

## Editorial

### *Heroes of the Resistance*

It is unfortunate that the men and women who fought in the German Resistance movement have not been suitably honored in the international commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the victory in the European theater of war (V-E Day). The role of a resistance fighter under any circumstances demands great courage and determination; but how much greater in the case where one is setting himself or herself in opposition to his own government.

For the French patriot, participating in the underground demanded a very great moral commitment, but the decision to oppose the Nazi occupation in itself would not have been problematic. But for a German patriot, how different the decision to participate in creating the circumstances for the defeat of one's nation in time of war.

It was the moral courage of the members of the German Resistance, and the quiet support of those German citizens who hated the Hitler regime for their efforts, which created the circumstances for the reemergence of Germany as a great nation.

The Nuremberg trials, held at the end of the war, established the principle that there is a higher moral law to which every individual is held accountable. Of course, many moral men and women did not have the moral stature to participate in active resistance, but how can it be that we fail to honor the memory of those who did?

These were not a bunch of foolish followers of Vladimir Lenin, individuals who espoused the communist dictum that the defeat of one's own government was to be desired because it would further the cause of the international communist movement. Nor were they in any way akin to those criminally demented individuals who commit terrorist acts—for whatever perceived motive.

On May 27, 1942, leaders of the German Resistance movement gathered at the Kreisau estate in Silesia, to establish the moral basis upon which they would wage war against the Nazi regime from within Germany. Excerpts from the document which they issued at that time establish their high purpose. Thus, they wrote then:

"We see in *Christianity* the most valuable forces for the religious and moral renewal of the German people, for overcoming hatred and lies, for the reconstruction of the West, for the peaceful association of peoples. . . .

"*Natural law* is the moral ordering principle made known by God in the Creation. No unalterable principle of natural law can be set aside by the legislative power of the state. That holds true for the inviolability of life—excepting punishment, self-defense, and help to those in distress—of honor, of freedom, and of truth, as well as of property. The obligatory force of the laws made by the state stem from their consonance with natural law."

It is important to note that the fact that these men and women looked to Christian principles upon which to base their action, did not reflect on their part a previous commitment to a religious way of life. On the contrary, by and large they were recruited from an intelligentsia which considered itself to be liberals. Some had been Social Democrats, some were trade unionists, and some even were members of the landed aristocracy. They were united not by their past lives, but by their opposition to the Nazis.

The Protestant religious leader Dietrich Bonhoeffer played an exceptional role in shaping the movement—we might say in expressing its Christian conscience. In contrast to the existentialist movement, he posed the Christian necessity to actively oppose evil. Thus, he wrote about the need for "civil courage," to perform the "responsible deed" in "obedient" and "absolute adherence to God."

It was not possible for a good person to live a moral life by ignoring the evil around him; therefore, he said: "The Word of God is to be spoken in such a way, that it transforms and renews the world below."

The need for a Resistance movement to oppose fascism is unfortunately still with us, as the example of the brave men and women in Bosnia makes clear. We should honor the memory of the Germans who fought Hitler, in the best way possible: by dedicating our lives as they did theirs, to once and for all defeating the forces who would impose fascist horror upon the world.