

TO DOM GABRIEL SORTAIS

JANUARY 26, 1959

. . . Why did I get interested in Pasternak? Out of sheer curiosity? This is what you seem to believe. On the contrary, it seems to me that there is in Pasternak an element that is deeply spiritual and deeply religious. This is no illusion, everyone acknowledges it. Besides, he has written some religious poems which are among the greatest, the most profound, and the most Christian of the century. Good enough.

While nearly everyone believed that Pasternak's revolt was political or literary, the stance that I chose to take in my article was that his revolt was a-political, anti-political and in truth spiritual. Not only spiritual but Christian. In taking such a position I never for an instant had the feeling that I was betraying my Christian or my contemplative vocation. On the contrary, I believe that my vocation as a contemplative writer *demands* this kind of testimony of me. . . .

It does seem to me, I must add, that the voice of a monk might well be the one necessary to point out the religious significance of Pasternak's works. It may be that I am wrong. I am quite willing to accept that. But at any rate I assure you that, in writing about the Christ of Pasternak, I found myself face to face with the Christ whom you accuse me of not loving. . . .

MARCH 2, 1959

. . . I leave the judgment to you, but it seems to me that I have a very serious duty to complete my article on Pasternak and to put the whole truth on paper. And to publish it. It is a question of giving a Christian explanation of Pasternak's witness which is both heroic and Christian. This affair has moved the hearts of everyone, but most profoundly it has touched those who are writers and intellectuals. It is about an event that has happened in the very midst of the spiritual life of our time. To dissociate myself from involvement with this action which is so extraordinary would be for me a betrayal: a betrayal of my particular vocation, a betrayal of Jesus Christ. At least this is the way I feel. . . .

TO DOM JEAN LECLERCQ

NOVEMBER 19, 1959

. . . Now I shall tell you, in confidence, something more interesting and more monastic. I have asked the Congregation of Religious for an exclaustation so as to go to Mexico, and become a hermit near the Benedictine monastery of Cuernavaca. Dom Gregorio [Lemercier] will take me on and encourages me very much. This is really what I have been looking for for a long time. I have good hopes of succeeding with the Congregation, but the Superiors are dead set against this move. . . . Truly, I am who I am and I always have the writer's temperament, but I am not going down there to write, nor to make myself known, but on the contrary to disappear, to find solitude, obscurity, poverty. To withdraw *above all* from the collective falsity and injustice of the U.S. which implicate so much the church of this country and our monastery. . . .

TO DOM GABRIEL SORTAIS

APRIL 29, 1960

. . . The Holy Father [Pope John XXIII] has had sent to me, too, very poor monk that I am, a paternal message to tell me that he approved of a few discreet meetings in the form of colloquia or of informal retreats with some distinguished guests who come here from time to time, and with professors of Protestant theology, writers, etc. These are discreet, rare contacts, but which seem to help these souls to understand the Church, or else if they are Catholic, to deepen their love of God and their Christian faith. I assure you that I am not launching into a new "career" but I still keep the taste and the practice of solitude. But these restricted contacts seem to do good and seem to help me a little, too. Naturally, it is only with Dom James' permission that I make these contacts, and according to his will.

TO MOTHER ANGELA COLLINS, O.C.D. *Mother Angela Collins, O.C.D., served as Prioress at the Louisville Carmel and later founded a Carmel (a convent of Carmelite nuns) in Savannah, Georgia. Merton visited the Carmel in Louisville, and the two became friends.*