

VINTAGE

Saints & Sinners

Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable. Even a superficial look at history reveals that no social advance rolls in on the wheels of inevitability. Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle: the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals...Life's most persistent and urgent question is, "What are you doing for others?" Cowardice asks the question, "Is it safe?" Expediency asks the question "Is it popular?" But conscience asks the question, "Is it right?" -
--Martin Luther King, Jr.



Sophie Scholl (1921-1943) & Hans Scholl (1918-1943) of the White Rose

"Sometimes I wish I could yell, 'My name is Sophie Scholl! Remember that!'"

Hans & Sophie's sister Inge recalls: For Sophie, religion meant an intensive search for the meaning of her life, and for the meaning and purpose of history...Like any adolescent...you question the child's faith you grew up with, and you approach issues by reasoning...You discover freedom, but you also discover doubt. That is why many people end up abandoning the search. With a sigh of relief they leave religion behind, and surrender to the ways society says they ought to believe. At this very point, Sophie renewed her reflections and her searching. The way society wanted her to behave had become too suspect. But what was it that life wanted her to do? She sensed that God was very much relevant to her freedom, that in fact he was challenging it. That freedom became more and more meaningful to her. In those years of total bondage, questioning about God opened her eyes to the surrounding world. There was no innermost preoccupation for her that would have allowed her to withdraw into her private soul to survive the catastrophe of the Third Reich and its war. The smallest step taken in daily life required a decision for freedom & permitted no retreat, no matter how tempting.

Sophie: Isn't it a tremendous enigma and, if we know the reason, almost frightening, that everything is so beautiful? In spite of the terrible things that are going on. A great unknown has burst into my simple enjoyment of things beautiful, a faint vision of their creator, whom the innocent, created things glorify with their beauty. Only man can be ugly. Being endowed with free will, he can seclude himself from the glorification. These days one might often things that man can manage to drown out this song of praise with his roaring cannons, with swearing & blaspheming. Yet—this dawned on me last spring—he cannot. I will try to take the victor's side.

Upon hearing of the arrest of German Communists by the Nazis: Hans Scholl, "Where are the Christians? Should we stand here with empty hands at the end of the war when they ask the question: 'And what did you do?'"

Sophie Scholl, "I want to share the suffering of these days. Sympathy becomes hollow if one feels no pain." "One has to do something—or else be guilty."

1942 LEAFLETS of the White Rose **"We will not be silent. We are your bad conscience. The White Rose will not leave you in peace!"** "We grew up in a state where all free expression of opinion has been suppressed. The Hitler Youth, the SA and the SS have tried to drug us, to revolutionize us and to regiment us in the most promising years of our lives." "Our people stand ready to rebel against the Nazi enslavement of Europe in an impassioned uprising of freedom and honor." "Hitler cannot win the war – He can only prolong it." "In the name of the entire German people we demand from Adolf Hitler the return of our personal freedom."

Sister Inge: Their Christian faith constituted a significant motivation for what they were doing... We had a Christian existentialism, strongly influenced by Soren Kierkegaard... Only when reasoning is at its wit's end, and only then may we believe. Faith starts where reason has reached its limit. The basic Christian attitude immensely helped the White Rose people to stop talking about resistance and start acting. Suddenly they saw one thing clearly. Being against is not enough. We have to do something. There is an enormous stone wall of impossibility, and our job is to discover minute possibilities that we can chip or blast out of the wall. Finding possibilities, even on the smallest scale, was extremely important for my sister Sophie. The passage from the Epistle of James, 'But be ye doers of the word, not hearers only,' was an imperative for her.

Sophie Scholl: The real damage is done by those millions who want to "survive." The honest men who just want to be left in peace. Those who don't want their little lives disturbed by anything bigger than themselves. Those with no sides and no causes... Those who don't like to make waves—or enemies. Those for whom freedom, honor, truth, and principles are only literature. Those who live small, mate small, die small. It's the reductionist approach to life: if you keep it small, you'll keep it under control. If you don't make any noise, the bogeyman won't find you. But it's all an illusion, because they die too, those people who roll up their spirits into tiny little balls so as to be safe. Safe?! From what? Life is always on the edge of death; narrow streets lead to the same place as wide avenues, and a little candle burns itself out just like a flaming torch does. I choose my own way to burn.

Just because so many things are in conflict does not mean that we ourselves should be divided. Yet time and time again one hears it said that since we have been put into a conflicting world, we have to adapt to it. Oddly, this completely unchristian idea is most often espoused by so-called Christians, of all people. How can we expect a righteousness to prevail when there is hardly anyone who will give himself up undividedly to a righteous cause? I've been thinking of a story from the Old Testament: Moses stood all day and all night with outstretched arms, praying to God for victory. And whenever he let down his arms, the enemy prevailed over the children of Israel. Are there still people today who never weary of directing all their thinking and all their energy, single-heartedly, to one cause?

I'm still so remote from God that I don't even sense his presence when I pray. Sometimes when I utter God's name, in fact, I feel like sinking into a void. It isn't a frightening or dizzying sensation, it's nothing at all — and that's far more terrible. But prayer is the only remedy for it, and however many devils scurry around inside me, I shall cling to the rope God has thrown me in Jesus Christ, even if my numb hands can no longer feel it.

ON TRIAL, *Sophie:* "Somebody, after all, had to make a start. What we wrote and said is also believed by many others. They just don't dare express themselves." "I would do everything again, exactly the same way. For it is not I who have the wrong philosophy of life, it is you." "So many people have already died for this regime that it's time someone died against it."

EXECUTION *Sophie's cell mate:* All that night the light was kept on, and every half hour an officer looked in... How these people lacked any understanding of your deep piety, your trust in God! For me the night was endless, while you, as before, were fast asleep. You slept deeply. How I admired you! All those hours of interrogation had done nothing to your calm, relaxed manner. Your unshakeable, deep faith gave you strength to sacrifice yourself for others.

Sophie on her last day: "Such a glorious, sunny day, and I must go. But how many must die on the battlefields, how many promising young men... What will my death matter if because of our actions thousands of people will be awakened and stirred to action! Surely there will be a revolt among the students."

Hans with his parents: "I have no hatred. I have put everything, everything behind me."

Sophie's mother: "Remember Sophie: Jesus." *Sophie:* "Yes—but you must remember, too."

Hans's last words: "Long live freedom!"

Sophie Scholl: The Final Days, directed by Marc Rothmund, 2005 Oscar nominee for Best Foreign Language Film