

Dietrich Bonhoeffer,  
*Letters to London: Bonhoeffer's previously unpublished  
Correspondence with Ernst Cromwell, 1935–6,*  
Ed. Stephen J. Plant and Toni Burrowes-Cromwell  
(Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014), xvi+107 pages

The discovery of this bundle of letters written in the years 1935 and 1936 from the justly-famous German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945) to a then-young Anglo-German by the name of Ernst Cromwell (1921–), now in his early nineties and bearing the anglicized name “Ernest,” does not materially add an enormous amount to what we know about the thought of Bonhoeffer. We see themes found elsewhere—his distrust of pietism (p.66), his emphasis on humility (p.69), his delight in the gift of friendship and community (p.73–74), the vital importance of living in the truth and cleaving to Christ (p.74–75)—but these are interwoven with other remarks of less import though vital to the developing friendship between Bonhoeffer and young Ernst. What we especially see in these letters is Bonhoeffer the pastor, seeking to offer encouragement and guidance to a young man living in England, whom Bonhoeffer was preparing for confirmation during his ministry at the German-speaking congregation at St. George’s, Sydenham. Given the fateful and horrific events transpiring in Germany in the mid-1930s, we also have some fabulous insights into Bonhoeffer’s determination to be faithful to his Christian calling amidst such days. In one letter, he tells Ernst that he has made himself “pretty unpopular over the issue of the Jews” (p.66). In another, he informs his young friend that he has been forbidden by “the Ministry of Culture...to lecture” (p.72).

A helpful introduction, “A friendship to be grateful for: Bonhoeffer’s letters to Ernst Cromwell,” sets the letters in context (p.1–27). There is also an interview with Ernest Cromwell (p.29–46), and an excellent “Afterword” by Toni Burrowes-Cromwell, Ernest’s daughter-in-law, in which she draws out the significance of these letters for Christian life today (p.77–100).

Michael A.G. Haykin  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary