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 **Confronting the Nazi War on Christianity. The Kulturkampf Newsletters, 1936–1939 (review)**

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Reviewed by:

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Some of the most incisive and forceful descriptions and analyses of the Nazi campaign against the German churches and indeed against Christianity were contained in 135 *Kulturkampf* Newsletters written between January 1936 and the end of August 1939, which appeared at almost weekly intervals. Published first in Paris, they also appeared in a German edition, a British edition in 1937, and a U.S. edition in 1939. They have now been republished in an almost complete edition translated by Richard Bonney. As a contemporary source, these newsletters were extremely well informed and provided a valuable chronology of the Nazi persecution of the churches. They served as one of the first decided commentaries outlining the essential opposition and incompatibility between the Nazi Weltanschauung and Christian faith.

This repeated theme is supplemented by detailed documentation of the Nazis' overt harassment of dissident priests and pastors, the suppression of the churches' publications, and the closure of schools and organizations. In addition, extracts are given from the speeches and writings of prominent Nazis, outlining their deliberate hostility, which were all seen as part of a wider campaign not merely to control but eventually to eradicate Christianity from Germany. Fittingly, the final issue condemned the Nazi ideology, with its "divinization" of Hitler and its appeal to racial consciousness as the basis for a new state religion.

These newsletters also provide evidence of the attempts made by the churches to combat this ideological campaign. The sermons of Bishop Clement von Galen of Münster were quoted with approval, as was the Papal Encyclical of March 1937. Increasingly attention was paid in 1937 and 1938 to the campaign against the Protestant churches and to the valiant responses of the Confessing Church. In April 1938 a whole issue was devoted to the show trial of Pastor Martin Niemöller. His sentencing to a concentration camp, despite his legal acquittal, was seen as another

example of Nazi plans for repression of all church opposition.

Further, another recurrent theme of these newsletters is the folly of those gullible churchmen who believed they could be good Catholics or Protestants and good Nazis at the same time. Here, these illusions were resolutely **[End Page 388]** attacked. In April 1938, for example, the sad case of Cardinal Theodor Innitzer of Vienna and his craven submission to Hitler after the Anschluss was rightly castigated as an unforgivable betrayal of true Catholic interests, which foolishly ignored what had happened in Germany over the previous few years.

There are, however, problems with Bonney's edition. Curiously, he does not provide answers in his introduction to such important questions as the identity of the author or authors, the sources and provenance of the detailed and often local information provided, the intended audience, the size of the imprint, or the origins of the funding needed for this multilingual enterprise. Nor does he try to assess the impact these newsletters had at the time or explain why they ended so abruptly. He makes no attempt to place them in the wider context of exile German resistance efforts or literature.

Surprisingly enough, no one came forward during the war or afterward to claim responsibility for these newsletters. Thus there is still an unresolved mystery. A fuller attempt to find answers can be found in Heinz Hürten's edition of the German version, which appeared in 1988, but even Hürten admits puzzlement as to the authorship question. Nevertheless, the republication in English of these intrepid letters and commentaries adds to our picture of the German church struggle and stands as a warning against connivance with anti-Christian ideologies, which still needs to be heard.

John S. Conway
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ally undertook himself, with a small coterie of fellow conspirators but without benefit of a church body behind him.

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ROBERT P. ERICSEN

Confronting the Nazi War on Christianity: The Kulturkampf Newsletters, 1936-1939. Edited and translated by Richard Bonney. [Studies in the History of Religious and Political Pluralism, Vol. 4.] (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009. Pp. x, 578. \$86.95 paperback. ISBN 978-3-039-11904-2.)

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