
André Rigoyne de Fougereles

Man's honor

André Rigoyne de Fougereles was unable to attend because of the illness of his wife. The following speech was delivered on his behalf. As captain of the Second Shock Battalion of the Free French, he fought mountain SS divisions and "Tiger" tanks in Alsace before being captured. He escaped in April 1941 and continued fighting with the Resistance. De Fougereles, 83, is a reserve colonel and president and founder of the European Confederation of War Veterans.

In memory of the living and the dead, of all my comrades who died for freedom, in memory of my brother, a Resistance fighter who, as he died tortured by the Nazis, forgave Germany and said a prayer for her, I have come to tell you today that we must struggle with all our might to prevent blood from flowing once again in Europe and to crush all ideologies of blood, soil, and race. We must resist once again, if we are to defend the essential values of our common civilization. We must resist demoralization and defend the cause of man. Man is the absolute value of our civilization, but, having lost consciousness of this fact, he is once again in danger of destroying himself. For an unconscious man becomes an absolute weapon against himself, and at the same time his own victim, an absolute victim.

To escape this double misfortune of victim and torturer, man must rise above himself. If he is educated, trained, if the laws of the universe have been explained to him, he becomes conscious of his universal character and value. He works for the common good, and the killing stops among fellow men. But if he loses his conscience, he becomes evil, the absolute weapon of evil. That is what the Nazis were, the spirit of destruction of man, his values and his own mind.

During the 1930s, I witnessed the downfall of man. The crisis struck, bringing exclusion and fear with it. Unemployment grew. Violence, hatred and egoism spread. The cult of money and possessions destroyed the being and his soul. The stored-up resentment and hatred could only lead to war. Nazism, an implacable machine of destruction, was its extreme form.

With the sleep of reason and the return of exclusion, I see the same monsters reappearing today. They thrive on the present climate of demoralization and demobilization. That is what we must resist against in order to prevent the establishment of conditions for a new war. We must

insist that there is only one human species and defend its values.

We must rebuild, and forgive

We must rebuild the cathedral of Europe and the cathedral of honor, raised upon the foundation of our common human history, raised upon the memory of past sacrifices and discoveries, and on forgiveness for offenses. We should stop talking with self-satisfaction solely about those who did, or who are doing, wrong. We should rather be inspired by those who refused bondage and put man and freedom above the niceties of daily life.

We must fight today against the deception and the lies that deform and belittle everything. We should refuse bondage and abasement and be concerned with what is most often forgotten—the soul of man.

An old soldier and disabled in the war, I fought to change Verdun, a place of hatred and bloody ferocity, into a symbol for the Europe to be built of memories and pardons, the symbol of a European cathedral. You must carry this idea on to tomorrow.

To do so, we must create work, reconstruct and rebuild. That means a new Marshall Plan, both for the East and the South, to recreate a common purpose.

But the essential problem today is not the economic crisis, nor the financial crisis, but a spiritual crisis. We must rediscover the honor of man by taking up the values of human civilization, recreating a culture of hope and life. To do so in the past, we needed the commitment and resolution of a few determined men. You, who are here today, have the vocation to be those few and the duty to become so.

At the decisive moment, very little is needed: It is enough to have a handful of men around whom others can rally, seemingly against all hope, but, in fact, at the very beginning of hope. Concerning this value, the most fundamental one of all—hope—allow me to give my own example. In 1940, as a young officer, I had witnessed the downfall of honor; we were not led, we were not determined, we had collapsed. I was sent to a prison camp, where I lost 19 kilos [40 pounds] in a few months. All seemed lost, but I decided to hold on. On April 20, 1941, on Hitler's birthday, I took advantage of the reduced guard to escape. I crossed Germany on foot, alone, ill, like a hunted animal; I fainted 50 times; I ate ivy berries to survive. All seemed lost. And yet, only four years after the debacle and three years after my successful escape, we were marching down the Champs Elysées to commemorate the Liberation.

I can assure you that if someone had described to us in 1940 or '41 the Liberation the way it really did happen later, we wouldn't have believed him. But during that time of disinheritance, we believed in something higher and stronger than any precise earthly hope. We believed in honor and in the rejection of bondage. If I am among you today, it is because I never lost that belief, and I never will.