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MERTON AND ECOLOGY OF HUMAN SPIRIT*

Introduction

When I was looking for available data on the Internet, I conducted a web search on alltheweb.com, my query was to collect all available texts including the phrase 'Thomas Merton'. After some time I obtained information that the total exceeds 154.000 items. This impressive number is also an opportunity to reflect on our modern cultural context. It shows the great intellectual influence of Merton's writings. However, it also shows the great information turmoil, typical of our times. In effect, the Internet lists profound texts, comprising reflections on spiritual condition of our times appearing next to useless pieces of information about a publisher of Merton's writings, who has just published the most up-to-date treatise on the economic conditioning of playing table tennis. Excess of superfluous information doesn't bring us any closer to the essential content of Merton's heritage.

I go back to times when, during my seminary studies, we were trying to get to know this heritage using drastically different technical means. When I went to seminary, I had already read *The Seven Storey Mountain* and *The Sign of Jonas*. I think I was in my third year when *Znak* published *No Man Is an Island* in Polish translation. Back in those times the Bureau for Religious Affairs used to set a limit for paper supplied to Catholic publishing houses. Several thousand copies which were printed within this limit

* Transl. by Anna Muranty.

were sold in a matter of few weeks. The book, with its profound analysis of spiritual resources, then unnoticed in official philosophy, was a tremendous success. Those who became interested in it a little later were merely informed that the book was out of print. I recall a triumphant face of a friend, who, despite that, one day came to the Seminary with one additional copy of Merton's work. It was a typewritten version, made on copying paper, unknown to the present generation. We found out that an employee of one of the Krakow offices was so fascinated by a borrowed copy of Merton's book that for several weeks she stayed at work after office hours to type-write it in seven or eight copies.

I recall similar situations, not without certain nostalgia, thinking about a number of valuable works of Merton, which are currently available to Polish readers, and yet frequently are unnoticed by them, because the information turmoil directs their attention to other publications. Yet typical for Merton's combination of spirituality, poetry, opening to God's transcendence and a culture of great challenges make his works modern classics, in which we find consistent caring about ecology of human spirit. All those who strive to protect the natural environment of people find in his writings invariably living answers to fundamental questions concerning our way to holiness or the sense of harmony and meaning in a world dominated by the shriek of advertising.

When, seven years before his death, Merton was writing an introduction to the anthology *A Thomas Merton Reader*, he concluded with the following words: "... countless readers have given me a gift of friendship and of love which is to me precious beyond estimation. These readers sometimes write to me, and generally I am not able to reply. But here at least let me assure them of my gratitude, my love, and my prayers. They are in my silence, in my Mass and in my solitude. I hope we will be together in Paradise".¹ I would like to thank the organisers of this session for their attempts to give us a foretaste of paradise by directing our attention to this classic of spirituality, whose output takes into consideration the most sensitive areas of modern culture. I hope that his momentous writings will inspire our discussion, our reflections, and our silence. Let the communion of spirit that unites us become a contribution to this caring about the ecology of man, without which our civilisation might easily transform us into world of one-dimensional consumers.

¹ *A Thomas Merton Reader*, ed. Thomas P. McDonnell, New York: Image Books Doubleday, 1989, p. 18. From now on this anthology will be abbreviated to *TMR*.