

Nuremberg

Last Friday I was privileged to take part in the praying of the Coventry Litany in St Sebaldus Church in Nuremberg in southern Germany. Before the last War Nuremberg was considered the best preserved medieval city in Europe. In 1945 most of it lay in ruins and its great medieval churches were not spared. Fortunately all but one were soon painstakingly restored to something of their former glory.

Whether the almost complete destruction of the old city centre was really justified is still debated. However, you do not have to go far from the city centre to see why it was targeted. For Hitler and the National Socialists Nuremberg was the most German of all German cities and the natural venue for their regular rallies and congresses. The remains of the Zeppelin Field with the podium from which Hitler addressed the crowds and the unfinished Congress Hall designed for 50,000 people are quite chilling. In their intentionally neglected state you have to use your imagination but there is plenty of film footage in the modern museum to help.

National Socialism was in many ways a religion, a religion without God, for Hitler was to some extent their god. We may find it difficult to understand how so many people could be caught up in all that, but such is the power of propaganda and the controlling grip of a dictatorship. Even the Churches, with some individual exceptions, colluded.

It seems strange that much of the rally ground is now used for sport and recreation. Next to the Congress Hall is a funfair. There are boats on the lake and cafés. Life moves on. The wounds of history have to be healed.

Straight after this I visited the courtroom where the Nuremberg Trials were conducted. For me after a reminder of the horrors committed by the National Socialist regime here was a return to sanity and hope. Here for the first time a regime and its leaders were held to account in an international court of law. The way was set for the International Court of Justice and other such bodies.

By the Germanic National Museum in the city centre is a series of thirty large white concrete columns. Each has the wording of one of the articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in German and another different language. This is the message both for the present and the future.

None of all this is explicitly religious and I saw nothing about the Church or religion in the rally ground exhibition. However, for Christians the attainment of true humanity, of freedom from oppression and coercion, and of mutual respect is central to the Good News of God's love and the commandment to love God and our neighbour, whoever that neighbour may be.

Kingsley Boulton
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