

non-conservative policies to spread wealth and opportunity. “The thing you have to remember about Michael,” David Cameron once told a frustrated Nick Clegg, “is that he’s a bit of a Maoist – he believes in progress through creative destruction.”

Owen Bennett’s book helps lift the lid on this complex character. It is, perhaps, stronger and more informative on the early period of Gove’s life. Of 23 chapters, only the final nine deal with the post-2010 period in government. That is a not enough space. The book’s sub-title is “A Man in A Hurry”, and perhaps Bennett himself felt a degree of pressure to bring his volume to a conclusion, as Theresa May was toppled from power and the recent Conservative leadership election loomed?

And there lies the oddity about this biography – that it has not merely recorded the Gove story, but helped shape it. Bennett’s final few pages explain how the early serialisation of the book, and its revelations about use of illegal drugs, helped end Michael Gove’s second attempt to secure the most powerful job in the land. So was this one biography whose contents helped make its subject of less, rather than more, future interest?

Well, maybe. But Gove has already bounced back from three career disasters which could have sunk a lesser politician. One suspects that there will be many more chapters that will need adding before we have the definitive account of the life of this controversial and exceptional man. ■

Lord Lexden
Conservative peer

This meticulously crafted collection of letters adds to our understanding of the international stature of a man of peace

The George Bell-Gerhard Liebholz Correspondence

In the Long Shadow of the Third Reich, 1938-1958

Edited by **Gerhard Ringshausen** and **Andrew Chandler**
Publisher **Bloomsbury**



George Bell and Gerhard Liebholz were drawn together in the 1930s by a shared conviction that Hitler must be overthrown. Liebholz, an outstanding German constitutional lawyer, was befriended and supported by Bell, the then Bishop of Chichester, when he arrived in England as a refugee in 1938.

The two men exchanged long, brilliant letters about the creation of a new European order in which Germany would be a full democratic partner. Both hoped that the Germans themselves would get rid of Hitler, but the failure of the 20 July plot to kill him 75 years ago put paid to that. Both feared the consequences of Soviet victory in Eastern Europe.

Two members of the House of Lords should make a point of reading these inspiring letters: the Archbishop of Canterbury and the current Bishop of Chichester. Four years ago,

they oversaw a grievously flawed internal Church investigation which upheld an uncorroborated complaint of child sex abuse by an anonymous woman against Bell, widely regarded as the greatest Anglican bishop of the 20th century, who had died nearly 60 years earlier.

A report in 2017 by Alex Carlile, the distinguished Lords crossbench lawyer, damned the entire investigation process. A second complaint against Bishop Bell last year was dismissed as completely groundless. Nevertheless, those responsible for the discredited decision in 2015 insist that Bell remains under “a significant cloud”. A terrible injustice has been done.

This book provides a powerful reminder of the international stature of the man who has been so seriously maligned. A prolific speaker in the Lords, he did more than anyone else in England to aid both Hitler’s Jewish and

Christian victims. He spoke out fearlessly against the carpet bombing of German cities; the resulting controversy cost him the archbishopric of Canterbury when it

became vacant in 1944.

Bell was insistent that the German people as a whole ought not to be punished for the crimes of the Nazis. This was the theme of a steady stream of speeches in the Lords. “The West”, he wrote, “does not desire to crush Germany”, but was intent on “rebuilding the Christian civilization of Europe upon planned co-operative lines”.

For such views, which anticipated a united Europe, Bell endured much criticism at home while the war lasted.

To the opponents of the Nazis in Germany, he was an inspiration. In a letter after a Lords debate in March 1943, Liebholz told him “how warmly and eagerly our friends in Germany welcomed this voice of Christian reason”.

George Bell is venerated by Christians in many countries. They cannot understand why he has been treated so unjustly by the current leaders of the Anglican Church. ■