black Jesus. Harlem renaissance theology and an ethic of resistance.* By Reggie L. Williams. Pp. xii + 184. Waco, Tx: Baylor University Press, 2014. £33.50 978 1 60258 805 9

*JEH* (67) 2016; doi:10.1017/S0022046916001354

Reggie Williams offers the reader real insight into Bonhoeffer's year at Union Seminary in New York (1930–1). Yet *Bonhoeffer's black Jesus* goes beyond biographical description of his time there, first through a fairly detailed look at the Harlem Renaissance and important theological impulses that Bonhoeffer encountered there, and secondly through following these impulses as they continued in his thought and life when he returned to Germany. This study has a number of strengths to commend it. First, Williams gives a lively account not only of the

<sup>3</sup> Sarah Williams, *Religious belief and popular culture in Southwark, c. 1880–1939*, Oxford 1999; Stephen Parker, *Aspects of church life and popular religion in Birmingham, 1939–1945*, Oxford 2005.