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Sept. 11, 1958.

Dear Helen Wolff:

Thank you for your letter of the 5th, sent the same day as the telegram. I was interested to read the Times review and to notice the inability of the reviewer to get through to the real meaning of the book. Of course, reviewers as a rule are in a professional rut and see things, as a matter of fact, in the precise way that Zhivago condemns. We do not realize that even without the pressure of a police state we tend to conform just as blindly and abjectly as people do in Russia. That is why those who will hail the book merely as a condemnation of communism will also have missed the point.

Having finished Zhivago, I reiterate my enthusiastic opinion given when I was in the first chapters. What in the eyes of conventional reviewers might appear to be defects-- certain clumsinesses in the structure, a certain lack of subtlety in the portraiture of some of the characters-- are not defects at all. What the Times reviewer calls "long, solid ~~and~~ rather old fashioned and somewhat stiff" is really a quality that is part and parcel of Pasternak's genius, a sort of primitive freshness and ingenuity which surprised me (he is after all a sophisticated writer if ever there was one). Yet on this large canvas he has something of Douanier Rousseau, and the ~~xxx~~ structure of the book with its picaresque coincidences (which are often too good to be true) has the fascination of something very new and young, and therefore still a bit crude, which is one of the things I was talking about in giving the book a "prophetic" quality.

I definitely intend to write, if I can, a long critical study on Pasternak. His religious view of life and of history rings every possible kind of bell in my heart. I was deeply moved by all these themes, as well as by his poems. If you are in direct contact with him, by the way, you can tell him that the poem Hamlet is one which I understand perfectly. And above all that I fully endorse the interpretation of the typology of the Old Testament, the relation of the Red Sea and the Virgin Birth, and above all his interpretation of it. In this I stand with him with all my heart and soul. It is the very center of my own life and faith, and I think it is to this central, key thought that we must all be faithful in the world of our day, even at the price of life itself.

To me Christianity will remain meaningless unless it is a belief in God-manhood. The center of Christianity is the Incarnation. And that means not only that God "once" became man, but that God now lives in man. And it is this central truth that Pasternak returns to with more and more force, more and more feeling, together with its tremendous consequence, the Resurrection.

Needless to say the tremendous, inexhaustible poetic quality of the book is its most obvious recommendation. The images rush at the reader and refresh him like the waves of an immense sea. There is always something new and splendid, which will make the book something to be read over and over again.

I have written to Pasternak, as I said. I have also sent him a small book. If you happen to learn of someone going to Russia who might see him and bring him a couple of books, I would like to send him something. Meanwhile I hope you will keep me posted if there is any news of him, as I am rather worried about what they might take it into their heads to do to him. I happen to have been given some Masses to say for my own intention (which is rather rare here) and so I am including Pasternak in them along with my own family of novices, and I have asked them all to pray for him. Very sincerely yours in Christ