

To A Jewish Friend

BY DOROTHY THOMPSON

MY DEAR Friend: I could find no words when we spoke on the telephone this morning. Should I merely add one more expression of revulsion, disgust and grief? And would you listen to it, in any case, through all the bitterness that you feel? I hear in my ears your cry: "What will become of my child if this goes on?"

You and I belong to one civilization. We have read the same books, admired the same minds, believed in the same virtues and practiced them according to our limitations. We both love freedom and we both love peace.

When I read the papers this morning I remembered the words of one of your great prophets, Isaiah, which we, who call ourselves Christians, hold prophetic of the coming of the Savior. You will remember the words:

"Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrow: yet we did esteem him stricken of God and afflicted."

"But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him: and with his stripes we are healed."

I thought of the present "peace." The chastisement of it is upon your race today, wounded and bruised for all our iniquities, but I do not think that by your stripes we shall be healed.

It is perhaps hard for you to believe that the same cry that you uttered was in my heart, too. "What will become of my child?" You fear that this mob-madness will spread, and I share your fear. The example is attractive for those who seek a scapegoat for their own personal, national and social frustrations. But, if it does, what will become of my child, as well as yours?

Would you prefer your child to be brought up to be a persecutor to being brought up to be persecuted? Would you like him to be taught to burn, and beat, and steal? Would you like him to preen himself on his fair hair as sufficient justification for his existence and his actions? Would you like him to be trained in prejudice and brutality and violence? You would not, and as you seek to protect your child, so I seek to protect mine, and we are, as we always were, on the same side, standing for the same things, and my position is no more "altruistic" than yours.

My passion, like yours, is for those few principles of civilization that have lifted people through the ages to the precarious dignity which gives them the right to call themselves "human." Among them none is greater than the concept that the individual must be judged according to his own individual actions and rewarded or punished by the law and society according to them. That alone offers the hope that this miserable race may one day justify its claims to be a little higher than other animals.

If we lose that, we have let loose the beast, and it is not only your race that will perish—it is mine, too, and the one to which we all belong—the race of men.

You said, "I feel debased, degraded." But I cannot share that conception of honor. No one is debased by what is done to him. He is debased only by his own actions, and if we are to put this question on racial grounds then I, as what is called an "Aryan" in the idiotic parlance of the day, have more reason for furious protest than you against abasement.

For my people have never appealed to your people in vain in behalf of any of the things that constitute our common heritage of culture. And in all this violence your race has conducted itself with a lack of violence which is unexampled. Its victims for five cruel and despairing years have revolted into violence only twice—once in Switzerland, and the other day when a poor, distracted 17-year-old boy took his "revenge," at the positive risk of his own life and in provable defense of his existence.

And now I read that for a political crime which scores have already expiated with their lives and tens of thousands with their property he, too, may go to the guillotine—against all precedent for actions of this kind.

adding one more brutality—the murder of an hysterical 17-year-old youth.

Your race, my friend, has long eschewed violence, and for that you have been cursed as well, in time of war. But perhaps it is the reason why you have survived longer than any that at present walks the earth.

But I would beg you not to isolate yourself in a fierce and bitter pride, overwhelming as that temptation must be, but to have the courage to continue in the common front with which your life and your actions have allied you—the front of human decency. We shall need for that front all the men and women available, and no one in that front will ask a man's race: The tests will be otherwise, in the person, and in his behavior.

We are both still citizens of a free democracy, in a time when the humane ideas on which all freedom rests are at stake. We are engaged in a great struggle for those ideas, against the forces that would destroy them. That is painful, but it is also a privilege and a challenge. Those concepts can never be destroyed as long as a passionate faith in them is alive in enough hearts. They have not yet been destroyed anywhere—not in Germany, either.

To lose faith in them is to lose faith in any reason for existence, as anything more than a physical organism.

The crisis is not a Jewish crisis. It is a human crisis. The issue is not whether Judaism will survive but whether the common civilization that runs from the Greeks to our own day will survive—that mixture of Graeco-Roman culture, Judaeo-Christian religion and ethics and the fearless mentality of the scientific awakening, which all together we call Western civilization.

And the place to stand and work and fight for its survival is not, for us, in Germany, but is here, in this country, which is so dear to you and me. Protest we must, and will, for the sake of our own self-respect, to let the world know that we are no party to this new crucifixion.

And devise we must, new instruments of offense and defense against the agencies that seek to foment the same mob spirit in our own country. But, again, we must act as Americans, supporting the ideas and practices of our civilization, and not as Jews, or non-Jews, lest the issue be confused.

And so I beg you to regard this horror as not more personal to you than it is to me, and to all the millions of others on this soil, who belong to many races and follow many creeds, but yet are loyal over and above them to the essential principles from which our institutions derive.

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