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ABBEY OF GETHSEMANI  
TRAPPIST, KENTUCKY

July 12, 1964

Dear Rafael Squirru:

Many thanks for your little book on the "New Man" I have read it carefully and with pleasure and want to congratulate you on it. I especially liked the essays on the poet and on the role of the intellectual. It seems to me that this little book represents a vitally important trend of thought, and you know of course how much I agree with it. The thinking of the public, especially in the "great powers", seems to me to be hallucinated by the unreal concept of what one might call an Atlantic gigantism (except that it would have to include Russia and even China). The belief that the only kind of thinking that is real and meaningful is that which is associated with European and North American thought patterns, extending this also to Chinese Marxism. But this celebration leaves out most of the human race, most of its needs, most of its aspirations. It has proved itself completely incapable of really solving the problems of man and is now increasingly incapable even of defining them.

It might seem scandalous for me, a priest of the Catholic Church, to admit such things, as it is naturally assumed that Catholicism is simply one aspect of this whole European pattern of thought. Unfortunately that is true of the Catholic "ideology" in its European dress. But there is more to Christian faith than this limited ideology and true Catholicism, (which has yet to rediscover itself in our age, I think) is indeed universal. Where there has been a failure has been precisely in the imposition of the limited, (the European) as "Catholic" or universal. I think the Council is partly beginning to be aware of this, but only partly. It is very dim.

Meanwhile the great task for the Catholic and for the humanist and indeed the honest man in this hemisphere is to work for a mutual understanding and spiritual communication between the north and the south. A tremendous task, so neglected and so misunderstood that it seems at times impossible. Fortunately books like your and articles like some of those in Americas are there to give one hope. And Miguel Grinberg with his fantastic movement. And the voices of the Latin American poets ~~and~~ and artists.

This is just to let you know what you already know: that I count myself as one who is dedicated to this task, within the limits of my own capacity and of my situation here.

It is unfortunate that I cannot travel. Perhaps someday by some miracle I will be able to go to Latin America. I dearly hope so, though I do not see how it will ever be possible. But in any case there are many "new men" coming to this country. If there is anyone who ought especially to come here, I hope you will suggest it, and let me know. It is always very important that I should know beforehand and make arrangements if anyone wants to see me, otherwise if they just come down and ask the answer is negative. I have to arrange everything myself and ask the necessary permissions myself, otherwise it does not work.

Very best wishes to you, and congratulations on the good work you are doing at the Pan American Union.

in Cordial Friendship,

Thomas Merton