

at *San Luis Rey*, a 1927 novel by Thornton Wilder that became the basis for three films (in 1929 by Charles Brabin, 1944 by Rowland W. Lee and 2004 by Mary McGuckian). A priest searches for signs that God had good reason to allow the deaths of five individuals killed when a bridge in the Peruvian Andes collapsed. Why them, instead of others? The priest is indeed an eighteenth-century Franciscan missionary. But what troubles the priest is general to Christianity, not specific to missions. Why does God do what he does, or allow to happen what happens? The saga has enjoyed such wide and enduring appeal because of how easily this classic theological dilemma can be detached from the missionary matrix that justifies Abrams's attention to it.

One finding which Abrams articulates clearly is that the movies of the mid-twentieth century decades accurately reflected the real-life role of foreign missions in expanding the horizons of the average American, exposing them to the diversity of humankind and challenging racial prejudices and the uncritical support of colonial empires. This effect is much more visible in some films than others, and one wishes that Abrams had kept some of them in focus long enough to see how this effect is achieved, and, equally important, where it is not. Abrams is well read in scholarship on missionaries, and successfully integrates his findings with the latest books and articles in the field. *Missionaries in the golden age of Hollywood* falls short of the superior book it might have become, but it gives us the most comprehensive account we have of missionaries as characters in commercial films.

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Britain and the German Churches, 1945–1950. The role of the Religious Affairs Branch in the British zone. By Peter Howson. (Studies in Modern British Religious History, 43.) Pp. xx + 285 incl. 1 map, 1 chart and 10 tables. Woodbridge–Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2021. £75. 978 1 78327 583 0
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‘What can one say of the Religious Affairs Branch?’ writes Peter Howson. ‘It is now rarely even a footnote to history’ (p. 255). In fact, he finds a great deal to say of it and there is much of value to learn from this patient, often meticulous, book. Howson is surely right to argue that the period which followed the defeat of Germany in May 1945 has been too little explored by historians of religion, who have often been preoccupied by the German church struggle in the years of the Third Reich. Once British Christians had viewed German events from abroad, at most coming and going, reflecting, protesting and intervening as best they could. But with the occupation and division of Germany British forces and government servants of all sorts not only lived in that country but became a part of its troubled narratives of political and economic reconstruction. Direct military occupation yielded a largely civilian Allied Control Commission charged with the task of overseeing demilitarisation, denazification and democratisation. An administrative structure for the whole, devastated country had to be invented quickly. Inevitably, it was a clumsy affair, once succinctly described by a British church report, quoted by Howson, as ‘an amateur bureaucracy struggling with colossal problems in a foreign country and largely through interpreters’ (p. 197). Berlin, now an island

in Soviet-occupied territory, was awkwardly set aside for the joint control by Powers who barely co-operated, let alone collaborated.

In the British zone of occupation public authority was divided into thirteen 'divisions' In one of these, 'Internal Affairs and Communications', lay a further ten 'branches'. One of these was religious affairs. The bread-and-butter business of the Religious Affairs Branch lay in the work of denazification. Germany became a place crammed with men and women doing their best to administer questionnaires which, in the case of the Churches, accomplished very little indeed beyond antagonising a great many people. While the rest of German society was busily rebuilt on new foundations, the Churches remained very largely in the hands of those who had overseen their fortunes under the Hitler regime. Moreover, as one source put it in June 1945, they were 'the one place where large numbers of people are permitted to gather together, and at the same time the one place where there is an almost complete lack of Allied control' (p. 44). But who should be allowed to hold services? Should those who did be monitored? Indeed, what significance did Churches of all kinds possess in the recreation of German democracy? At the level of high policy, all of this was overseen by a super-intending authority, the Allied Religious Affairs Committee, a body established under the Allied Control Authority which represented all four Allied powers. In some practicalities, at least, this proved effective. The French supplied the German Churches with communion wine while the Soviets provided candles.

Howson acknowledges that religion was a modest concern for all the political authorities as they set to work on other things. Only the British, in their zone, gave it much of a place at all. Even here, Howard notes, it was only by the middle of 1946 that the Religious Affairs Branch was 'a fully functioning part of the Control Commission' (p. 97). In this book Bishop Bell emerges as an essential 'motivating force' (in the words of Edwin Robertson) or as the source of 'creative interference' (pp. 111–12). Rather in his image, Religious Affairs was a distinctively ecumenical venture, but the parts had to be carefully balanced in case one appeared to predominate. Most of its work was practical, administrative, routine. But difficulties abounded, not least because inter-departmental relations were far from easy. Staff came and went, sometimes by unexpected resignations. There was, almost from the beginning, a rift with the army chaplains. Resources were unevenly spread and privileges in one quarter could be resented in another. When it came to their relations with the Germans at large, attitudes were not always yielding. 'We have not forgiven', wrote one chaplain in September 1945, 'and they have not repented' (p. 67). It was seen that that British should not support one part of the Churches against others. And yet they were determined to eradicate the *Deutsche Christen* movement within a comprehensive denazification of German society.

The Roman Catholic Church in Germany was still bound by the terms of the 1933 Concordat, a controversial settlement which the Soviets scorned. The hierarchy proved, in British eyes, obstructive. Archbishop Frings in Cologne thought the British inept and vindictive. In Münster, Bishop von Galen might well have been a staunch critic of the National Socialists, but he was no ally to the occupying powers. When both men sought to visit the Vatican to receive the cardinal's hat from Pius XII in February 1946 the visit was badly bungled and this brought

much criticism, not least because only days after this taxing mission an exhausted von Galen died. As for the Protestant Churches, the situation was if anything more complicated. Structures were chaotic where they existed at all. In Hannover the tarnished, troublesome Bishop Marahrens got into trouble with the Control Commission and clung to office in the face of many challenges. But these years saw the creation of a new Evangelical Church in Germany and this could certainly be seen as a successful work of ecclesiastical reconstruction. There were also at least thirty-nine minor denominations for Religious Affairs to monitor, including the Baptists, Methodists, Moravians, Mennonites, Old Catholics, Neo-Apostolic or Catholic Apostolic congregations, Quakers, Seventh-day Adventists, the Salvation Army, Christian Scientists and Jehovah's Witnesses. Only in early 1947, Howson finds, did they begin to discover the existence of Muslim communities across the British zone, many of them Iranian and living in Hamburg. The needs of some 20,000 German Jews living in the British zone soon fell to the military chaplains and to those at work in the Displaced Persons branches.

Where the Religious Affairs Branch was conspicuously active was in the organisation of visits by British and other church figures, beginning in 1945 with the American Stewart Herman, Cardinal Griffin and Bishop Bell and soon growing in number and in ecumenical breadth. Howson finds that without the work of the branch it would have been 'difficult, if not impossible', for Bishop Bell and Gordon Rupp to have attended the landmark conference which took place in Stuttgart in October 1945 (p. 153). A delegation of British church women in September 1947 was led by Bell's wife, Henrietta. By 1949 the days of the branch were numbered. There were earnest discussions as to whether it should be superseded by a 'mission' to the newly constituted German Evangelical Church, but for this there was evidently little enthusiasm amongst German church leaders and in Britain there was little money for travel expenses. The work of the branch fizzled out – like so much else. A sense of disappointment hangs over this last year. 'Your Church', remarked a German church leader glumly of the Church of England, 'does not know where it is going' (p. 254).

Peter Howson is surely to be congratulated for providing us with an admirable book which certainly fills a hole in contemporary church historiography.

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Christianity's American fate. How religion became more conservative and society more secular. By David A. Hollinger. Pp. xvi + 200. Princeton–Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2022. £25. 978 0 691 23388 8

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The esteemed American intellectual historian David A. Hollinger's newest book is a sort of extended essay pulling together his three most recent works – *Protestants abroad: how missionaries tried to change the world but changed America* (Princeton 2017), *After cloven tongues of fire: Protestant liberalism in American history* (Princeton 2013) and the personal memoir *When this mask of flesh is broken: the story of an American Protestant family* (Denver, Co 2019) – and marrying them to some excellent recent scholarship. For twentieth-century American religion, Hollinger wisely condenses the findings of Anthea Butler, Kristin Du Mez, Randall Balmer