

All this, and much, much more of the complex story, is carefully chronicled by Chandler in a non-partisan way, resisting the obvious temptations simply to demonize a Headlam or beatify a Bell. He seeks not just to narrate but empathetically to show how the minds of the participants had in part been shaped by their past experience and domestic concerns, and how even the most courageous and far-sighted of them were at times constrained by circumstances and events beyond their control.

Beyond words, and a measure of humanitarian action, what could the genuinely concerned Christians of Britain offer? Problems arose here. Whenever more vigorous protests to the German government, or proposals on actual British policy, were mooted, caution seeped in: would Berlin be thereby provoked into still greater repression (not that the Nazis ever needed much stimulus)? Lang felt this keenly. Even Bell was, just occasionally, hesitant. In 1939 came war with its own dynamic of the Nazi invasions westward and eastward, and the British Vansittart policy of unconditional surrender. Nevertheless, there emerged the ecumenical Peace Aims Group, led by the Presbyterian William Paton, with its clandestine contacts via Geneva with the German resistance. There was much public debate on the shape of a post-Hitler Germany and post-war reconstruction in Europe, fed especially by organs like J.H. Oldham's *Christian News-Letter* (sometimes including reports from within Germany). In 1942 George Bell had his remarkable meeting in neutral Sweden with Bonhoeffer, returning to London to inform the British government about the nature of the German resistance. Publicly he used his seat in the House of Lords to plead the case of the 'other Germany', and famously, to protest against the Allied area bombing policy.

The story is in many aspects inspiring, but overall makes sobering reading in a contemporary world of resurgent nationalisms and autocracies. By 1940, even the peaceable Bell saw no possibility for the peace of Europe without a military victory over Hitler, just as in Germany Bonhoeffer was praying for that grim result to engulf his country. At the end of the day, no church or political figure had any other answer to Hitler. The questions are still with us, as is our debt to our forebears for bequeathing them to us. Chandler concludes appositely: 'The story of British Christians and National Socialist Germany may now be regarded as a subject for historians. But it is not yet a dead history.'

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Steven Nemes, *Orthodoxy and Heresy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 75. ISBN 978-1-009-26817-2 (paperback).

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Steven Nemes is concerned about the problem of truth, and the capacity to address this problem openly and thoroughly. Specifically, he is interested in the capacity to explore the question of truth in a way that cultivates dialogue and not division.



For him, this represents the potential to have a theological debate without the threat of anathema. In fact, the terms *anathema*, *orthodoxy* and *heresy* are key terms in his book. I will return to these terms.

Nemes is an adjunct faculty member at Grand Canyon University in the College of Theology. He is interested in Christian systematic theology and phenomenological philosophy, and their relationship. He writes about complex issues in a clear and systematic way, explaining key terms with a judicious use of signposts and summaries so that the reader never gets lost. This book is part of the *Cambridge Elements* series, the aim of which is to explore 'problems related to God, such as the human quest for God or gods, contemplation of God, and critique and rejection of God'. In that regard, he outlines a broad approach to how we might address 'problems related to God'. Of course, this begs the question: Which God? Which theological construction?

Nemes explores all these issues in relation to Christian Scripture and church history. For example, he explores the complex relationship between Scripture and tradition. In this instance, he asserts that, while elements of the tradition predate parts of Scripture, the reading from Scripture has hermeneutical priority. Along the way, he presents useful examples. These examples are presented in detail like case studies. In the process, he conducts a nuanced analysis of issues like the creation story in Genesis 1, the work of Irenaeus, the Nicene Creed and the concept of transubstantiation. These case studies are written in a clear expository style, contributing to his quest to find a way of addressing the problem of truth.

He presents a strong conclusion, 'there is no room for ideological notions of "orthodoxy," "heresy," and "anathemas" in a field whose single principle of inquiry is not the coherent propagation and expansion of received ideas but rather (fallibly) to describe things as truly and accurately as possible'. For Nemes, then, articulating the concept of anathema is a means of clarifying orthodoxy. He argues, moreover, that by exploring the relations between orthodoxy and heresy, he is able to make a theological/hermeneutical move beyond the horizon of anathema. Nevertheless, my concern here is that because he relies heavily on the discourse of orthodoxy, heresy and anathema, it is difficult for him to leave behind certain anthropological and philosophical traces (cf. untested christological statements 'Jesus offers Himself to God on behalf of others in order to make atonement for their sins').

In summary, this book represents a useful overview, which hints at some critical issues. But has he gone far enough with the critical issues? So, then, let me explore the book's possibilities in relation to three elements: the truth, Christology and God.

In terms of truth, Nemes employs the classical distinction between 'belief-that', which pertains largely to propositional truth pertaining to the 'world of things', and 'belief-in', which is, in my terms, a relational truth pertaining to the world of persons and communities. He recognizes the relation between the two is complex, and so he sees the need to articulate conceptually the meaning of truth itself. Following Aristotle, he defines truth this way: 'Truth is the relation of adequacy that obtains between what is said about something, on one hand, and the thing about which something is said, on the other. Truth is achieved when what is said is adequate to what is being talked about.' This is broadly speaking a pragmatic approach to truth.

Of course, there is no unmediated study of the world. For Paul Tillich, 'Religious truth is existential truth; to this extent it cannot be separated from practice'. So, truth is discovered in history and expressed discursively. Nonetheless, I am not suggesting that there is an easy solution here, but rather, I am arguing that epistemological issues are complex. On that note, Nemes is consistent in his exposition of key theological terms and historical figures, but there is something too neat, too clinical, about his theological constructions. Truth is mediated in the real world. And this is the world of aporia, the undecidable, competing value systems, flawed institutions, ambiguous power-relations and systemic violence.

In terms of Christology, he introduces a series of strong formulaic christological statements, without subjecting them to critical analysis. For example, 'Christians believe that various things are the case – so, God exists and Jesus was raised from the dead' and 'The preaching and argumentation of the apostles is also in many cases empirical. The apostles preach the resurrection of Jesus from the dead because they saw Him.' These christological statements surface repeatedly without critique. The inference here is that his christological statements do not need to be tested in relation to the question of truth. Surely, however, we can debate christological presumptions without fear of anathema? Especially as Christology is a central part of his theological constructions.

In terms of God, he has a particular kind of theism in mind: 'What makes Christian faith distinctly Christian as opposed to generically theistic is that it is a living-with God that takes place through the mediation of Jesus.' This is related to his Christology. In fact, he refers to the relationship between Christ and God as an onto-epistemological bond. I suspect he has a strong view about this bond, which he has not fully articulated here. In the light of the climate crisis, and broader questions around theodicy, something is missing here. From a different theological perspective, Catherine Keller makes the timely remark: 'that the so-called end of the world begs the question of which construct, which schema, of "world." By the same logic, the so-called death of God begs the question: Which God? Which theological construction?'

In conclusion, the book could be helpful for clergy and theological students. It would certainly be accessible to a Protestant audience, though Anglican, Catholic and Orthodox readers could also benefit. So, it is a useful book, but it could have been a great book. The difference hinges on a fundamental question. What is the point of the book? Clearly, Nemes is interested in Scripture and church history, but he wants to say more. In fact, he wants to say something about contemporary theological discussions and constructions. Ironically, in order to do this, he relies on old binaries, and archaic discourse like *orthodoxy*, *heresy* and *anathema*, which inhibit the work of the contemporary conceptual critique of the truth, Christ and God. I suspect he has more to offer.

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