

**EUROPEAN BAPTISTS and the THIRD REICH –  
by Bernard Green  
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You are a member of a small denomination which is often ignored and sometimes discriminated against by the local and national government. For this amongst other reasons you and your fellow worshippers have very little incentive, opportunity or indeed desire to co-operate with the more powerful state recognised churches.

A new political leader promises not only to revitalise and cleanse the nation and regain the respect which is its due but also to institute equality and toleration for all Christian denominations – an opportunity to preach the gospel without hindrance.

This is of course the situation of German Baptists in the 1930s as portrayed in *European Baptists and the Third Reich*.

The first hand accounts from the letters and journal of Leonard Champion detailing his time in Germany between 1931 and 1934 highlight the situation: the conflicting hopes and fears, and the genuine dilemmas of members of various denominations. Over the years as the National Socialist government enforced increasingly harsh measures on other minority groups, the churches throughout Germany had to wrestle with the problem ‘at what point does the Christian say “enough is enough, we must speak out against this”.....even if we are then prevented from speaking further.’

The outstanding examples of Niemöller and Bonhoeffer as leaders of the Confessing Church were in contrast with the Pietist tradition of some German Baptists.

Hans Luckey (journalist and director of the Seminary in Hamburg) wrote in 1938 “National Socialism has kindly let us do as we like because we stay away from politics. It is a fact that our preaching has not been hindered.”

This “freedom” had its price and there is much to learn and ponder in the agonies of conscience and the accommodations of conscience depicted here.

Those chapters dealing with other parts of Europe including Great Britain contain moving accounts of witness, resistance, clandestine meetings and services and the overcoming of adversity. Such accounts show how much simpler it was for Baptists in those countries, despite the sufferings of occupation, to reconcile their Christian beliefs with their patriotism. Their loyalties were not in question in their support of the struggle against the occupier, the enemy.

How different it was in the ‘30s and ‘40s for German Baptists.

This is an uncomfortable story redeemed by the prayerful and painstaking efforts of those in the denomination worldwide who were determined upon reconciliation and the rebuilding of trust in the post war years.

Philip H Dickinson