

Merton and Moscow

by
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It seems to me that the foundation of the Russian Thomas Merton Society in November 1996 was no accident. It was providential because Russia is now passing through a time when the voice of someone like Merton needs to be heard. In the autumn of 1996 I met Donald Allchin in England and he told me he had been praying for Merton to be known in Russia. Slowly but surely this is now happening.

Our inspiration is Dr. Natalia Tranbuy, renowned in Russia for her outstanding translations of CS Lewis, GK Chesterton and John of the Cross. She has been familiar with Merton's writings since the 1960's. Last year, Jim Forest gave some excellent talks in Moscow and referred to Merton, and a small group of us corresponded with him. We had hoped to produce a translation of *The Seven Storey Mountain* but for the moment are focusing on Jim's *Living with Wisdom* which Orbis have given us permission to translate. We have also been in touch with Bob Daggy and have joined ITMS and look forward to our copies of the *Seasonal*.

We are a very small group though among our numbers we now have a Dominican priest and an Orthodox scholar with an interest in inter-faith dialogue. We do feel isolated at times as Merton is practically unknown with no English or Russian versions of his books available. However, I am translating the essay *Contemplation in a World of Action* for one of the Christian journals published in Moscow and we feel that this is a beginning. We have hopes of being able to publish a condensed version of *The Merton Reader* in Russian.

What has fired and inspired me about Merton is a passage from his foreword to the Japanese edition of *The Seven Storey Mountain*:

"Therefore, most honorable reader, it is not as an author that I would speak to you, not as a story teller, not as a philosopher, not as a friend only. I speak to you in some way as your own self. Who can tell what this may mean? I myself do not know. But if you listen, things will be said that are perhaps not written in this book. And this will be due not to me, but to One who lives and speaks in both."

We can hardly expect that Merton will become as popular in Russia as he is in the English speaking world where he is considered, as Donald Allchin indicated in an article in *Sobernost*, as the "best known monastic writer since the Reformation." Yet we look forward with expectation to this meeting of the mind and heart and writings of Merton. Merton will help those in Russia, who seek a faith, to find it. To those who have a faith he will enable to explore a deeper sense of the spiritual and to become closer to a Christ in whom all divisions and contradictions, be they personal, denominational or inter-religious, are overcome.

