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The Church of England and the Holocaust: Christianity, Memory and Nazism. By **Tom Lawson**. Studies in Modern British Religious History 12. Woodbridge, U.K.: Boydell, 2006. x + 213 pp. \$80.00 cloth.

In the opening pages of *The Church of England and the Holocaust*, Tom Lawson emphasizes that historians “should be nervous” (2) about making moral judgments retrospectively. However, the Holocaust represents “the ultimate atrocity” (1) and “the moral touchstone of twenty-first century perceptions of the past” (6). In this light the seeming inattention of a “bystander” (2) institution such as the Church of England represented “a collapse of Christian leadership” (7). Was this the case? If so, how can the Church’s moral lapse be explained?

Describing his study of the “Anglican mindset” (15) as a moral imperative, Lawson poses his narrative as an explanation of how leading Anglicans absorbed and responded to the reality of Jewish suffering as a result of Nazism. More than what was known, when, and to what ends, this is an exploration of the outlook by which Jewish suffering was interpreted. Although Lawson speaks broadly of an Anglican outlook, in effect this is a study of what a few influential Church leaders perceived. Lawson’s argument succeeds in part because he uncovers a consistent outlook and shows how it shaped the ways Church influence was asserted.

Lawson divides his treatment into two sections: one exploring the years just before and during war, and the other assessing the post–World War II outlook and the intentions it prompted. He notes that the Church’s leaders possessed an inherent sense of crisis. Key leaders, especially William Temple, archbishop of Canterbury, who died late in 1944, perceived unprecedented challenges to the Church. Lawson grants that a crisis of belief surfaced in the early twentieth century. But he insists that the Church retained profound influence, a significant point in his argument. He depicts the Church of England as the moral conscience of the nation and the shaper of public observances, especially during war. He locates Anglican identity in a capacity to generate common discourse among diverse viewpoints. This capacity gave Church leaders influence over government policy as well as the public outlook.

Yet leading Anglicans such as Temple and George Bell, bishop of Chichester, held to their emphasis on crisis and approached reports of Jewish persecution in this light. At times they protested, and Temple’s exertions on behalf of Jews were noteworthy. In the midst of war he sought to relocate Jews away from the apparatus of murder. Bell also spoke out in 1943 and has been credited with vigorous efforts to rescue Jews from harm. But with Temple’s death

these efforts waned, and the true focus of Church leaders became apparent. Bell and most of his colleagues saw Nazism as an assault on Christianity and on a Western civilization presumed to be Christian. Bell consistently rallied support for Martin Niemöller and Germany's Confessing Church, who, Lawson insists, Anglican leaders saw as the main victims of Nazism. In Lawson's view this misplaced emphasis was a profound moral failing.

This argument is bolstered by Lawson's ability to document views that indeed seem odd decades later. For instance, some Church of England leaders firmly distinguished between the German people and the Nazi ideology and its regime, which were seen to assault the churches as well as other segments of society. From this perspective, persecution of Jews was one aspect of a general persecution, not its foremost aspect. At times Anglican leaders excused the *Wehrmacht* and observed that military officers organized the failed plot to assassinate Hitler. A few Anglican leaders, notably Bell, opposed war crimes trials and lobbied to have some of the accused pardoned, arguing that they had done what they were ordered to do. Clearly, this position would subsequently become inadequate.

Lawson's argument modifies the images of such figures as Niemöller and Bell who have been extolled as heroic opponents of Nazism. Niemöller mainly resisted state interference in the church, and Bell, despite occasional protests of Jewish suffering, focused on the challenge of Nazism to German churches and on the rebuilding of Christian civilization. To Bell the principal evil was the totalitarian state and its secular ideology, not its supreme moral offense. A few Anglicans, notably James Parkes, cited the unparalleled suffering of Jewish people and proposed a view of the circumstances rooted in an interfaith perspective. But the preponderance of Church of England leaders held the views advanced by Bell. Nazi Germany represented an assault on Christianity, and the post-war task was to move quickly beyond war and to redeem a civilization that was inherently Christian. The threat to the church and its social role was the primary crisis.

It is surprising that Church leaders were slow to grasp the Nazi horror but not that their response reflected their prevailing outlook. They were not inflexible, and Lawson notes that their anti-war sentiments shifted into defenses of war when conflict began. But they clung to their underlying perspective, and Lawson offers valuable insight on it. His revisionism is persuasive, and his comment that he would add nuance to prior views helps his case. But his conclusions overreach. He asserts that the Church's view of Judaism reflected an intention to convert, not an interfaith commitment of which there were only glimmers. Lawson's evidence reveals more inattention to Jewish suffering by Anglican leaders than thoughts of proselytism, and his criticism of the lack of an interfaith outlook has an anachronistic quality. As he shows, their intention was to save a civilization they presumed to be

basically Christian from totalitarianism. It is sufficient to show that Church leaders misread the nature of the crisis and overlooked one of its greatest horrors. The inadequacy of the Church of England's leaders was not conscious disregard, but adherence to an outlook that allowed them to misconstrue social realities. This may not have been the moral failure that Lawson suggests, but it was a failure.

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Awesome Families: The Promise of Healing Relationships in the International Church of Christ. By **Kathleen E. Jenkins**. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2005. xii + 284 pp. \$22.95 paper.

At the center of Kathleen E. Jenkins's sociological study of the International Churches of Christ (ICOC) is the sticky problem of why members believe that the church creates "awesome" families yet outsiders contend that the group destroys families. This question began as a personal one for the author, who discloses in the introduction that a family member had joined the church. "As a family member, I wanted to find a way for my brother and my parents to come to understand each other" (4). Through seven well-researched chapters, Jenkins tells the story of members' attraction to ICOC's therapeutic promise to heal, fortify, and construct families. Her keen eye for the contradictions of individualism versus collectivity, submission versus authority, and ideology versus practice make this an engaging read that is relevant beyond the scope of this now defunct small group or even the study of new religious movements. *Awesome Families* provides an in-depth look into the lives and experiences of members and demonstrates the power of communal accountability in forging religious identity.

Jenkins argues throughout the book that, like many other new religious movements, the ICOC did not represent so much a break with culture as the use of strategies of culture such as prevalent therapeutic models to shape religious goals and identity. She employs an ethnographic approach, conducting interviews with members and ex-members for five years, engaging in participant observation at meetings, meals, and other events, and monitoring websites. She found a racially diverse group of people who sought to enhance their family lives through the traditional evangelical formula of strict gender roles that carry over from the family to church and