

## 49. THE BOMBING OF GERMANY

The bombing of the great industrial region of the Ruhr valley has raised some interesting religious and moral problems in both Britain and America. When one estimates the destruction in Britain and then reflects that four to ten times as many bombs are raining on the Ruhr region, one is able to envisage the terrible destruction that is being wrought in Germany.

It was significant that while the newspapers, and sometimes the Broadcasting Corporation, seemed to gloat over the "revenge" that American and British planes now exacted for the destruction in Britain, common people both in Britain and America had the decency to feel and express sorrow over the necessity of this terrible measure of war. A simple old elevator operator in a London hotel touchingly observed to the writer, "I don't care what the newspapers say; I think the bombing of those cities is terrible, however necessary." A young student at Oxford, product of the Christian Student Movement, and preparing for service in the Royal Air Force declared: "I have written to the B.B.C. [radio] to protest against its gloating announcements. I will probably do some bombing myself; but I will take no satisfaction in the human misery it causes."

It is natural of course for those who are inclined to pacifism to declare that those of us who support this war prove the untenability of our position by this moral embarrassment and discomfiture. For the bombing of cities is a vivid revelation of the whole moral ambiguity of warfare. It is not possible to defeat a foe without causing innocent people to suffer with the guilty. It is not possible to engage in any act of collective opposition to collective evil without involving the innocent with the guilty. It is not possible to move in history without becoming tainted with guilt.

Even the most righteous political cause is tainted with antecedent, concomitant, and consequent guilt. Every "righteous" national or political cause is partly guilty of the evil against which it contends. That is its antecedent guilt. It involves itself in the evil of causing suffering to the innocent. That is the concomitant guilt of its enterprise. It will also be unable to remain untainted of subsequent guilt; for it will most certainly corrupt the virtue of its victory by egoistic and vindictive passions. There is no escape from

*Christianity and Society*, Summer, 1943.

guilt in history. This is the religious fact that Saint Paul understood so well and that is so frequently not understood by moralistic versions of the Christian faith.

Once bombing has been developed as an instrument of warfare, it is not possible to disavow its use without capitulating to the foe who refuses to disavow it. No man has the moral freedom to escape from these hard and cruel necessities of history. Yet it is possible to express the freedom of man over the necessities of history. We can do these things without rancor or self-righteousness. It has been reported by both American and British authorities that pilots of bombing planes, professing the Christian faith, have sometimes refused to take Communion before their perilous trips. This hesitancy does credit to their conscience. They ought on the other hand to be helped to understand that the Lord's Supper is not a sacrament for the righteous but for sinners; and that it mediates the mercy of God not only to those who repent of the sins they have done perversely but also to those who repent of the sins in which they are involved inexorably by reason of their service to a "just cause."

The Kingdom of God, of which the Sacrament is the symbol, is on the one hand the peace that comes to the soul when it turns from sin to righteousness. It is on the other hand the peace of divine forgiveness, mediated to the contrite sinner who knows that it is not in his power to live a sinless life on earth.

## 50. THE GERMAN PROBLEM

Of the many tragic aspects of our age, none is greater than the failure of Germany. It is the failure of a great people, fallen to as low a state of moral and political corruption as we are likely to see for many centuries. Such insanity as the Germans developed would not, of course, have been possible if the rest of the world had not provided a static corruption as the soil out of which the dynamic evil of the German mania developed. Nevertheless the failure of Germany is truly tragic. It must be understood if it is not to arouse the victors to vindictive passions that will destroy every possibility

*Christianity and Crisis*, January 10, 1944.