



David Kirk, company of st. paul, via giacinto carini 24, rome, italy

Annunciation of Blessed Virgin
March 26, 1962

Dear Father Merton,

Your recent plunge into the work for peace and social justice—with verbal and prayerful protest against the silence of Catholics on the nuclear question—has given me renewed hope, renewed faith in my vocation. I felt very much alone until you, as a priest, put your hand to the plow. Everyday, I read of witnesses for Christ's brotherhood on Freedom Rides and the like; but not one priest has yet to go to jail for our Negro people. My friends in the peace movement bombard me with literature on tiny efforts for disarmament through non-violence; but not one priest who will attempt to mouth the words of the Prince of Peace, and even less a chance of one picking up a picket sign.

I don't mean to imply that the priest is the leader of political revolution. But he is more than the minister of the sacraments; he should be a "minister of restlessness", as Cardinal Suhard says, a man who worries mankind. He should be a witness of Jesus Christ—and for some this should imply a disciplined dissent in witness for a Christian social order; he should be God's prophet, God's propagandist, not remaining deaf to Isaiah's entreaty: "Cry, cease not, lift thy voice like a trumpet, and show thy people their wicked doings, and the house of Jacob their sins". I thank you, Father, for lifting up your voice like a trumpet and pointing the way to Christian sanity in your writings, and for, in a way, lifting up my vocation, showing me the priestly mission in the modern social order.

I'm a member of the Company of St. Paul, a secular institute of pontifical law, a new way of perfection with priest, laymen and laywomen as members, consecrated to permeating secular society and sanctifying it. Like yourself, I'm a convert to the faith, a graduate of Columbia University, etc. I ran all over the lot to find the abundant life and got my feet wet as a layman in social movements: the Catholic Worker in New York, inter-racial work in my native Alabama, Polaris Action, etc. Though only 26, I'm a student at the Beda College in Rome, the seminary for late vocations and converts.

Jim Forrest—who lived across the hall from me when both of us were associated with the C.W. and the like—showed me his correspondence with you. I miss the C.W., the Bowery and all the mad goings on you found with that little Christian cell. (Jim, you may know, is now working full-time with C.N.V.A.).

Do you think, Father Merton, that I can return as a priest who totally commits himself to the work of social justice, to work with people whose values are totally different from mine, to work with the poor and be poor with them? This implies even a willingness to go to jail; and my Superiors assure me that it is perfectly compatible with the vocation. But the good Cardinal in New York may not be so understanding. *(Cuba is an example)*

God's Providence seems to want the Church to become poorer and more of us to belong to the milieu of the poor. Why can't the poor have their Religious? Their priests? We all know that the upper and middle classes have religions with their own kind of mentality, culture and social usages, but what of the poor—those who are badly housed, those who struggle painfully to live—is it not possible that priests can harmonize their lives

with the poor—their housing, dress, food, and above all their hearts and minds. In the Company of St. Paul in the United States, we have a good possibility of doing exactly that. Our one house is in D.C., and the one priest we have cooks three meals a day and works like a horse. Our 20 members are largely veterans of the C.W. movement, and they've already opened three storefronts on the East Side for Puerto Rican youngsters (supporting it by the work of their hands), plus a home for aged prostitutes and unwed mothers. Not like the Religious do; but in a personalist way.

You will forgive me for writing so many thoughts to you. You can imagine my renewed spirit when I discover one in the priesthood who seems to feel as I do. Besides, I'm a little lonely over here, away from the C.W. and all my Christian friends in the States...so I "talk" through letters.

So, mainly I write because I wish encouragement, but, more important, prayers. I know you are very busy and many people write to you, but I hope you can slip me in someplace, at least in prayer.

In Christ Jesus

David Kirk

P.S. I'm also a C.O. Jim Forrest had planned to start an American PAX; but I think this is cancelled now, I'm not certain. If so, later, I should like to start it, or help start it.



David Kurtz
PONTIFICIO COLLEGIO BEDA
VIALE SAN PAOLO, 18
ROMA E.U.R. ITALY

October 18

Dear Father Merton,

Thought I would send you copies of the speech of our Patriarch Maximos and his auxiliary, Bishop Elias, in the Council on the primacy of Rome. These amendments have been accepted by the Fathers. Slowly, they are chopping away the juridical concepts and giving us an instrument for discussion with the Orthodox.

Pray that Maximos can live thru this Council. We need him. He already has ready some 30 speeches on each of the schema, bold corrections -- and they must be delivered...

This is a quick note which I'm sending with a priest-friend, Father Raya of B'ham, who is here and is leaving for the states this week -- it will save me postage.

Father, Merton, I was ordained by the Patriarch to sub-deaconate this month. Deacon next summer, priesthood Christmas 1964. Pray for me: I'm not "fit" at all.

I send you the love and prayers of a brother,

In the Lord, always,

David

January 21, 1963

Dear Father Merton,

I got your packet of material the other day — and I'm really grateful to your passing along these things to me. I especially appreciated the selections from Clement of Alexandria — there's a man for us, not afraid to compete with paganism nor to show the Church her duty to man-in-the-world; have you read his homily on the Rich man according to the Gospel of Mark?

Anyway, I can put to work anything you can send. There is such a spirit of lifelessness here in seminaries. Especially at the North American College, where so many hope to be career boys and thus have to be "practical". Administer the sacraments, build Catholic schools, maintain the system, they say. And this is the sort of food many get in seminary classes — so little talk about the priest as shepherd and teacher, as the man of Sinai, as prophet and witness, as the man who brings unrest, "the minister of restlessness". There really is a fear of the Roman Curia on the one hand. On the other, a lot of students just can't see that there has been a failure of Christian effort in many areas. Of course, I have to be careful — I'm not yet ordained — but little circles of students who want to get to the root of things are developing quietly over the city. At the Beda, we're on a sort of self-development program — all other seminaries in the world strangely are run like monasteries — and my very British rector said, "There's a point in all this — but, for goodness sake, keep quiet".

Even if good Pope John doesn't live, the Council has let in fresh air: the Bishops have seemingly discovered themselves as the Church. One Dutch bishop told me, "From now on, when it is written 'The Holy See says', we will ask if this is the voice of Peter or the Curia". Cardinal Bea told Pope John that if the reform was stopped now by the Curia, there would be a schism on the part of the progressive bishops. Patriarch Maximos IV got up in the Council and told them that they didn't know what was going on in the world and proceeded to read the DAILY NEWSPAPER—with all its problems and misery—to the bishops and asked: what are we doing in the Church to attune ourselves to these problems? On another occasion, he looked straight at Card. Ottaviani and said: "The Holy Office must go! We don't want it. It is not Holy. Nor is it an Office. The 1st Inquisition went. Now the 2nd Inquisition must go". (The Melkite Bishops, Greek Catholics, on the opening day refused to parade their Byzantine episcopal vestments before the world television sets when their Orthodox brethren were put in a box next to the Unitarian observers). It will never be the same after this Council. Two years ago poor old Fr. Lombardi was condemned for just saying a few words about reform — now everybody is saying it, and saying it more frankly, too. The flame has been kindled. The turn has been made.

As for myself, Father Merton, I'm sponsored for the priesthood by Maximos IV, Patriarch of Antioch. It is a personal thing — he knows my vocation, the sort of work I want to do and is helping in this way — thus, I'm not incardinated into any diocese or religious institute until after ordination, leaving me free for the moment to work out a proper path. I will receive Byzantine orders, with permission to work and celebrate in both the Latin and Byzantine rites. Personally, I am more at home under Antioch's jurisdiction than Rome. The spirit is free and open; the Liturgy is expressive, directed toward the layman, in English; the theology, biblical and patristic; the emphasis in the Christian life on the mysteries of faith, not pious devotions; and now, the Church of Antioch (Melkite Rite) is seeking not only to be a bridge between Catholicism and Orthodoxy, but Islam and Christianity, Communism and Christianity.

From exp. for Pope John - I never knew Fr. + his speaking was incardinated, no sentence kindled, breathe with in flexibility.

What two or three of us here have in mind, according to our graces (one of us is an ex-jailbird for refusing to continue to spy on China after he discovered Christ, Im a CO) is a sort of HOUSE OF ENCOUNTER for Catholics, Episcopalians, Orthodox and Protestants, etc. It would involve a sort of groundfloor type of work: personal contact between Christians, getting rid of false notions and tensions, making known to all Eastern and Western christian traditions and diversity of expression and worship, etc. And one main point, following the suggestion of Cardinal Bea, is to use such a place for collaboration of all Christians in areas of common principles: universal disarmament, strengthening the UN, , education, family life, social welfare, dommon works among the poor and the disabled, civil rights and civil liberties, etc — such a place would be perfect for a Fellowship of Reconciliation group (too few Catholics in it), or for a ministerial Freedom Ride (last time — not one Catholic priest — political prudence). Cardinal Cushing has said we could work under him — but Im really interested in Bishop Wright's diocese, but I have no way of presenting all this to him. The Lord will provide though...

Ill ask the Patriarch Maximos to send you a copy of his book The Voice of the Church in the East — really explosive!

Maximos, by the way, is accepting a lot of hermits and worker-priests to his jurisdiction. Fr. Willibrands, OCSO, got permission to start a foundation of hermits on Mt. Tabor; another is starting acc. to the primitive Carmelite rule also in Galilee.

Despite all the forces within the Church who just want to sit on their pious tails, I am full of optimism, Father Merton. After all, the victory has already really been won for us: "I have overcome the world". Whatever the restrictions, whatever the pivots of grace, I will make the best of it, loving without measure, for we're told to "love with your whole heart, your whole soul, your whole strength". So many temptations in this whole business though. I understand now what Brother Charles of Jesus meant when he said he thought it was difficult to be both a priest and a Christian. The only way is to be truly poor — because if you're not, you'll be preaching a glossed-over Christianity, because if you need Mrs. O'Leary's money, you can't tell her frankly to sell her furs and follow Christ...

Anyway, thanks again, I send my love and prayers and greetings of a brother in the Lord,

In Christ,

Dave

David Kirk
Pontifical Beda College
Viale S. Paolo 18
Rome

PS. I sent you a copy of a mimeo letter about the Council. I couldn't be too frank in it — mainly its for friends, lay people, who don't get any news about the discussions in their diocesan press.

PONTIFICAL BEDA COLLEGE
VIALE SAN PAOLO, 18
ROME, ITALY

September 13, 1963

Dear Father Merton,

I am back from the Near East, and want to get you off a note before school starts.

Spent some time with Father Yaacov Willebrands at his Mish-Kan-El (Tabernacle of God) hermitage in Israel. He found a village up on the mountain which was entirely destroyed -- except for an Orthodox church. The Orthodox church will remain Orthodox, but will become Father Yaacov's chapel (churches are no bigger than a room in the East, none like these monsters here). Following Father Monchanin's total adaptive ideas, his community is becoming truly Israeli -- the Byzantine Liturgy offered him a real beginning with its oriental ethos. The Jewish manner of prayer has been adopted, and the Liturgy and Office are in Hebrew. The difficulty is to have Jewish converts join him -- but so far three, two of them sons of rabbis, have made the step. He wants the hermitage to gap several bridges -- and Orthodox may become monks in the community and remain Orthodox. No property whatsoever. The hermit-monks will work out part-time in the vineyards and fields in the area, this way earning their own bread and refusing common property. The chapel will remain the property of the Orthodox Metropolitan of Nazareth!

Father Willebrands told me to give you his prayers. Also, the Sisters of the Annunciation, a wild, radical group which are the female counterpart of Mish-Kan-El!

I spent most of the summer with the Patriarch Maximos. His little residence in the mountains was busy, working for the Council. Maximos doesn't have a Vatican: he has two or three priests helping him, and a nun who does the cooking and that's it. The Patriarch will soon publish a commentary (from the Eastern point of view) on all questions before the Council -- from peace to married clergy. He is also pushing for a real relationship with the Orthodox, who deserve more than some "communicatio in sacris" edict. He also has a wonderful speech ready on Latin casuistry and juridicism. Maximos is much loved in Europe, but I note that American journalists pay no attention to him. Wish Jubilee would do a feature on him.

The Curia is trying to get back at Maximos for his "anti-Roman" positions and have refused to answer his correspondence. He will resign his position as "associate member of the Congregation for the Eastern Church", a mockery in itself.

Thanks for getting Tom Giering into that work-your-way college in Kentucky, or for recommending him. He has many talents, and a loving heart, just needs a bit of settlin'.

Received minor orders this summer, Deaconate next summer. Will be so happy to get back home, to get back to the East Side and some work. You get fat in body, mind and heart sitting through seminary.

Pray for me. Can I help you during the Council? You have only to say. In the meantime, I send you the love and prayers of a brother.

David Kirk

In the Lord,

David

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November 29, 1966

Fr. Thomas Merton ocso
Gethsemani, Kentucky

Dear Father,

We wonder if you would join our committee of advisors for Emmaus House. Our hope is that a number of persons experienced in the work of reconciliation will accept and can be called upon, from time to time, for sounsel on particular questions. We would like to draw from Catholic, Protestant and secular experiences in reconcilia-tion and coalition.

We are seeking a mode of presence in the world that goes beyond boundaries - and at this point we are not certain of our direction. Perhaps the main point is that we are here and we are flexi-ble and open open to things happening in dialogue and in service.

I would be grateful if you could let me know soon.

With many thanks,

In Christ's fellowship,

Dave

Fr. David Kirk

P.S. Dan Benjamin suggested I get in touch with you. What about a poem for our new newsletter?