

Dr. Heinrich Grueber Honored by Berlin

Translated By
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RULING MAYOR KLAUS SCHUETZ

The Eighth of May, 1970, twenty-five years after the capitulation of National Socialism in Germany — the day that twenty-five years ago had been an end as well as a beginning — this day has consciously been chosen to honor at this hour one of our fellow-citizens.

On the Eighth of May much will be written and said throughout the world, in the East and in the West, and naturally also in Germany — solemnly and not so solemnly, with promises and obligation, frequently pleading and here and there even threatening.

We in Berlin want to be reminded of this day in a special manner. Today we want to honor a fellow-citizen who in times of danger placed his conscience higher than his own freedom. On the Eighth of May, 1970, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the capitulation of National Socialism, Berlin honors Dean Heinrich Grueber, a fighter for justice and brotherhood, a man who stood by the persecuted while others turned their eyes away. We are honoring a man who is unflinching whenever the question of peace and understanding between the nations arises. Berlin honors a fellow-citizen who never let himself be blinded by hate — not even hatred of the evil — because he never fought *against* anything but because he always fought *for* something.

In honoring Heinrich Grueber we are at the same time doing it for the sake of ourselves, for we honor him not only to remember, but we are doing it also to

determine the place of the city of today and we are doing it with a view to the future of all of us.

We realize, however, dear Mrs. Grueber, that he could only go his way because you had been with him. Therefore we want you to know that the honor bestowed today firmly includes you, his wife.

The strength for all this — and here the word seems to fit strangely — his strength came out of a joyful faith, a faith taking seriously life here on earth, and the obligations of life on earth, giving strength to serve the world without submitting to it.

You have tried to bring the community of resistance into the formation of a new Germany. It has failed, probably due to the conflicting interests of social orders and the Great Powers, hitting head-on in the middle of our country and in Berlin. During the decade in which you were the authorized representative of the Evangelical Church in Germany at the Government of the DDR,¹ you have tried to hold the door open and build new bridges and you have tried to safeguard the unity of your Church in Germany. This was not free from misunderstandings and it was not free from criticism either. Many of us — and this we want to admit today — have not approved of this or that word, or this or that action, by Heinrich Grueber. But you have not let this deter you from your chosen way. The fact that your efforts have not been successful does not mean a judgment. You have tried to mediate when all too few were capable of doing so — and even then you have been able to help people, many individuals, not the least being through helping them with medical supplies for which

ELIZABETH MAY served as translator and interpreter for Dr. Grueber, Dean of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in West Berlin and distinguished World Citizen, when he visited in Denver some years ago. The explanatory footnotes have been added by Miss May.

¹ German Democratic Republic.

up to this day gratitude is being expressed to you, and rightly so.

You have worked for reconciliation between Israel and the Germans, between us and our Eastern European neighbors. You have worked for a reconciliation earned by the confession of guilt and the assuming of responsibility for that which has been and for that which now exists. And you have again and again aimed your word against hypocrisy also of those who have failed. We have not forgotten what you said about our own people at the witness stand at the Eichmann trial.

You, Dr. Grueber, have given us an example of the strength of faith, of brotherhood, of steadfastness and of unbendability of conscience. For this we want to thank you in this hour in asking you to accept the Honorary Citizenship of Berlin as of today, the Eighth of May.

DR. HEINRICH GRUEBER

Mr. Ruling Mayor, Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen: May I express to the Senate and to the House of Deputies of Berlin my sincere and heartfelt appreciation of the high honor that has come to me. Also I want to thank all my friends who through their appearance expressed their joy. As I already told you in writing, Mr. Ruling Mayor, the honor has made me particularly happy as it emphasizes my relationship with this City, now lasting over a whole generation.

The honor has been bestowed upon me on a day when our thoughts go back to the time of more than twenty-five years ago. You informed me, Mr. Ruling Mayor, that the decision to grant me the honorary citizenship had been made on April twenty-first. It was the very day when twenty-five years ago the Werewolf had decided to liquidate me before the Red Army marched in. When, however, on April 22nd the Soviet troops marched in, I stood in my congregation in Berlin-Kaulsdorf asking the commanding Soviet officer to allow me together with the local nurse to visit our wounded fellow-citizens, dressing their

wounds. From the resistance which we had considered to be our duty, a new obligation had now arisen, the obligation for reconstruction, both of them merging into each other, but also closely connected since coming from the same fundamental attitude—the concern for our fellow-citizens.

Thinking back of those days, just as it is for many of those who consciously witnessed them, it is above all with a feeling of gratitude also for the new tasks facing us.

There would not have been a discussion as to how these days should be commemorated were it not primarily due to the thankfulness of all of us and a realization that memorial days should first of all be days of reflection, of thinking and thanking. After all, thinking and thanking go together. This kind of thankfulness is felt particularly by those for whom an agonizing time of separation had come to an end. During the years of resistance all those who considered themselves responsible members of their nation, had been submitted to the test of separation, many of them burdened with a sense of guilt and complicity. Also they feared for the future of this nation which was and remained their nation with which guilt and destiny had linked them.

When we heard in the camps that a fanatical, blinded and misled mass of people had shouted: "Yes, we want total war," we realized more than ever that a total war could only end with a total victory or a total defeat.

None of us could think of a total victory of the Nazis without shuddering at the thought that this would even surpass the brutality and cruelty we had lived through and suffered with the outlawed and expelled. In that case the guilt and complicity facing us would take on forms beyond human conception.

On the other hand we knew a total defeat would mean a misery which would make what we had gone through seem like a mere bagatelle. Such unthinkable misery would, however, hit

also the innocent — and mostly the children, the sick and the aged.

After the decision had been made, there was cooperation of all the people willing to help. We started to meet the need; to clear the guilt, and to work for a united and peaceful Germany, hoping to make it a bulwark of peace and not a center of unrest.

It was this hope that caused me to accept the call to work with the first postwar City Council of Berlin; to found and direct the Evangelical Hilfswerk² in Berlin; and as Propst zu Berlin³ to help in the reconstruction of the Evangelical Church as well as in many church and charitable organizations.

Any kind of work on men, and for men, regardless of whether it be a church activity, a political function, educational or welfare work, has to be done with this goal: to make oneself superfluous. Only when this is manifest is the work of eternal value. All egocentric power wants eternity. But all ego-

centric power of an individual, of a collective, and even of a pluralistic society carries within itself the germ of deterioration. The more this urge for power predominates, the faster it leads to self-destruction.

You know the story of the Tower of Babel: "They built and they built, to make a name for themselves, afraid they would have to leave." So we read in the Book of Books. Ladies and Gentlemen, this building of the tower was followed by the Babylonian confusion of languages. So it is written at the beginning of the history of man. So it will remain also in 1970 to the year 2000, yea, to the end of the history of man.

In the years that God still gives me in His Grace, I would like to continue to live and work as a citizen of Berlin, as "Polites" in this "Polis."⁴

By gratitude called into service, a service again leading into gratitude. In this gratitude and service I know myself to be in solidarity with you.

² Relief Agency.

³ Dean of Berlin.

⁴ I.e., as an adherer to the Constitution of this City.

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