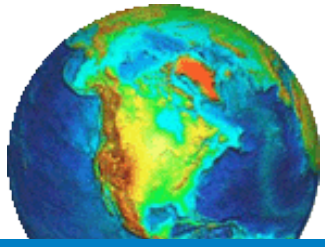


# Resolutions To Action

LCWR Global Concerns Committee

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# RESISTANCE

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## Experience

Resistance as a response to injustice and social sin has received a surprising signal boost in 2017. From protests against police brutality and executive orders, to creative displays at marches for women's rights or climate justice, or even as a trending hashtag on social media, resistance is suddenly on the radar of the body politic.

We do well to remember however that resistance is not a new creation, but rather is at the root of our Christian experience. Christian resistance to evil has always taken root within a particular social context and as such requires navigating a web of complex social, political, and economic relationships.

This complex web of relationships certainly faced the ordinary Christians who chose to resist the extreme social sin of the Nazi Holocaust during the last century. These Christians faced evil by acting from within their own spheres of influence, frequently paying with their own lives. Many Germans of course supported Adolf Hitler and his regime when they assumed power, while others chose a position on the sidelines. What is less well known is the story of the thousands of ordinary citizens arrested or executed for acts of resistance: 300,000 German political resisters were in prison by 1939; 5,000 active resisters were executed; and 15,000 members of the military were killed for desertion or other actions deemed subversive. Beyond these numbers, still other ordinary citizens were able to carry out meaningful acts of resistance protecting the life and dignity of neighbors,

## Social Analysis

As we discern how to resist the social sin and injustice of our time, it is worth considering what enabled thousands of ordinary people to counter the dehumanization of the Nazi regime through acts of resistance to extreme social sin in their daily lives. Political psychologist Kristine Renwick Monroe, in her book *Ethics in an Age of Terror and Genocide: Identity and Moral Choice* (Princeton University Press, 2012), offers a critical insight.

Monroe analyzed extensive interviews with rescuers/resisters, bystanders, and Nazi supporters to examine their diverse responses to genocide. She concludes that in all cases, moral identity constrained the response to evil. In other words, one's identity—how one sees

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oneself in relation to self, other, world, and agency—radically influences one's ethical response and actions. Monroe proposes thinking of identity as providing a menu of moral choice. Just like pizza is not an option at a Japanese restaurant, certain moral actions are not on the menu depending on your moral identity.

Monroe found that bystanders were led to inaction by their self-identity as weak and feeling that they had little control over the situation. Their common response was, "But what could I do? I was one person alone against the Nazis." Supporters of the Nazi regime, paradoxically, saw themselves as victims whose well-being was under threat. They were willing to strike preemptively at target groups out of a perceived need for self-preservation. They also saw themselves as being influenced by forces beyond their control.

In contrast, members of the rescuer/resister group saw themselves as connected with everyone and able to effect change. Monroe discovered that they were the only group who had integrated the value of human life into their world view. She concludes that moral identity is the force that moves us beyond thoughts and feelings to action in the face of injustice and social sin.

## Reflection

Most people are not likely to face the dramatic life and death choices that were an almost everyday occurrence under the Nazi regime. Yet, we do find ourselves enmeshed in a web of unjust economic and social structures that threaten human dignity and the integrity of creation. Most often, this complex web manifests itself in our daily lives and choices in an increasingly globalized social, political, and economic system. It follows then that contemporary Christians seeking to resist social sin must look first at their connections to social sin in their everyday lives.

The Second Vatican Council recognized the moral importance of everyday ordinary actions. Gaudium et Spes (no. 34) claims that human beings, created in God's image, have a mandate to "rule the world in justice and holiness." We do this through "the massive endeavor of humanity," both at the individual and collective level. Yet, as the Council reminds us, this mandate "also applies to everyday activities." Evoking the memory of Jesus, the Council asserts that "the way of love is open to all people and that … this love is to be pursued not just in great matters but above all in the ordinary circumstances of life." Facing the life-threatening and life-diminishing realities of contemporary forms of social sin, by extension this mandate also extends to actions for justice, both in extraordinary and ordinary circumstances.

Dorothee Sölle, a German theologian who was 15 years old when the second world war ended, challenges us to consider the imperative of diverse, active, and deliberate resistance in the face of a society that has become habituated to death. Furthermore, she believes such resistance from within the dominant culture requires a radically mystical consciousness which maintains a connection even to those who think otherwise. No one is to be excluded. There is a synergy here with Monroe's research finding that only the rescuer/resister group was able to include everyone in their worldview, and thus find the strength to advocate for the powerless at great personal risk.

## Action

Our experience and Christian tradition teaches us that resistance to social sin is possible and serves to affirm inherent human dignity and the integrity of creation, even if it does not actually serve, by itself, to end the social sin. As we engage with the movements of resistance emerging in our global and local communities, we have a transformative role to play as women religious rooted in the Gospel. We bring our awareness of interconnection and interdependence which serves to broaden the menu of moral choice from generalized feelings of sorrow or outrage to concrete actions for justice. We are also challenged in our daily lives and by our LCWR assembly resolution to consider the ways that we are enmeshed and complicit in the structures of social sin and to resist whenever possible.

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