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Trappist P.O.  
Kentucky.

October 23, 1958.

My Dear Pasternak:

What a great joy it was to receive your two letters. It has given me much food for thought, this bare fact of the communication between us: at a time when our two countries are unable to communicate with one another seriously and sincerely, but spend millions communicating with the moon... No, the great business of our time is this: for one man to find himself in another one who is on the other side of the world. Only by such contacts can there be peace, can the sacredness of life be preserved and developed and the image of God manifest itself in the world.

Since my first letter to you I have obtained and read the book published by Pantheon, and it has been a great and rewarding experience. First of all it has astounded me with the great number of sentences that I myself might have written, and in fact perhaps have written. Just one example at random: I am bringing out a book on sacred art in which one of the theses is practically this "All genuine art resembles and continues the Revelation of St Hohn". This is to me so plain and so obvious that as a result I have seriously questioned the claim of the Renaissance to have produced much genuinely religious art...But enough of the small details.

The book is a world in itself, a sophiological world, a paradise and a hell, in which the great mystical figures of Yurii and Lara stand out as Adam and Eve and though they walk in darkness walk with their hand in the hand of God. The earth they walk upon is sacred because of them. It is the sacred earth of Russia, with its magnificent destiny which remains hidden for it in the plans of God. To me the most overwhelmingly beautiful and ~~most~~ moving passage is the short, tranquil section in the Siberian town where Yurii lying in the other room listens through the open door to the religious conversation of Lara and the other woman. This section is as it were the "eye" of a hurricane-- that calm center of a whirlwind, the emptiness in which is truth, spoken in all its fulness, in quiet voices, by lamplight. But it is hard to pick out any one passage. All through the book great waves of beauty break over the reader like waves of a newly discovered sea. Through you I have gained a great wondering love for the Urals (here I cannot ~~accept~~ accept your repudiation of the earlier books, where I first discovered this.) The train journey to the east is magnificent. The exciting and rich part about the partisans is very interesting. Of course, I find in the book too little of Uncle Nikolai and his ideas-- this is my only complaint and perhaps it is unjust, for his ideas speak in everything that happens.

Am I right in surmising that the ideas in this book run closely parallel to those in Soloviev's Meaning of Love? There is a great similarity. Both works remind us to fight our way out of complacency and realize that all our work remains yet to be done, the work of transformation which is the work of love, and love alone. I need not tell you that I also am one who has tried to learn deeply from Dostoievsky's Grand Inquisitor, and I am passionately convinced that this is the most important of all lessons for our time. It is important here, and there. Equally important everywhere.

Shall I perhaps tell you how I know Lara, where I have met her? It is

a simple enough story but obviously I do not tell it to people-- you are the fourth who knows it, and there seems to be no point in a false discreteness that might restrain me from telling you since it is clear that we have so very much in common.

One night I dreamt that I was sitting with a very young Jewish girl of fourteen or fifteen, and that she suddenly manifested a very deep and pure affection for me and embraced me so that I was moved to the depths of my soul. I learned that her name was "Proverb", which I thought very simple and beautiful. And also I thought: "She is of the race of Saint Anne". I spoke to her of her name, and she did not seem to be proud of it, because it seemed that the other young girls mocked her for it. But I told her that it was a very beautiful name, and there the dream ended. A few days later when I happened to be in a nearby city, which is very rare for us, I was walking alone in the crowded street and suddenly saw that everybody was Proverb and that in all of them shone her extraordinary beauty and purity and shyness, even though they did not know who they were and were perhaps ashamed of their names-- because they were mocked on account of them. And they did not know their real identity as the Child so dear to God who, from before the beginning, was playing in His sight all days, playing in the world.

Thus you are initiated into the scandalous secret of a monk who is in love with a girl, and a Jew at that! One cannot expect much from monks these days. The heroic asceticism of the past is no more.

I was so happy that you liked the best parts of Prometheus, and were able to tell me so. The other day I sent you a folder with some poems which I do not recommend as highly spiritual, but perhaps you might like them as poems. Yet I do not insist on this division between spirituality and art, for I ~~did~~ think that even things that are not patently spiritual if they come from the heart of a spiritual person are spiritual. That is why I do not take you too seriously when you repudiate your earlier writings. True, they have not attained the stature of the latest great work, but they contain many seeds of it. I am deeply moved for instance by the florist's cellar in Safe Conduct which, like everything else in life, is symbolic. You yourself have said it!

I shall try to send you a book of mine, the Sign of Jonas, which is autobiographical and has things in it about the monastic life which might interest you. Perhaps New Directions can send you one or other book of my verse, but my poems are not very good.

So now I bring this letter to a close. It is a joy to write to you, and to hear from you. I continue to keep you in my prayers, and I remember you every day at Mass. Especially I shall say for you one of my Christmas Masses: on that day we have three Masses and one of them may be applied for our own intentions. Usually we have to say Mass for some stranger. But one of my Christmas Masses will be a special present for you. I was going to say a Mass on All Souls Day (Nov. 2) for all your friends who had died especially in all the troubles recounted in the book. I was not able to arrange this, but I will do so some other time, I do not know when. I will try to drop you a line and let you know.

Meanwhile, then, with every blessing, I clasp your hand in warm friendship, my dear Pasternak. May the Most Holy Mother of God obtain for your soul light and peace and strength, and may her Holy Child be your joy and your protection at all times.

Faithfully yours in Christ