

Bishop compares fight over female bishops to World War II

by [Al Webb](#)

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LONDON (RNS) A leading bishop in the Church of England has triggered fury in British religious circles by likening the debate over allowing female bishops to the "serious threat" of warfare posed by the Nazis on the eve of World War II.

Bishop of Lewes Wallace Benn told a conference of conservative Anglicans in Hoddesdon, England that, with the conflict over women bishops, "I feel very much increasingly that we're in January of 1939."

Benn, who's due to retire in two years, warned his audience that "I'm about to use an analogy, and I use it quite deliberately and carefully. And it slightly frightens me to use it, but I do think it's where we are at."

What he meant, he said, was that "I feel very much increasingly that we're in January of 1939. What we must not do is create a phony war, but we need to be aware that there is real serious warfare just around the corner."

The date marked a speech by Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler that predicted the "annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe." Germany invaded Poland eight months later.

His remarks infuriated James Smith, chairman of the Holocaust Center in Britain, who told journalists that Benn downplayed "both the scale of the suffering the Nazis caused and the scale of the moral challenge they represented."

The bishop's office, in a statement, insisted that Benn "never mentioned Hitler or the Nazis," claiming instead that "he said that the situation in which we find ourselves in the church feels like people probably felt as they viewed the year ahead in January 1939."

"There are storm clouds on the horizon and warfare around the corner," the statement said.