

BLACKFRIARS

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JUSTICE AMONG NATIONS

THE situation of the virtue of Justice in the post-war world is complicated in very many ways. The manifest and widespread injustices of the war, and of social conditions directly or indirectly resulting from the war, have mounted to such huge proportions it is difficult to make a beginning in the restoration of justice. The war was fought for the sake of justice, but at its conclusion far greater injustices remained than at its commencement. Thousands, or rather millions, of innocent people left homeless, foodless, and even cast out of their own country, big powers interfering and dominating lesser ones, who had never been guilty of aggression, war criminals at large, vast hoards of men held under arms without a war to fight, and the effects of two atom-bombs . . . In fact we completed the war with an act which surely can never find justification, the annihilation of tens of thousands of Japanese civilians with an instrument of war, the effects of which are out of man's control.

The crimes that need to be brought to judgment are manifest. The terrible brutalities and murders of the concentration camps, the robberies and looting in occupied territories and, above all, the responsibility for the outbreak of war, these colossal infringements of law and attacks on human nature itself must be vindicated and paid for if justice is to be restored. And there have been attacks

on men's rights since the cessation of hostilities, such as the mass transference of peoples in central Europe. The world cannot be put in order if such things are to be left unrequited. Justice, in the moralist's view, is an unwavering intention of giving to each and to all what is his and their due. To *everyone*—*à chacun* is the Latin word—his due: to vanquished and victor alike, to criminal and sufferer too. In the long run it would be foolish to try to grant the British working man his natural rights, through a Socialist Government or by any other means, if Joyce, Goering, and the camp leaders of Belsen were allowed to continue without trial or judgment; and on the other hand it is not just to insist upon the condemnation of war criminals while condoning the dispossession of the small holder and the little businessman. Truly, different types of justice are involved in these cases, "general", commutative, and distributive justice; but these cannot be operated in isolation.

It is not merely that the extent of the justice has become so vast that we do not know where to begin; there is also no machinery of justice capable of putting the situation to rights. Judgment must be given before justice can again be set to work; but judgment demands authority, competent and constituted for the Common Good. In modern civilization made up—for the time being at least—of independent, sovereign States, there is no common authority which can legislate or even adjudicate for the common good of all the nations. The only just power now existing is concerned with the common good of separate individual States. That is why William Joyce, however guilty he may have been, could put up such a strong case against his condemnation. And the Nuremberg trials are bringing to judgment men, many of whom must be very great criminals, but the authority to which they are brought is constituted not by right but by power. The victorious allies are alone in judging these men. They have made no attempt to introduce judges from neutral countries. The neutrals themselves are being condemned by these same victorious allies—we are encouraged to interfere in Spain, we are inclined to dictate terms to Ireland, Sweden and Turkey. Our claim to the right to do all these things comes simply from the fact that we have been victorious over Germany and Japan. Victory of itself does not give international authority nor the right to dispose the common good of nations. The general public seems to condemn these Nuremberg trials as unnecessary, so debased has its sense of justice become. Good Christian men, who are regular in their prayers and devotions, have

been heard to protest that these criminals were so obviously guilty that they should be shot out of hand. Such expressions presumably arise from the insulted and outraged common nature of man. But it is a misfortune that this common nature of man seems to lack a general protector of its rights, which can transcend the boundaries of nations and empires. The Nuremberg trials, therefore, would seem to be unjust judgments on unjust men. The men responsible for Hiroshima and Nagasaki committed an act, which is at least, of sufficient dubiety to justify a trial; and these are the men who have set up the courts to condemn Hess, Goering, Ribbentrop and Co. We were shocked by the French trials, but are these others any different in character?

There is, of course, one international authority to which the supernatural good of mankind is committed, namely the universal Church of Christ. Theoretically speaking the Vicar of Christ has the authority competent to judge these criminals, for he has to dispose all the supernatural virtues of mankind, justice, charity and faith; he has the last word in faith or morals. In the ages of faith the Church was occasionally called in to pronounce judgment on such cases, even if that judgment was often ignored by the rulers of the peoples. At the present time such a proposal would appear to the average citizen of any nation as ludicrous. It can never have occurred to the men who arranged the trial of war criminals; and we should be regarded as madmen if we had suggested it to them. But the fact remains that the only competent authority for restoring justice to Europe and the world rests with the Church and in the person of the Pope. Nor would the proposal seem so wanton if we remember the just summaries of events at the beginning of the war given in the Vatican newspaper, *Osservatore Romano*. In the first months of 1940 that journal would give both versions, Allied and German, of such happenings as the seizing of the Altmark in Norwegian waters, and would conclude with a judicious summary so just and objective that it raised a storm of abuse from German and Fascist quarters, and the paper finally had to be suppressed as it was leading to bloodshed and death in the streets of Rome. The recent extension of the college of Cardinals is a visible sign of the universality of that authority; and as the men raised to this dignity are all men of practical experience in their own diverse nations whence they are drawn there would, in fact, be every possibility of a restoration of justice. A wild dream perhaps, but where else can we look for international justice?

THE EDITOR.