

Michael Bouterse
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Dear Sophie Scholl,

I read your book, except you didn't write a book at all. You just wrote. Lived and wrote it all down, all the history of the world etched on each of those letters, each of those diary entries that you penned, never knowing, never expecting that God would snake them down through the sluggish, tired decades into my quiet hands, sixty-five years after you met the Reich's guillotine blade.

Yes. I did, of course, know the whole story already before I discovered your book, Sophie Scholl. About a year ago, I found it. I was turning pages in a history book and there was your picture—with that gleam in the eye. I didn't know who you were so I began to read. Began to read that the Nazis came. That they screamed "*Deutschland, erwache!*" but only you were the only German awake. So you, your brother Hans, and his student friends formed a small circle of resistance. Called it the White Rose. That the leaflets were written, thousands disseminated, and millions of Germans called to stand up against Hitler. The Gestapo alerted. The act detected, the handcuffs fastened, the verdict read. The blade raised. The blade whizzing down.

I didn't want to read anymore after that.

Then one day, I found your book with all of the letters and diary entries in it. But after I read about half of it I decided to take it with me to the woods. So that I could digest it. There were some parts of it, of course, that I really loved. That you and your resistance friends so passionately loved art, poetry, music, philosophy, nature, and God—that you surrounded yourself with Bach and Goethe and Augustine and Plato and Rilke—were huge joys to me since it proved that there have existed people who love these things as much as I do.

But I must confess that on the whole, reading your book, Sophie Scholl, was a very painful affair. How astoundingly absurd it must seem to you; but to read your letters—these simple, innocuous things wishing Mother a happy birthday, thanking Father for last month's allowance money, reminiscing with best friends Lisa or Fritz about last week's hiking trip—gave me a deep feeling of disquiet, nausea even.

Because they weren't so simple and innocuous. The books and money and the hiking trips were bearable; but every so often a shred of something primeval and barbaric would pierce the curtain through. And I would fall apart. Fritz was serving the *Führer* on the Russian front. Father was imprisoned simply for calling Hitler "the scourge of God." Hans and your siblings were almost found out by the Gestapo. And Goebbels was burning books by the thousands, censoring all the art and poetry and music that you loved.

I guess the nausea came from these, the inability to comprehend that world. How can you and I love that world, Sophie Scholl? It is too evil for God. No, it is more than just the six million Jews. It is that it lost something else, something far more valuable. It is that they crucified God in it. It is that all of your beloved poets are dying in it, that canvasses are burning in it, that music is bleeding in it. Do you know that you are one of those dead poets, Sophie Scholl. Do you know why you were killed? Because you sought after good above all else, in that world where *Mein Kampf* was more gospel than the Bible. So they cut off your head. And that was that.

That was why I took your book with the letters into the woods that day, Sophie Scholl. I went into the woods because I could not bear the world. For it had killed you, the only little good spark.

But maybe, I thought, I could find solace in the words that you left behind. It seemed worth trying. So I sat down beneath a tree, opened your book, and found some.

Perhaps it was the letters written to God. Perhaps the diary entries about being lonely and afraid. But in your memoirs of your short twenty-one years under the shadow of evil, all of those moments of despair became cathartic. "Everything is so beautiful," you wrote, "in spite of all the horrors that exist." "I'm filled with fear," you confessed, "and feel an undivided yearning for him" ---God, that is---"who can relieve me of it" And "I shall cling to the rope God has thrown me even if I can no longer feel it."

Oh, Sophie Scholl, oh, Sophie Scholl.

You saw what no one else could see. You found it! You saw beauty in a world of gas chambers and Auschwitz ovens. You saw God in a world of Hitler and Himmler. Until that very last moment, Sophie Scholl, you stood up for what was good because you found it in what was evil. How can I even describe how much I love you for that.

I close with a picture, the one at the very beginning of your book. It is a picture of you, Sophie Scholl, standing against a tree. Your back is to it, your arms wrapped around it, your head bent slightly upward toward the sky. But it is your face, Sophie Scholl, your face grimacing or laughing, I can't decide. It is your face grimacing with utter pain at all the evil in the world but somehow smiling with joy at the same time. Smiling because good endures. Smiling because they have driven God from the Earth but we have sheltered Him underground. Smiling because deep within your soul you know that the world that slays you is not beyond saving, and that we sinners can win redemption still.

Thank you for always reminding me of this.

With the utmost sincerity,

Michael Bouterse