

Doing good by resisting evil

“It has been our misfortune to have the wrong religion. Why didn’t we get the religion of the Japanese, who regard sacrifice for the Fatherland as the highest good? The Mohammedan religion would have been much more compatible to us than Christianity. Why did it have to be Christianity with its meekness and flabbiness?”

Those words were spoken in 1933, by Adolf Hitler.

I have to confess, that in my decades of writing for the Review, I have never before begun a column with a quote by Hitler. I found it in a biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer by Eric Metaxas. Bonhoeffer was the Lutheran pastor and theologian who opposed Hitler, publicly and privately, from the day Hitler came to power. His reward for opposing the Nazis was that he was hanged.

Ironically, Bonhoeffer was executed just two weeks before the allies claimed victory in liberating Germany and the rest of Europe from the Nazis. A further irony is that Bonhoeffer was hanged just three weeks before Hitler took his own life.

Bonhoeffer (pictured, right) died at the age of 39. What gave this young man the courage to stand up against a force of evil, when so many others were intimidated into silence? The answer, put simply, is that Bonhoeffer had a faith that was neither meek nor flabby. He had a faith in God that was so profound that you could almost say that he had the faith of God. With the courage of Jesus, who died that we might live, Bonhoeffer was willing to die to save the lives of others.

He modeled the power of Christianity among the Allies, in that they had the strength to resist the evil of the Nazis, and, then, after the war, the compassion to rebuild what the Nazis had destroyed. The strength to resist evil and the power to do good can sum up the moral behavior of Christians.

In a letter to his fiancée, Maria von Wedemeyer, Bonhoeffer wrote: “God has seen to it that the human heart is stronger than any power on earth.”

Their courtship was less than romantic, since her last 17 visits to Bonhoeffer were in his Gestapo prison cell. And, yet, we can’t underestimate her influence on him. Her

love was unconditional. Her letters were beautifully encouraging.

Typically for my column in the May issue of the Review, I write about Mary, the Mother of God. May is her month. People often ask about Catholics' devotion to Mary, and I think Maria's love for Dietrich helps us to understand this. Mary stayed with her son all the way to the cross. Maria stayed faithful to Dietrich to his death. Mary reminds us of the power of the feminine to transform the world.

And now a final quote from Bonhoeffer: "Battles are won, not with weapons, but with God. They are won when the way leads to the cross."