Listening and Dialoguing with the World

A Philosophical and Theological-Spiritual Vision

Ivan Platovnjak SJ

Tone Svetelj

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UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA | TEOF Faculty of Theology

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Dedicated to all those

who not only watch and listen,

but also desire to see and hear

people, the world, and God!

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Introduction

This monograph focuses on how to engage in dialogue with a secular world that both craves for and rejects the dimensions of the transcendent. Of course, there are many more open questions than the chapters in this book. Silence and listening, anatheism, transhumanism, resilience, the search for hope, the contemplative attitude towards the world, and technology in search of immortality are just some of the aspects that confront those who believe in God, non-believers, and doubters of the transcendent. The choice of these themes is partly dictated by the academic projects in which the authors have been actively involved in recent years. For a more comprehensive picture of the challenges of our time, we should include environmental issues, new forms of racism, globalization as a modern form of colonialism, the spiritualization of artificial intelligence, and the search for a synthesis between science and religion. These challenges undoubtedly encourage us to think more deeply and act differently, and we will keep them in our reflections in the near future.

The challenges of our time are in many ways novel, precipitated by the social, political, cultural, and religious circumstances in which we live. As such, they require us to think in new ways, all the while in connection to the

accumulated wisdom of our cultures and traditions. We live in a globalized world that forces us, quite literally, to cooperate more and be more aware of our interdependence and interconnectedness. To this mix, we can add the technological development that conditions our thinking and, at the same time, opens up new possibilities for thinking and working together. The awareness of our inevitable dependence on nature has probably never been more underscored than it is today. The process of globalization, the inevitability of cooperation and increased interdependence also open historical wounds in individuals and nations, the vectors of cultural values and religious traditions. Our entire perception of the present is burdened by the inherited past, which leads us to our current ways of thinking and of creating the future.

Despite the distinctness of human history development, facing the current challenges should not become a hard nut to crack for Christian thinkers in their efforts to communicate the newness and beauty of Christianity to this world. This challenge in itself is nothing new in our time. From the very birth of Christianity, the apostles faced the question of how to proclaim the resurrection message of Christ in a way that would be acceptable to seekers of the divine, regardless of their languages or their descent from Jewish, Greek, or Roman culture. In proclaiming the good news, the apostles of 2000 years ago and the scholars of Christianity today use language that is understandable to the world. In doing so, they have been repeatedly exposed to temptations on two levels. First, to make the Gospel message so clear, well-defined, and self-evident that there is no room for doubt, dialogue, or reflection. Second, the temptation to immerse oneself in the world to the extent that the Good News becomes diluted by a secular mentality.

Finding the right balance between adapting to a secular mindset and keeping fresh the originality of Christianity, thus remains a task for every generation, from the disciples of Jesus to the Christians of the 21st century. The Church Fathers first explained the novelty of Jesus' message in small Christian communities. Later, monasteries became the focal points of

Christianity, functioning as spiritual and cultural centers for entire nations. With the establishment of universities beginning in the 11th century, the means of Bible transmission and interpretation changed dramatically, and with it, the approach of scholars to the deepest questions of human existence. Guttenberg's invention of printing, taking humans' insatiable desire for knowledge to new heights, represents a colossal development. How to communicate the message of the Bible in an environment overshadowed by the Internet and artificial intelligence is becoming a unique challenge of our time for academics and individuals who want to stay engaged with Christian thought alike.

Believers and non-believers are repeatedly confronted with the question of how to reach the fullness of life. The answers are not easy for either. Both sides are troubled by the thought that they are unable to fully grasp and explain the meaning of life to which they aspire. There is always something in the depths of every human that remains unfulfilled and yearns for more. This restlessness accompanies us at every step, regardless of our life circumstances. For example, both married and unmarried people find marriage or unmarried life as something that cannot completely satisfy them. It is an illusion to expect that one single person will entirely satisfy all our expectations. Neither will staying in a monastery calm the restlessness of the monks' hearts. Lack of fulfillment is also experienced by those constantly investing in personal careers, promotions, work, or other search for success, or by those seeking answers in indulging in pleasures. Momentary successes, excitements, or temporary gratifications cannot satisfy the restlessness of the human heart, which longs for something about the visible and immediate reality. The difference between believers and non-believers stays in the way of how they seek the ultimate answer for their inner dissatisfaction. "The unbeliever wants to be the kind of person for whom this life is fully satisfying, in which all of him can rejoice, in which his whole sense of fullness can find an adequate object /.../ for believers,

the account of the place of fullness requires reference to God, that is, to something beyond human life and/or nature." (Taylor 2007, 7–8) In other words, believers and non-believers are alike in that they have to justify the correctness of their convictions repeatedly and yet simultaneously accept that their current understanding is incomplete.

Of course, it would be exceedingly naive to simply identify believers with Christians or non-believers with non-Christians. Being a Christian does not mean that all of their existential answers are solved and that their search for meaning is no longer necessary. The difference is that believing Christians seek the fullness of life in a relationship with God, who is the only One who can satisfy the restlessness of their heart. "Our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee" as St. Augustine states at the beginning of Confessions. And this is written by someone who had spent many years of his life longing for fame and success and indulging in every possible carnal pleasure.

1. Towards an Integrated and Holistic Perception of Reality

We live in exciting times when science has expanded our horizons and exposed human imagination to new possibilities. With the massive growth of knowledge in the last decades, called the age of computers of information, we are exposed to the process of fragmentation and specialization of knowledge. The process of integrating knowledge and information into a new meaningful whole is becoming an increasing challenge for the human intellect in the 21st century. It is a challenge faced by academics and scientists who are experts in their fields, and also by ordinary people who are struggling to preserve their identity, culture, beliefs, values, or whatever they find meaningful, in a world of globalization.

A large amount of new factual information allows us to answer the question "why" but does not provide us an answer to the question "to what end"? Increasingly, powerful computers and artificial intelligence may organize the various theories and all knowledge into some new acceptable hierarchy, but that does not mean they also uncover wisdom. "Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?" T.S. Eliot asks at the beginning of his play The Rock (Eliot 1934, 8).

How to transform raw information into useful and structured knowledge remains a great challenge, calling for a unity of knowledge, the reconciliation of the universal validity of reason, and an understanding of the diversity of social and cultural experiences. Such unity, reconciliation, and understanding cannot be imposed but must be discovered through a patient process of listening and hearing.

The authors of this book present here their reflections, rooted in listening and thinking about the challenges of our time and world from a philosophical and theological-spiritual perspective. The first part of each chapter details the philosophical frames of thought on a particular challenge and is presented in a way that sheds some light on the historical background needed for a better understanding of the challenge. In the second part of each chapter, the Christian perspective is added, integrating the theological thought with the spiritual reflection.

The authors posit as a condition for an integrated and holistic perception of reality, the complementary relationship between the philosophical and theological-spiritual ways of thinking. Fruitful philosophical and theological-spiritual examinations must complete each other through a critical dialogue leading to an integrative perception of reality. While following the strict methodological rules within the domain of a specific science is an indispensable principle in scientific research, it cannot become an end in itself. Such an approach becomes an obstacle in

our attempt to present an integrative perception of human existence. The search for wisdom and answers to existential questions, as understood by the ancient Greek thinkers, is so complex and demanding that it cannot be trapped in any one-sided interpretation. The ancient Greek thinkers, as well as the Church Fathers of the first millennium of Christianity, did not need to grapple with the division between philosophy and theology, since the purpose of both is to shape human existence to the highest principles that reason and faith can reach. That division between philosophy and theology began to appear with the appearance of the first universities in Europe and became almost unbridgeable.

As mentioned earlier, there are many more challenges and concerns in our time than the ones presented in this book. Each challenge has something positive in it and compels us to seek answers in a deeper way. The beauty and the burden of challenges is that they do not let us simply imitate past patterns of thinking and acting. Even when we are confronted with something completely new, such as the emergence of artificial intelligence in our time, the past experiences and solutions can enrich our reflection. For example, the invention of the printing press in the 15th century encouraged us in our confrontation with artificial intelligence to seek new thought and action patterns. Similarly, different types of atheism, with its more or less categorical rejection of transcendence, are nothing new in our time. History is a storeroom of numerous struggles of human beings open or resistant to the Divine call. Postmodern atheism should be seen as an invitation and opportunity for creation of a more original thinking. Atheists' rejection of past forms of expressing or perceiving transcendental reality is a contemporaneous opening up space for something fresh, new, and more meaningful, and it should not be burdened by the vulnerability and imperfection retained in our historical memory. It may sound paradoxical that the challenge and beauty of atheism is precisely in creating a space in which God self-reveals even more as God.

2. Synopsis

In this spirit, the authors of these chapters reflect on the challenges of our world in the hope of opening the door to a new way of thinking and living. This thinking is not intended to become categorical or a monologue based on insisting on one's own understanding, ideas, solutions, apologias, or even on convincing others that they must accept our understanding in any way, if not peacefully, then by force. Nor is the new thinking based on uncritically accepting reflections and answers of others, or on a blind application of their solutions as the right ones. The purpose of listening is to grasp as deeply and respectfully as possible what the other is telling us, and then, in a spirit of dialogue, to seek a response integrating different ways of perceiving reality. When the participants in the dialogue become more human in the noblest sense of the word, i.e., capable of compassionate and respectful co-existence and of working together for the common good, their reflections will also be correct. Such listening and dialogue begin with respect for the inner stillness that enables us to illuminate the hardships and challenges of today, as well as the call of God that addresses us in our life circumstances. This is also the main theme of the first chapter of this book.

The second chapter introduces the question of anatheism, defined as an attempt to reimagine God's presence in our time. After the era of atheism, with its triumphalist slogan "God is dead", we are entering the era of anatheism, which Richard Kearny characterizes as a time of rediscovery of God. Historically, a period of great certainty in faith and the understanding of religious truth is followed by a period permeated by the limitations of modern secular thinking. Their common denominator is the inability to listen to and understand the modern human being in his or her doubts and search for a deeper meaning. Christianity offers an answer with discipleship, the personal willingness to learn to be open to the eternal newness of God and His revelation.

The third chapter focuses on the phenomenon of transhumanism, which reopens the enduring question of the essence of humans and the meaning of their corporeality. The rapid development of modern technology brings this question further into focus by transcending the biological conditions of human life, and by creating a new global mind with a deepened consciousness. Despite all the advancements introduced, technology did not bring along a more integrated view of human bodily existence. As in the past, modern humans still feel trapped in their bodies, inevitably aging day after day to follow the logic of death. By looking at the transhumanist's truncated view on human life, Christianity offers a more integrated view of human life, emanating from the contemplation on the life of Jesus Christ. Graces and powers necessary for the fullness of life on earth and for entering into eternal life are revealed in the human biological and bodily limitations.

Chapter four raises the question of the tension between the mortality of the human body and the soul's desire to attain immortality. The developments in medicine, technology, and artificial intelligence intensify this inner tension while reinforcing the sense of being entrapped in a mortal body. The fear of inevitable death accelerates human efforts and investments in technological developments, as a reflection of the human desire for immortality. Christian thinking goes beyond the fear of death by showing that not only the soul but also the body is oriented towards God. Insofar as humans are able to accept bodily death as part of their life in love, that is, in God, they will be able to accept earthly limitations and live with them in fullness.

Contemplation is the main theme of the fifth chapter. Both ancient Greek and Christian thinkers position contemplation as a primordial way to establish a resonant attitude towards the world. Contemplation is a unique way to relate to the world and find a deeper meaning and purpose in it. Pre-Platonic philosophers, Plato, Aristotle, and numerous Christian theologians and teachers of spirituality, each in their own way, understood the meaning of contemplation or resonance to the presence of the other/Other, that is, to the

presence of something that transcends human earthly life and, at the same time, supports a more integral way of living. The idea that contemplation can also be seen as a way to the triune God who created everything and who reveals love for humans through creation, remains incomprehensible to Greek philosophy.

The following chapter reflects on resilience, defined as the ability to sustain and nourish the sense of self and purpose through a system of beliefs, principles, and values. Modern humans resist, in ways, the illusory horizons of knowledge or behavior based on past experiences. At the same time, they promote self-understanding rooted in personal experiences, augmented by scientific principles of psychology, sociology, and neuroscience. Consequently, understanding spirituality becomes highly personalized and dissociated from social dimensions and engagement. Spiritual openness in this context, remains quite illusory. Excessive self-centeredness leaves little room for the spirituality of relationships, especially for relationships with the people who are suffering and dying. Only acceptance of human fears in the face of distress, crises, and death, leads us to a more fulfilled life. Christian spirituality enables Christians to perception and awareness of the presence and closeness of God in human weaknesses and boundaries. God as the unchanging and constant presence in human life, is the reference point on which humans can always count and to which they can always turn. Through God's unwavering presence, humans gain the resilience and strength to face hardships and find the way to the deeper fullness of life.

The search for hope is the main theme of chapter seven. Hope is that quality of life which, in moments of negativity and despair, opens us up to new possibilities of thinking and acting. Hope is a view of things that remain invisible in the chronological perception of time. As such, hope exists only in the present moment, when one consciously chooses not to be trapped in the limitations of a horizontal perception of life. Humans reach their deepest expectations, desires, wishes, and longings only when placed in a spaceless kairos, i.e., with a view of the future that occurs in the "now". Christian spirituality, understood as

faith integrated in individual and community lives, supports Christians in their chronological time and place (we call this chronos), where the kairos, and with it, the hope and meaning of life, can be revealed.

The main theme of the final chapter is an integrative approach as a synthesis of the premodern, modern, and postmodern perspectives, taken as complementary reflections on how to find a meaningful balance between faith and reason, the spiritual and the material, relative and absolute, authority and freedom, and immanence and transcendence. Despite many advantages of fragmentation, specialization, and secularization, the present time calls for integration, reconciliation, and synthesis of what seems to be fragmented. In this perspective, the Christian message, with its two thousand-year-long tradition, reappears clearly as life-giving, with its spirit of unification of what appears to be fragmented in human nature. God, who became man, desires to remain one with every human and enable everyone to live fully in love in this world and after death in eternity. An integrative approach helps us go beyond the divisions between spirituality and religiosity, and to accept the fact that there are different conceptions of spirituality (religious, secular, in-between, and the "esoteric"). When we adopt an integrative approach, we can see an opportunity to better discover our own spirituality in the different spiritualities. By comparing differences and similarities of the most profound human spiritual longing, life's purpose and meaning, fundamental values, the relationship with the transcendent, and ultimately eternal life, can all be rediscovered. In this light, we become more humans, able to build fraternity and care for the common good. An integrative approach to spirituality also enables us to go beyond the mutual exclusions of the three different dimensions of spirituality (personal-experiential, communal-institutional, intellectual-studious). When these dimensions are respectfully accepted and seen as intertwined and complementary, spirituality realizes its mission in full. The necessity of thinking differently is underlined by the very title of this chapter: Synthesis and integration: from "either-or" towards "both-and".

Chapter 1

Towards Silence, Listening, and Dialogue

"Whoever is going to listen to the philosophers, needs a considerable practice in listening." This quote is often attributed to the Greek Stoic philosopher Epictetus (50-135), whose students organized, edited, and published the philosopher's thoughts. Even though the exact wording of this quote and its specific source varies in different interpretations, its meaning remains unchanged: to benefit from philosophical teaching, one must practice active listening. Listening to the philosophers should not be limited to the academic scholars of philosophy, whose teaching usually resonates only with a few enthusiasts. With philosophy, Epictetus refers to the "love of wisdom", whose insights enrich us with a more profound comprehension of reality, including the purpose of our human existence. However, simple listening, hearing, or reading philosophical teachings is insufficient. The second half of the sentence emphasizes "considerable practice", which entails an attentive grasping of the philosopher's position

from the side of the listener, which goes beyond his projection of what the philosopher wanted to say. Attentive listening leads to an active internalization and engagement with wisdom, leading to a new practice and personal transformation.

The first chapter of this book presents, both from a philosophical and theological point of view, that challenge of our time which is probably the most neglected—listening, be it listening to the interlocutor, nature, or something transcendental, God in the religious context.[1] Listening is intrinsically connected with silence[2], which is a prerequisite for listening, and with dialogue, which is the fruit of listening. Only to the extent that we are ready to listen, we will also be ready to respectfully accept and understand what is conveyed to us. Sometimes it is particularly difficult to accept things already known to us, because we feel that such listening wastes our time. But when someone speaks to me, they always speak to me from their point of view, thereby conveying themselves. And if I accept their saying respectfully and wish to understand it more deeply, I will thereby show respect for this person and give myself the opportunity to understand even more deeply what is conveyed to me (Simonič 2020, 318–319; Vodičar 2022, 702).

1 Listening to an entity presupposes a relationship with that entity. The importance of a true relationship with various aspects of the world and transcendence has been recently influentially demonstrated by Hartmut Rosa with his theory of resonance which has important religious dimensions (Žalec 2021c). Rosa's theory of resonance has significant similarities with Martin Buber's I-Thou philosophy and Heidegger's thoughts on being-in-the-world (Žalec 2021a, 143–144).

2 Generally speaking, we tend to distinguish between two forms of external silence: the silence that does not depend on us and the silence that depends on us. This second form of silence occurs when we are silent on the outside, i.e. when we do not speak out loud or when we turn off the source of sound. There is also an inner silence, which is brought about when we distance ourselves from our own thinking, questioning, judging, emotional reactions, memories, random thoughts, monologues, etc., by remaining completely quiet. This inner silence allows us to be more open with our whole being to the other person, to what he or she is saying to us, with a deep desire to accept him or her together with everything he or she wants to communicate to us. It is this focus on him or her that helps us to be more free from ourselves and from everything that prevents us from being more other-centered, attentive and respectfully present. In this book, we are mainly discussing silence, which depends on us and is kept both on the outside and on the inside.

Of course, there are many more challenges than we cover in our reflections. We will not be able to solve any of them without the courage to listen and accept what we have heard and humbly respond.

1. In Search of True Meaning of Logos

The Ancient Greek-English dictionary translates the Greek noun *λόγος* (*logos*) as word, reason, speech, explanation, narrative, divine reason, assertion, the truth of the matter, and much more. (Ancient Greek Dictionaries 2020b, s.v. "*logos*") Broadly speaking, logos refers to saying something about something. Similarly, the Greek verb *λέγειν* (*legein*) translates as to say, speak, enunciate, tell, call, mean, declare in words, make a remark, and similar. (Ancient Greek Dictionaries 2020a, s.v. "*legein*") These two Greek words are undoubtedly the most elaborated terms in Ancient Greek Philosophy. It is not an exaggeration to claim that contemporary philosophical thought and comprehension of reality, as the proud heir of Ancient Greek philosophy, is primarily constructed through an attitude of talking and claiming. The Western philosophical thought of the last centuries has not listed many references to the notion of silence and capacity of listening, which seem to be ignored or left to the realm of poetry and religion, so many times considered as illogical, sentimental, lacking analytical precision, almost not worth of deserving our attention.

The verb *λέγειν*/*legein* can also be translated as to lay, to lie, to bring to lie, or to let things lie together before us. In addition, the same verb also refers to shelter, gather, keep, and receive, whose meaning comes much closer to the cognitive attitude based on proper hearing, listening, and preserving. In his book *Early Greek Thinkers,* Martin Heidegger claims that the meaning of the verb *legein* is in so many ways similar to the German word *legen*, meaning to lay down, to lay before, and to bring together. *Legein* properly means to laying-down and laying-before which gathers itself (Heidegger 1975, 60).

To lay—in this case—means to place one thing beside another, to gather. In her interpretation of Heidegger's writing, Gemma C. Fiumara argues that listening and speaking should be used together because the first term precedes the other. "Perhaps this gathering of itself epitomizes the sort of concentrated listening that is required in intellectual midwifery." (Fiumara 1990, 3)

When Heidegger talks about *legein*, he compares this activity to harvesting, i.e., bringing the fruits from the soil. The harvesting process includes much more than simply pulling out the fruits from the soil; harvesting also involves sheltering, safekeeping, and accommodating fruits in storage rooms. If we do not keep harvesting and preservation together, we live in an illusion of harvesting. Therefore, *legein* translated as to lay, lie, bring to lie, and let things lie together before us, should implicitly trigger our concerns about things in front of us.

In other words, when words have been said, and their meaning lies before us, we are invited to shelter and gather their meaning. Our Western mind seems to be confronted by a way of thinking associated with only half of the meaning of our logos (7). Since we do not listen carefully, we do not grasp the true meaning of what we have heard. The true meaning of the words begins to affect us only when the damage inflicts our death logic. For example, so many articles and books have been said and written regarding the Greenhouse effect. All these words do not trigger any concern in my mind until my garden has lost its grass due to the scorching sun. Only then I start thinking about the Greenhouse effect's consequences.

2. Logocentric Tradition

The multitude of words carrying information and disinformation at every step of our life has never been so excessive as is the case nowadays. Even though we have at our disposition sophisticated communication devices with ceaseless access to information, it does not mean that we are well-informed and able to

listen attentively with a sincere desire to comprehend the speaker's position, and ready to move from words to action. More than a hundred years ago, Ludwig Klages described our tradition as being based on logocentrism (Josephson-Storm 2017, 221). Our Western understanding of sciences and contemporary philosophy considers words and language as the primordial expressions of an external reality (Roszak 2023). With this logo-centric mindset, we believe that our saying (logos) is equivalent to defining and completely grasping the original and irreducible object(s) that the logos represent(s). In his book *Of Grammatology*, French Philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) criticized logocentrism, claiming that Western philosophy has privileged speech because of its proximity to truth, while relegating writing to a secondary status as a mere representation of speech. Without entering his philosophical thought, Derrida introduced the idea of deconstruction, i.e., a method of critical analysis that challenges fixed meanings of words within texts and discourses. "This is what deconstruction is made of: not the mixture but the tension between memory, fidelity, the preservation of something that has been given to us, and, at the same time, heterogeneity, something absolutely new, and a break." (Derrida 1997, 6) Our words and speeches contain an amount of instability and contradictions, pointing to the indeterminacy of the meaning of the words. Derrida's position agrees with our claim that words and sayings cannot be the exclusive way of grasping the truth, leaving no space for silence and listening.

The logocentric mindset is pollinated by the ongoing necessity of discussing all matters, hoping to lead to a meaningful solution. As ideal as these discussions seem to be, the fact is that individual or institutional hidden agendas can manipulate the entire discussion process. People with more elaborate rhetorical skills or in charge of mass media easily manipulate the entire discussion process toward their own goals, often unknown to the public. The same process of manipulation is camouflaged by narratives emphasizing the importance of discussion, freedom, and the democratic participation of all people involved.

As strong and appealing as logocentrism might be, there are also many limits. We already mentioned Derrida's critique. In addition, due to the limitations of human mind, human language cannot always fully describe the complexity and richness of reality. Human words do not have fixed meanings; the meanings of words change over time and across cultures. Human language does not include non-linguistic forms of knowledge. Even more, human language literally cannot describe certain human experiences. Logocentrism is also rooted in power dynamics and cultural bias; the meaning of the world is defined by certain cultures or intellectual traditions, not paying attention to the alternative meanings of the same words (Junfan 2022). Following this logic, even logocentrism, as a product of the Western tradition, still prioritizes and privileges certain languages and knowledge systems while marginalizing others.

Logocentrism does not leave much space or time for listening or hearing those aspects which the imposed discussion does not expose or want to hear. The logocentric mindset takes words *logoi* as the exclusive tools for discovering or proving something with an urgent inner need to talk. These two together create an absolute way of proving and justifying one's position, demanding an agreement without any objection from the listener. Consequently, the logocentric mindset does not lead to hearkening and heeding, translated as paying attention to the interlocutor's position. There is no space for silence and for a genuine desire to listening understood as a spiritual activity, moving the speaker from his position to somebody's else position.

3. Fading Power of Logos

Why is our way of thinking associated only with half of the meaning of logos, leaving no space for listening and silence? Are we becoming immune to the real power of words? In his book *Culture and Value,* Wittgenstein (1988, 30) writes: "I believe that the main reason for feeling like this was the

following fact: that every time some new linguistic phenomenon occurred to us, it could retrospectively show that our previous explanation was unworkable. We felt that language could always make new, and impossible, demands; and that this made all explanations futile."

As stated previously, the last centuries of our tradition have primarily focused on logocentric principles shaping our mindset. We should not be surprised that our Western mind lacks interest in the philosophy of silence and listening and has become overwhelmingly tired of continuous talking. If our saying (*logos*) is considered equivalent to defining, we got tired of repeatedly defining our reality, leaving no space for silence and listening, leading to new discoveries and options.

In addition, the lack of philosophy of listening can also be taken as an expression of a desperate and voiceless need to hear the most disturbing and secret queries of our time. These voices do not affect us even when we hear them because we do not want to take them seriously. This way resonates with the pivotal thesis of dialogical human existence presented by Martin Buber in his book *I and Thou* (2013). By being in the world, we always experience something in the world. "But the world is not present to man by experiences alone. These present him only with a world composed of *It* and He and *She* and *It* again." Even if we add "inner" to "outer" experience or "secret" to "open" experience, nothing is changed in the situation, we are "merely following the uneternal division that springs from the lust of the human race to whittle away the secret of death. /…/ The man who experiences has no part in the world. For it is 'in him' and not between him and the world that the experience arises. The world has no part in the experience. It permits itself to be experienced but has no concern in the matter. For it does nothing to the experience, and the experience does nothing to it." (Buber 2013, 4–5) Buber continues that only once we enter into a relationship can we really experience the world, not as an It, but as a *Thou*, which Buber finally perceives as the eternal *Thou*. This Thou is calling us through nature and other people's faces, but we seem not to be ready to hear their calls (Pevec Rozman 2021, 24–29).

Logocentric culture favors only one voice as the accredited source of knowledge. This voice is reserved for the intellectual and scientific discourse, constantly informing, permeating, and molding our understanding of reality. Such discourse can be basically described as a *naïve rationalism*. It is naïve because it assumes that scientific knowledge is, by definition, objective and correct, therefore requesting an absolute assertion from us. Following Wittgenstein, as soon as a specific scientific interpretation fails, it is replaced with another scientific interpretation, demanding new unwavering assertive confidence until we discover another scientific interpretation. Scientific development, with its, at least apparently, objective interpretations, is an ongoing attempt to grasp reality through our scientific interpretations. Such mental audacity demands a blind agreement with the proposed interpretations as the best and only possible one. This leads to a puzzling situation, well-illustrated by Albert Einstein, who pointed out that nature usually answers with "no" to the questions of scientific theorists and only occasionally with "maybe". Nature's answer with "yes" or "no" is always an answer in the frame of the theoretical language in which the question has been addressed (Einstein 2013, 18).

The background of this kind of thinking is a profound tendency to reduce all knowledge to a set of principles from which nothing can escape. Following these principles, we believe in being able to organize everything in the light of our knowledge. This faith in organizing our knowledge is basically grounded in our fear that there is a reality that escapes our knowledge, which triggers feelings of discomfort, anxiety, powerlessness, and a kind of existential insecurity in front of a reality that escapes our control.

To diminish this existential uncertainty, the human mind ceaselessly keeps creating new principles and interpretations through which tries to grasp the universe, as well as the meaning of its existence, continuously escaping its mental control. This kind of mindset is not able to, or even better, not used to listening, and because of this, does not allow itself any space and time for those narratives that do not fit into its present rational description. While

unable to face its own uncertainty, the human mind runs to another rational story, again and again hoping that the new one will be the right one.

At this point, we face a paradoxical situation. With our desires and efforts to objectively grasp the true nature of things and our existence, we no longer trust the present information. Following Wittgenstein's thoughts, why should we, if another similar or utterly different interpretation will soon override our current understanding of the matter? Or by referring to Heidegger's interpretation of *logos* and *legein,* our comprehension of reality is exclusively based on talking about defining reality, which does not hold space for harvesting and preservation in terms of letting things lie together before us and triggering our concerns about them.

All this leads to two conclusions: first, the scientific theories, with their apparent objectivity, do not provide the desired answers, and second, there is not only one possible way of knowing reality. There should be an opening to comprehension of reality that is not purely logical and does not automatically exclude whatever does not fit the parameters of scientific objective principles but leaves space for silence and wondering.

4. Whom Shall We not Listen to?

The next question is, who is talking, or whom shall I listen to, or even better, whom shall I not listen to? Both modern and postmodern ways of thinking direct people toward external structures providing clear and one-sided answers, almost dictating "how we ought to be happy" In this case, who is talking are almost exclusively the mortals struggling to accept the ignored meaning of *legein* in terms of laying down, gathering, and unfolding itself.

Presume that our way of thinking remains caught in the naïve rationalism intertwined with the logocentric culture, which prevents us from tolerating any alternative way of thinking. Logocentric rationalism is sustained by an

unknown frenzy, not allowing new ways of thinking and believing there should be only one tradition. The same rationalism is willing to criticize any despotism of institutions and thinkers, but it is not consistent enough to criticize those discourses that are not rooted in listening. We are dealing with a situation similar to Kant's description of a government based on despotism (Kant 2006, 45). When a government becomes too paternal and treats its subject as immature children who cannot distinguish what is truly useful or harmful, the citizens are obliged to behave purely passively, relying only upon the state's judgments. Such a government is the greatest conceivable despotism, suspending the entire freedom of its subjects.

Logocentric rationalism does not allow us to hear questions from different perspectives or pay attention to our reality differently. It does not envision a philosophy of listening, not as an activity to put into words our thoughts but as a spiritual activity, demanding us to step back from our ideas and open ourselves to something transcending us.

The philosophy of listening should not be equated to egalitarianism and liberalism, which claim to allow new narratives, ways of thinking, and traditions but, at the same time, do not create sufficient space and conditions for an attitude of listening. Egalitarianism and liberalism are based on well-defined principles of equality and freedom, again rooted in the tradition of using previously described logos but lacking space for alternative approaches. Consequently, the promised land of egalitarianism and liberalism must be constructed according to their plans.

The deepest human beliefs and desires cannot be expressed by following principles of naïve rationalism, logocentrism, egalitarianism, and liberalism. Individuals and entire nations want to give voice to what is inexpressible or blocked in their inner world. So many people are no longer prepared to accept the imposed "silence" preventing them from facing the dilemmas that their living and surviving involve. There is a growing expectation of being able to express oneself and to be understood, which necessarily assumes more listening.

To hear these unexpressed expectations sincerely, we need to create an atmosphere of openness as the grounding frame for silence first, hopefully leading to a fruitful dialogue second. This openness cannot necessarily be seen as something logical; logic does not always allow for the more authentic openness that may sustain a revealing dialogue (Čović 2020, 40–45). True listening and dialogue must be based on something other than previously described logic, which struggles to assess the same process of questioning critically. The art of questioning should be seen as the art of knowing how to preserve an orientation toward openness and how to prevent the suppression of a question by the dominant opinion, critical reference, emotional inclinations, or simple tolerance.

True listening should be broadened beyond what we are willing to receive or answer within our safety limits. In Heidegger's (1971, 71) words: "It might be helpful to us to rid ourselves of the habit of only hearing what we already understand. /.../ The authentic attitude of thinking is not a putting of questions—rather, it is listening to the grant, the promise of what is to be put in question." Inspired by Heidegger's reflection, true listening impoverishes us from a "naïve rationality" point of view; true listening leads us to a state of helplessness and disorientation, pulling us away from the articulation of real knowledge. In addition, true listening frees us from the adhesion to dominant anthropology or logo-cratic enslaving our minds. It always remains open to what is opaque, perplexing, and incomprehensible. It risks all and draws upon those depths where truth cannot be represented by means of institutionalized languages. This way, true listening becomes the *sine qua non* principle for authentic dialogue, which is so much needed in our time. As the most important, true listening creates the path to transcendence. Søren Kierkegaard, who wrote a lot, confessed he had "less and less to say, and finally, he became entirely silent. He became silent. /…/ he became a listener." When this happened, he "discovered in the silence the voice of God" (Kierkegaard 2018, 19–20).

Let us now explore the meaning of listening as it is presented in Christianity.

5. Listening in a Biblical Spirit

Christianity cannot exist without listening, since faith comes from listening to the proclamation (Rom 10:13). Therefore, whoever wants to believe and live it must first learn to listen as fully as possible. It is therefore not surprising that the Bible repeatedly stresses the importance of listening, which puts the listener in a dialogical posture. The first and foremost commandment of the Old Testament begins with "hear". "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." (Deut 6:4-5) This call to listen is repeated over and over again in the Bible. E.g., "My people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth." (Ps 78:1)

God is always the first to speak to us. On His side is the initiative to which we can respond if we listen and hear Him. We can clearly identify such a dynamic from the beginning of the Bible to its end. Of course, listening is His gift, since He also created our ears and gave us the ability to listen and hear. In his prayer, the psalmist confesses, "My ears you have opened." (Ps 40:6) In the book of Proverbs (20:12) we read, "Ears that hear and eyes that see, the Lord has made them both." He also makes people "listen to correction" (Job 36:10). One of the signs of the Messianic times will be that people will be healed of deafness: "Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped." (Isa 35:5; cf. Bar 2:31) Jesus healed many deaf people so that they could hear His good news, the gospel, and to confirm the fulfilment of the prophecies of the messianic times. (Mt 11:5; Mk 7:32, 37; Lk 7:22)

Pope Francis (2022a) considers that "among the five senses, the one favored by God seems to be hearing, perhaps because it is less invasive, more discreet than sight, and therefore leaves the human being more free. Listening corresponds to the humble style of God. It is the action that allows God to reveal himself as the One who, by speaking, creates man and woman in his image, and by listening recognizes them as his partners in dialogue."

In His immeasurable and free love, God the Creator and Father not only speaks to human beings and gives them His incarnate Word, the Son, Jesus Christ, but also listens and hears them. (Ps 10:17; 18:7; 34:15; 94:9; 130:2; Ex 3:7; Isa 59:1; Pr 15:29; 1Pe 3:12) But human beings often close themselves off from Him, "would not listen" to Him (Jer 17:23; 25:4; 34:14; 35:15), "turned their back on" Him (1 Kings 14:9; 2 Chron 29:6; Isa 1:4; Jer 2:27; 7:24), and "covered their ears" (Zech 7:11; Acts 7:57), so that they do not need to hear and obey Him (Szamocki 2022, 1056–1057). According to the prophet Jeremiah, God even threatens His people with exile because they refused to listen to His words when He continually sent them His servants, the prophets. (Jer 29:19) But they still refused to listen to Him. (Avsenik Nabergoj 2018, 685)

The refusal to listen can quickly turn into aggressiveness towards the one who is supposed to be listened to. Jeremiah (15-20) and the other prophets experienced this (Mt 5:12; Acts 7:52), so too did Jesus (Lk 4:16-30; Jn 5) and the first martyr Stephen (Acts 7:57), and later many others.

Through the entire Bible, we can see the dynamic on the one hand of a God who is always freely revealing Himself, speaking and listening, and on the other hand of a human beings who are called to listen to Him and to be attuned to what they hear, but who repeatedly refuse to listen, to hear, and to live in accordance with what is said. But God does not give up. He calls them "again and again into a covenant of love, so that they can fully become what they are: the image and likeness of God in his capacity to listen, to welcome, to give space to others. Fundamentally, listening is a dimension of love." (Francis 2022a)

The greatest commandment of love for God (Mt 22:37) is fulfilled precisely by listening to God, which should be constant (Prov 8:34; Jas 1:24-25), attentive (Lk 4:20. 22; 21:38; Acts 10:33), with reverence (Ps 89:7-19), with faith (Heb 4:2), by striving to keep what we have heard (Heb 2:1; Ps 119:11), and put into practice (Mt 6:24-27), with a humble, obedient attitude (Lk 10:42), and with prayer (Lk 18:7-8) (Strong and McClintock

1880). As we seek to listen to God in this way, we also become more able to listen to other people. And the more we are able to listen to people as images of God, the more listening to and hearing God, or loving God, is truly present in us.

As the beloved Son of the Father, Jesus often withdrew to a secluded place to be with the Father and listen to Him. He often encouraged His disciples to listen: "Whoever has ears, let them hear." (Mt 11:15; 13:9, 43; Mk 4:9, 23) He made it abundantly clear to them that unless they listened attentively they would not be able to hear what He was saying and therefore not understand. (Mt 13:18; 15:10; 21:33; Mk 4:3,20, etc.) After telling them the parable of the Sower and they did not understand it, He warned them to be attentive to the quality of their listening. "Therefore consider carefully how you listen." (Lk 8:18) Just as a seed can only bear its fruit on good soil, so the words that God the Father speaks to us through the Son, or through other people or creation, will be able to bear fruit in us if we listen well and do what is necessary to put what we hear into practice. Only if we hear the Word with a good heart, keeping it within us constantly, will we bear the fruit of life and salvation (Lk 8:15). At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, too, with the parable of the man who built the house, He made it clear to all those who listened that it is not enough only to listen. It is necessary to put that which was heard into practice (Mt 7:24-27).

Of course, who we listen to is important. Already in the Old Testament, God warned His people against false prophets. (Jer 14:14-15; 23:11) In the same way, Jesus warned His disciples against those who would appear in His name "claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many" (Mt 24:5). He also told them that "many false prophets will appear and deceive many people" (Mt 24:11). Only those who are faithful to Him and to what they have heard from Him, that is, to His good news, will be saved. (Mt 24:13) For this reason, Pope Francis (2022a) also warns us to be attentive to "whom we listen, to what we listen, and to how we listen".

6. Patiently Learning to Listen in an Integrative Way

From the beginning of his pontificate, Pope Francis (2013b**,** no. 171) has encouraged all Christians and people of good will to listen: "We need to practice the art of listening, which is more than simply hearing. Listening, in communication, is an openness of heart which makes possible that closeness without which genuine spiritual encounter cannot occur. Listening helps us to find the right gesture and word which shows that we are more than simply bystanders. Only through such respectful and compassionate listening can we enter on the paths of true growth and awaken a yearning for the Christian ideal: the desire to respond fully to God's love and to bring to fruition what he has sown in our lives."

Such respectful and compassionate listening is taught to us in a special way by God the Father through Jesus Christ (Simonič 2015, 493–494). The place of such teaching is prayer, which must not be a prayer of speaking, but of looking and listening, which is in its essential nature contemplation (Platovnjak 2018, 1038–1048; Skralovnik 2022, 265–291). In his Spiritual Exercises St Ignatius writes that those who persevere in contemplation are more accustomed than others to "consider, meditate, and contemplate God our Lord as being present in every creature by his essence, presence, and power" (Spiritual Exercises, no. 39). When, therefore, we are able to look at God in every thing and in every human being, then our attitude towards him is the same as it is towards God himself. We can no longer separate these two attitudes, for they are intertwined, interpenetrating. The Evangelist John tells us: "For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen." (1 Jn 4:20) In this context, the words of the Protestant theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer (2017, 75) are also significant, as he warns us that whoever is unable to listen to his or her brother will soon cease to be able to listen to God. And only when we listen to others through God's ears will we be able to speak to them through his Word (76).

In the light of Ignatius' teaching, we can see that it is contemplative prayer that enables us to see our interlocutor rightly, and that when we listen to him or her, we are listening not only to him or her, but also to God the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. Whoever practices daily contemplative prayer to recognize His presence, His language and His action everywhere (Jeglič 2022, 139), will be able to do so in conversation with every person, even those who think and feel quite differently from him, and in all things and events.

Learning to listen in an integrative way that is genuine, sincere, unconditional, loving, sensitive, accepting, non-judgmental and respectful presupposes similar things as contemplative prayer: silence, integral presence, reflection, practical tools and God's gift of listening.

6.1 Silence

Silence creates space for listening to God the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. It provides a time for discovering His presence and action in all things and for listening to the Father through Christ and to the Spirit who is given to us to remember, teach, comfort, inspire and guide. (Jn 15-17) The practice of being in this listening silence enables us to be able to listen and hear others and the Holy Spirit who is present in them and who also wants to remind, teach, inspire, comfort and guide us through them. When we learn to wait for the Word of God to happen, we will also be able to wait in conversation with others before responding to what is said, a question or a comment. In this way, we will not respond from ourselves, but together with the Holy Spirit, in God's way. We need to practice slowing down, waiting, being patient. For the more we are one with Christ, like the branches of a vine (Jn 15:1-14), the more fruit our conversation will bear.

It is not easy to enter into silence and silent listening (Brumec, Lavrič, and Naterer 2022). We have somehow managed to shut our mouths, but it is difficult to stop speaking our interior, our feelings and thoughts. We must be ready to do the sacred act of Moses before the burning bush to meet God, to

take off our shoes on the "holy ground" (Exod 3:5). This "shoes" symbolizes our truth, thoughts, beliefs, prejudices, attitudes, intolerance, anger, fear, self-sufficiency, disrespect, etc. Whoever is not ready to take off "this shoe" on the holy ground of encounter with another cannot listen with his or her whole being, body, mind and heart, i.e. in an integrative way.

We must also take a distance from the wrong way of listening: Assumptive listening (we make assumptions and presumptions in advance about what the other person wants to say to us); evaluative listening (we spend all our time and energy making judgements); self-protective listening (we are so caught up in ourselves that we are not able to listen at all, even though we may be very polite); authoritarian listening (we listen just to be able to give some advice); affirming listening (we only accept what we affirm, but we are closed to the whole message and its depth); condemning listening (we criticize out loud or inwardly all the time); defensive listening (we experience everything as an attack on us and we defend ourselves against everything, so we cannot hear or receive anything); eavesdropping or spying listening (we use the listening of others for our own benefit) (Nepo 2013; Francis 2022a).

It is very difficult to change our ways of listening that prevent us from listening in an integrative way. Even if we want it to happen, it takes months, perhaps years, of conscious, persistent, patient and hard work to make it happen. No one can do it alone; he or she needs the help of others and of God (Francis 2013b, no. 171).

6.2 Integral Presence

Our integral presence, i.e. being with the other with all our heart and mind, feelings and desires, with a humble, compassionate, loving, respectful and accepting attitude, with a deep desire to receive, hear and understand the other as God the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit, enables us to hear the other or to allow the other to reveal himself to us. Lindahl

(2002, 24) explains it this way, "Heart communication happens when we slow down, quiet down, look and listen. We stop and breathe. We become fully present with the person we are with. We listen with our whole being. At this point, communication can take place without words. Presence is a gift that fills our hearts and spirits. We are in communion."

Any relationship into which we enter in an integrative way in the Holy Spirit allows us the real possibility of a deep relationship in which the true self of one enters into communion with the true self of the other. When we join in the dimensions of love through the Holy Spirit in the hearts of others, we open ourselves to the creative power of God, which is able to transform every relationship and heal it. Before every conversation, it is necessary to awaken in oneself the faith that the love poured out by the Holy Spirit into the heart of every person (Rom 5:5) is the most personal reality in the heart of each participant in the conversation and at the same time "transpersonal" because it binds all together in a communion that transcends us. The mysterious presence of God in the heart of each person and in the seat of mutual relationship (Mt 18:2) is the real healing power that can prevent even the most subtle deceptions of resistance and projection (Louf 2001, 51–70).

6.3 Reflection

The time for reflection enables us to become attentive to the presence and action of God the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit, to His search and visitation, to His invitations, to become more and more His interlocutors and collaborators. It is not enough to take time to reflect not only on what has happened in listening silence, but also on everyday life, events and encounters. When we practice reflection, we also practice paying attention to the smallest things that we would otherwise overlook. We are becoming more and more aware that what is immediately perceptible is not everything, for the essential is obscured by our bodily senses; it can be perceived with the heart, with the senses of faith and love, with the spiritual

senses. (Zyzak 2022) The general examen can also be of great help to us, which at the end of the day helps us to become aware of the presence and action of God the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit in our daily life and action, including in our conversations (Platovnjak 2017, 87–89).

6.4 Listening Tools

When thinking about what is happening during a conversation, we can use the metaphor of a river to help us. During a conversation, everyone is on one side. The "river" or "thing" that I am talking about to my interlocutor, or my interlocutor to me, is seen by each of us from our own bank. What each of us sees is true, but it is not the whole truth of what I or the other is talking about. For no one can see what the other sees unless he or she tells him or her.

We always have at least two possibilities. We can stay on our own bank throughout the "conversation" and, for example, convince each other that only the view that one of us sees is the true and real one. In this way, we remain in a struggle for what is right and in convincing the other that he or she is wrong. Or we can decide to go to the other person's bank and discover how the other person sees what he or she is talking about. When one of us is willing to leave his or her own bank and leave all his or her "baggage" (e.g., his or her own thoughts and right, prejudices and fears, experiences and feelings, or bad listening habits) and go over the bridge of integrative listening to the other person's bank to see his or her point of view, he or she will have enriched himself or herself, his or her own point of view and their conversation. In doing so, he or she will realize respect and love for his or her interlocutor, and at the same time will re-represent to the interlocutor the closeness of God who loves and respects him or her as he or she is. He or she will also help him or her to become even more aware of his or her own view and of what is going on within him or her and what defines him or her.

Various practical tools can help us to listen in an integrative way that allows us to get to the "bank" of the interlocutor. We can *summarize* what

the other person has said, however, we should not add anything of our own. Additionally, we should neither explain nor clarify nor give advice. We can also help ourselves by v*erifying* that we heard right: "Did I hear you right, that ...?" Or: "Is this what you have said ...?" *Validation* can also help. This means trying to make sense of what the other person has said from his or her point of view. If he or she interprets a situation in a certain way, it makes sense for him or her to feel that way and act that way. We can still think differently and accept his or her meaning. But sometimes we can also see that something makes sense from our point of view. We can use expressions such as "What I have heard makes sense to me because ..." or "It makes sense, I can see that ..." We can also ask for clarification: "This part (X) makes sense to me, but can you help me understand ..." or "Can you tell me more about ...?" When the other person perceives that something is missing, he or she will make an effort to say more and explain more. When we listen to the other person in a more integrative way, which helps this person hear him or herself, then he or she sees even more things about him or herself. And if we see that the other person has not said something clearly enough, we can simply say if he or she can tell us more about it. *Open questions* are also helpful: "You said this and that ... Is there anything more you would like to say about this ...?" "You mentioned that you experienced this, understood this ... Could you say more about your experience, understanding of this ...?" (Hendrix 2008)

6.5 God's Gift of Listening

No one can listen in an integrative way in his or her own strength and on the basis of exercises and tools, but it is a gift of God, the fruit of cooperation with God. We must not forget what Pope Francis (2022a) stresses, that the ministry of listening has been entrusted to us by Him, who is the listener par excellence, and we are called to participate in His action. Since it is a gift of God, it is right to ask for it again and again from the Holy Spirit, who is our teacher of listening. When we trust in His active presence, we will

experience what Jesus promises us in the time of persecution. We will no longer be in fear of what to say, for we will know that the Spirit will give us the right word in time of need (Lk 12:11-12). It is not physical persecution that happens during a conversation, but inward persecution, for we are often attacked and persecuted by our own wrong listening habits, or by our fear of our interlocutor and his or her views. When we are one with the Holy Spirit, we can maintain peace, openness, respect, compassion and acceptance of the other and what he or she is saying, and find a way of talking that does not involve a double monologue or answers that dehumanize both, but a dialogue that humanizes both and helps us on the path of striving to grow in fraternity and caring for the common good and the common home (Francis 2020a).

7. Conclusion

Logocentrism is essentially "the illusion that the meaning of a word has its origin in the structure of reality itself and hence makes the truth about that structure seem directly present to the mind" (Ellis 1989, 36–37). It is an illusion based on the assumption that reality is built on binary oppositions of metaphysics (signifier/signified; sensible/intelligible; writing/speech; passivity/activity, human/divine, immanence/transcendence), but not on co-existence of the oppositions.

The great challenge for Western civilization, with all its intellectual treasure, is precisely to discover this co-existence of the oppositions. The words of human beings, as expressions of human intellectual effort, only penetrate to a certain extent into the essence of a thing, but they cannot by any means exhaust the depth of its reality, and especially not the meaning of human existence. This is why it is absolutely necessary to create within ourselves an atmosphere of silence, which is a prerequisite for listening and hearing. When we are in silence and ready to listen, we can listen to

what is speaking to us, which can be another person, nature, a book, past experience, God. As a result, a fruitful dialogue can develop.

The challenge of silence, listening and dialogue must also find its place in Christianity. Pope Francis (2022a) notes that "in reality, in many dialogues we do not communicate at all. We are simply waiting for the other person to finish speaking in order to impose our point of view. In these situations, as philosopher Abraham Kaplan notes, dialogue is a duologue: a monologue in two voices." If we want to escape the two-voice monologue, it is necessary to make a conscious decision to listen and dialogue again and again. We must keep before our eyes that their aim is to make us more and more human and God-like through them, following the example of Jesus, and to be able to welcome others with the same openness and generosity of love and respect as Jesus and His and our Heavenly Father (Mt 5:45-48). If our way of listening and dialogue does not help us to build fraternity and to strive for the common good and a common home together with others (Francis 2020a), then we need to change them. Only in this way will we be able to live our lives and relationships in the way of Christ and to put Christianity and its spirituality into practice in His Spirit. Only where there is present in us and among us "love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Gal 5:22-23), i.e., a love that excludes no one (Mt 5:44-48), is the Spirit of the Father and of Christ at work, even though He may not even be mentioned.

Chapter 2

Anatheism—Rediscovering God who Reveals Himself

Probably never in the history of mankind have people travelled so much to visit famous shrines or to see sacred art in museums. Nor has there ever been so many religious books sold in history as there are today. Yet research shows that religiosity is on the decline today, while spirituality, which oftentimes does not include in any religion, is on the rise. This is particularly true in Europe and North America. Despite the abundance of books on religions, visits to sacred places and the viewing of sacred art, which was sacred to people at the time it was created and the *topos* of encounter with God, it seems that God remains dead, as Nietzsche proclaimed.

This begs the question: Who or what comes after God, whom Nietzsche proclaimed to be dead? Richard Kearney (2011) presents a possible answer to this intriguing question in his book *Anatheism: Returning to God After God*. The idea of *anatheism* presents a turn in the continental philosophical tradition of the last fifty years, when God—despite Nietzsche's

proclamation—comes back again. Growing interest in the rediscovery of the Divine and a new search for God has gone beyond the bounds of the philosophy of religion and of Christianity in particular. There has occurred an increase and unprecedented awareness of the spiritual dimension of human existence, considered as nonessential for too long.

In this chapter, we put forward the thesis that anatheism can be seen as an incentive for all believers, and in a special way for Christians, to rediscover the revelation as the primordial principle of our existence. Rediscovery in this case is much more than a mechanical repetition of dogmatic teaching taken from the past theological reflections. An authentic rediscovery is based on an honest reflection and discernment, which frees us from rigidity, which has no place before the perennial "today" of the resurrected Lord (Francis 2018, no. 173).

The first part of this chapter presents Kearney's understanding of anatheism. The second part shows how great certainty in the faith and the understanding of religious truths became a concept that repulses the postmodern people and prevents them from being heard and understood in their doubts and search for meaning. The third part presents the path of discipleship inspired by Jesus Christ as response to the search of today's Christians.

1. Anatheism—a New Opportunity

The last centuries have shaken the foundations of Western societies, more or less rooted in Christianity, in many aspects. We witnessed an apparent departure of an old almighty God, supported with dogmatic certainties and strong metaphysics, typical for a militant theism, which has been gradually overcome by atheism and secularism. In his *A Secular Age* (2007, 26–29), Charles Taylor on numerous occasions refers to, and at

the same time disagrees with, a "subtraction narrative", which is the story that human progress in any culture involves the liberation from religion. In Taylor's reflection, this narrative only partially explains modernity's rejection of religion as something normal and part of human progress. It is true, however, that religion in the 21st century does not occupy the same place as it did in the 15th century.

This, however, does not mean that religion has completely left or disappeared from modernity; what has left are certain traditional forms and expressions of religion, but not religion itself. Modernity challenges religion to find new ways of expression within a pluralistic society and a disenchanted universe, in which a simple appeal to the divine and transcendence cannot be taken for granted. Such argumentation can lead to the recovery of traditional religious resources, and new ways of bringing to light the deepest spiritual concerns of human existence. In short, the secularization process opens new opportunities for religious/spiritual interest.[3]

When facing the challenge of the presence/absence of God in modernity, Richard Kearney does not take an un-doubtful position, but tackles the challenge with the question borrowed from his teacher Paul Ricoeur: "What are the particular perspectives that serve as filters for your way of sensing the world, understanding society, interpreting yourself and others?" (Kearney 2016b, 240). Our cultural, intellectual, as well as theological background always marks our reading and understanding of God.

As an answer to the presence/absence of God, one should say that the departure of God refers us to a particular understanding of God, influenced by our perspective traditions, cultures, and theology. After the departure,

3 For the possibility of a new religious notion of intersubjectivity with an ethical and educational relevance of Dewey's philosophy of religion and the related pragmatic theology see Škof (2015, 99–108). Čović (2020, 41) also points out that, despite the many challenges that modernity and/or secularization pose to them, religions can be the bearers of positive aspirations, provided that they are properly understood. There are numerous shining examples in our long history that prove this is possible, one of the most prominent being St Francis of Assisi as an example of poverty and humility.

however, we face a new openness and refreshed interest in the sacred with its spiritual and religious spheres, which might lead us towards a genuine renewal and a more mature faith.

Within this broad framework, Richard Kearney places his concept of anatheism and his inquiry into our understanding of God. For Kearney, God is not a "thing", which we can describe phenomenologically; God is a call, cry, summons that invites us to different interpretation by asking us: "Who do you say that I am?" (241).

Anatheism is an attempt to reimagine God in our time. The prefix *ana-* means "up in space or time, back again, anew", which is much more than a simple "after". Referring to the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, Kearney describes *ana-* in terms of an epiphany or "as a retrieval of past experience that moves forward, proffering new life to memory, giving a future to the past" (2016a, 6). The prefix *ana-* contains the idea of retrieving, revisiting, reiterating, or repeating a past experience, not in a nostalgic way as a *backward* repetition of a remote past, but as a repetition *forward* or coming back *afterwards* in order to move forward again.

The anatheistic retrieval of the old as the new can be summarized in the double meaning of *a* in the prefix *ana-*: "ab" (away from God) and "ad" (toward God). Kearney talks about the return of the lost one—the lost God, which is returning as a *more real* presence, or a much more powerful and moving presence because of its return through absence (7). "The *ana-* of anatheism makes sure that that God who has already come is always still to come." (18)

In other words, Kearney's "returning to God after God" is a hermeneutical retrieval of sacred things from the past, which still bear a radical remainder and unrealized potentiality to be more fully realized in the future. There is a hermeneutical circle between our past and our future; the happening in the future (after) is based on our interpretation of the past (before). In dialogue with Taylor, Kearney summarizes these hermeneutical retrievals by quoting Ricoeur: "We must smash the idols so that symbols can speak anew." (Taylor 2016, 84)

When dealing with religion, we need to answer anew the existential questions: Who am I? Who do you say I [God] am? In Julia Kristeva's "post-Christian Humanism" (Kristeva 2013, 3), we deal with a puzzling question for European culture, which is undergoing an unprecedented existential crisis regarding the definition of what it means to be human. The above-mentioned questions make part of a hermeneutical arc which leads from existential prefiguration to textual configuration back to existential configuration, and implicitly to the reader's appropriation of the text in his or her life. This travel from the author through the text to the reader opens the door to the possibility of transfiguration and to the power to be anew (Kearney 2016a, 13).

Such transfiguration is based on a notion of divine power, which should not be understood in terms of a sovereign and absolute *potestas*, which is indivisible, outside of movement, time and desire; Kearney states that the divine power should be understood as God's invitation to humans to love and to do justice, which needs to be realized and embodied in time and space. Divine power - Nicolas of Cusa describes it as divine *posse*—is the power to be able to be, the power to be all that one is capable of becoming, namely love (Kearney 2016b, 250). This *divine posse* needs to find its place in modernity, which is in many aspects a real narrowing of mind and spirit. Taylor calls this as a "great unlearning" of certain practices and teachings guided by wisdom, an evacuation of extremely rich spiritual traditions (Taylor 2016, 85).

In his book *Anatheism*, Kearney analyzes three paths where the re-imagining of the sacred can take place: the philosophical, the poetic, and the religious path. There might be a sacred person, time, and place; they are sacred because there is something set apart, strange and ineffable in them. The Latin *sacer* has the same root as *secretus,* or *mysterion* in Greek, meaning "blindfolded". Sacred is something that surprises us; it is not constructed by us in advance; it involves a deep sense that there is something "more", uncanny, transcendent, impossible for us to imagine until we reimagine it

anew, which is possible through a leap of faith. "The sacred is the realization that there is something there that is more than 'me'—or more than 'us', understood as an immanent consensus of 'we.'" (Kearney 2016a, 16)

Kearney with his anatheism claims that the sacred can be experienced in and through the secular. In his words, anatheism is an attempt to sacralize the secular and secularize the sacred; it is reimagining the sacred after the secular and through the secular (17). On the same page, Kearney describes our time in terms of atheism or theism, or the time of farewell to the old God of metaphysical power, the God we possessed, the omni-God of sovereignty and theodicy, which Nietzsche, Freud and Marx proclaimed dead. This farewell opens the door to a God that is coming back again. Or following Kristeva's reflection, the journey of Western philosophy passing through Marxism, Freudianism, linguistics, structuralism, and psychoanalysis, came to the point of a new interrogation on what it means to be human, and poses the most serious question, the one concerning God (Kristeva 2016, 99).

When talking about the return of epiphany, Kearney does not talk in the singular, but in plural, i.e., epiphanies of the everyday (Manoussakis 2006, 3). These epiphanies invite us to experience the ultimate in the mundane, simple, familiar, insignificant, and the most quotidian. In other words, Kearney invites us to rediscover ourselves again face-to-face with the infinite in Creation, which can take place only here and now (Vodičar 2017, 575).

From here Kearney deduces our highest human vocation, which is to revisit the "inscape" of the sacred in every passing particular, or to re-create the sacral in the carnal. This is a refiguring of first creation in second creation, or re-creation of the sacral in the carnal. Kearney's anatheism includes both atheism and theism, not as the third element in Hegelian dialectic, but as a moment that precontains the dichotomy of atheism and theism, both before the creation of this dichotomy as well as after. Therefore, anatheism is not a negation of the negation, or a return as a synthesis of two elements of dichotomy, following Hegel's dialectic.

There is no such certainty in Kearney's reflection on anatheism; the moment of *ana-* is a risk, a wager, or a drama that can go either way. There are two a's in *ana-*. The first *a* is the "a" of a-theism, and the second "a" is the "not of the not", or the negation of the negation, which might be understood also as a reopening to something new. However, this re-opening of *ana-* is not the next step of a linear progress or optimism, grounded in a new synthesis of the previous elements. The same opening can bring us back to the beginning or the time before the division between atheism and theism. Kearney, referring to Kierkegaard, talks about the time or place of the originary disposition of openness toward the radical Other. In this disposition one is called to repeat his act of faith (a leap of faith), as they did in the past, in order to find something in the future that has been lost. At this point Kearney talks about a dynamic that goes beyond chronological time or the succession of moments in linear fashion; it is a *kairological* time, or a time out of time where eternity crosses the instant. This time, however, does not deny historical time or the finite. Anatheism coincides and engages with our secular humanist culture, a concrete historical situation culturally, socially, and intellectually; it includes the modern announcements of Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud; the atheistic principles of the Enlightenment and French Revolution; the critique of religion; modern anxiety in the face of what Weber calls the "disenchantment" of the world, the desacralizing of society, the abandonment of God, and the loss of faith (Kearney 2016a, 8–9).

Here, we can easily add the struggle of post-communist countries, burdened by their past experiences, in their search for new identity, creativity and hope. All this together presents in Kearney's reflection on anatheism the possibility of a radical opening to someone or something that was lost and forgotten by Western metaphysics and needs to be recalled again. From the question of what comes after the disappearance of God, Kearney moves to a more existential question: how might any contemporary individual encounter this in one's concrete, lived and personal experience, as opposed

to impersonal. As an answer to this question, Kearney proposes examples or testimonies of the anatheist moment, when concrete individuals in their abandonment, disillusion and disorientation turned around and opened themselves to a new possibility of turning hostility into hospitality.

To sum up, Kearney's anatheism can be in many aspects compared to Taylor's "transcendent humanism", based on the distinction between transcendent/immanent (Taylor 2007, 13–15). Every form of humanism, which claims that human fulfilment and flourishing can be achieved exclusively and immanently within human nature, i.e., without any opening to the transcendental, calls for a critical re-examination. Both Taylor and Kearney call for the hermeneutic recovery of religious sources, which will bring religious and spiritual fullness as well as human flourishing on a deeper level. Following this trajectory, Taylor in *A Secular Age* talks about the need to "believe again" and of "incarnation". Consequently, even our spiritual life should lead us to a certain kind of life, not just in theory but in a way of being that makes difference (144, 278).

2. Trapped in Certainty

The death of God proclaimed by Nietzsche triggered different reactions among Christians. Many theologians have tried in different ways to prove that God is not dead; few have seen this as an incentive to check whether or not the God we preach about is really the God of Jesus Christ, through whom God has fully revealed Himself. If he is not the God of Jesus Christ, then he must die, not God, of course, but his false image. But for this to happen, we must first be willing to die to our certainty that we already know the true God and that everything we already know is about God.

It is impossible to live without any certainty. Every person uses basic certainty in all areas of life, because it gives him or her the security and

the power to face the most diverse challenges of life (Jerebic, Bošnjaković, and Jerebic 2023, 355). At the same time, certainty can also be a major obstacle which does not allow the person to accept the fact that in his or her life, there is always an insecurity that reflects the complexity of that life. It is precisely the tension between certainty and uncertainty that gives human beings the space for constant searching and questioning. This is particularly true in the field of science, where theories always remain potentially refutable and are accepted as possible but by no means certain. (Pohar 2023) This also applies to the field of faith and religion, living by faith, the view of God, him or herself, and the world. (Horvat and Roszak 2020) It is difficult to accept the fact that uncertainty is always present in the certainty of faith because it is only then that faith is alive and enables humans to be prepared for the surprises that God always prepares for each person. However, humans prefer certainty, light, and spiritual consolation, even if it costs them distancing from God.

The gospels reveal that Jesus was in constant tension with those who were completely sure in their faith, in life after the law, about their righteousness, the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, and the expected Messiah. These were, in particular, the great priests and religious dignitaries who occupied the chair of Moses, especially the scribes and the Pharisees who were the bearers of moral and intellectual authority. This certainty hardened their hearts (Lk 16:15) so that they put heavy and unbearable burdens on the people's shoulders (Mt 23:4) and became inconsolable with those who, for various reasons, could not live by their order. This certainty blinded their eyes and blocked their ears so that they could not recognize the presence of the expected Messiah in Jesus (Matjaž 2010, 1016–1020). They could not accept the fact that Jesus is the Son of God, the true God. They were greatly disturbed by the fact that he did not respect their way of understanding the Sabbath, that he kept company with the unclean, with criminals, and even gave them the example of faith (Lk 7:34; 18:14; Mt 21:31).

Even as Christians, we are not immune from what happened to these people who were trapped in their certainty. Pope Francis speaks very clearly about this in his encyclical *Rejoice and Be Glad* when he warns of the dangers of Gnosticism and Pelagianism, which he sees as two forms of doctrinal and disciplined certainty, but in which there is no real interest either for Jesus Christ or for the other. Those who are trapped in Gnosticism judge others by the extent to which they are able to grasp the depths of a particular religious truth. Because they are trapped in abstract thoughts about God, they are unable to know Christ suffering in the body of human beings (Francis 2018, no. 35–38). Gnosticism "seeks to domesticate the mystery, whether the mystery of God and his grace, or the mystery of others' lives" (no. 40). We can never and must never say where God is not present, for He "is mysteriously present in the life of every person, in a way that he himself chooses, and we cannot exclude this by our presumed certainties. /…/ If we let ourselves be guided by the Spirit rather than our own preconceptions, we can and must try to find the Lord in every human life. This is part of the mystery that a gnostic mentality cannot accept, since it is beyond its control." (no. 42)

Some have recognized the error of Gnosticism, but have fallen into another. The power that the Gnostics attributed to reason (intelligence) they began to attribute to human will and personal effort. In this way they fell into the fallacy of Pelagianism, forgetting that everything depends not on the will and on human effort, but on a merciful God (Rom 9:16) who surpasses us in His love, since He "first loved us" (1 Jn 4:19) (Francis 2018, no. 48). Often those who are convinced of how everything depends on human effort, on keeping the Church's rules and on faithfulness to its structures are unaware of this fact. Thus they become "enslaved to a blueprint that leaves few openings for the working of grace" (no. 59). The life of the Church becomes, against the inclinations of the Holy Spirit, "a museum piece or the possession of a select few. This can occur when some

groups of Christians give excessive importance to certain rules, customs or ways of acting. The Gospel then tends to be reduced and constricted, deprived of its simplicity, allure and savor. This may well be a subtle form of Pelagianism, for it appears to subject the life of grace to certain human structures. It can affect groups, movements and communities, and it explains why so often they begin with an intense life in the Spirit, only to end up fossilized… or corrupt." (no. 58)

Just like the Pharisees and dignitaries, Christians who are completely certain in their faith are often incapable of understanding people who are not so sure in their faith as they are, especially non-believers. The certainty in faith and religious truth often makes it impossible for them to be compassionate, understanding, or even tolerant of those who have doubts or are even non-believers who seek and wonder, who are not quite satisfied with the "catechism" answers. For this reason, they can become imaginative and turn into a "petty elite" who "subconsciously or knowingly exclude others from their comfortable, believable world. This is a tiny, bitter, unbridled, and unfaithful religiousness against which Jesus spoke: spiritual blindness." (Martin 2013, 33) This spiritual blindness is very explicitly illustrated by the elder son in the parable of the prodigal son who in no way could enter the father's joy upon the return of his son (Lk 15:25-32).

These completely certain Christians are also very poor religious educators for their children. This is illustrated by the results of H. Sundéen's extensive psychological research on the success of various types of believing parents in communicating the faith to their own children as stated by Halik (2012, 30). "Too sure" parents have very little success because they discourage their children with their authoritarianism. The same is true of "too uncertain" parents because their faith is too ambiguous and unconvincing. The best results are achieved by the parents who are "somewhat uncertain" or not "too certain" because they allow their children to ask critical questions and raise them primarily by personal example.

The Christians who are not aware of the fragility of their faith and the true nature of religious truths can fall into the temptation of ruinous authority on their spiritual path. When they come to know the truth of God and what is good for all people, they are persuaded by the tempter that they will want to love God and neighbor each one for the glory of God and for the good of the world. In every way, they would endure the world of higher justice and bring people into the kingdom of God, even forcefully, if necessary (Solovjov 2000, 55). Indeed, some Christians "think that it consists in the imposition of their own ideologies upon everyone else, or in a violent defense of the truth, or in impressive demonstrations of strength" (Francis 2020a, no. 92).

This temptation can only be resisted by those who keep in mind that they must constantly grow in faith, to take the path of permanent "discipleship" so that they can live in the spirit of the gospel. This is why Pope Francis encourages Christians to remain a disciple throughout their entire lives: "This message has to be shared humbly as a testimony on the part of one who is always willing to learn, in the awareness that the message is so rich and so deep that it always exceeds our grasp." (Francis 2013b, no. 128)

Where permanent discipleship is not lived, there is always a danger that people will be locked in their camp where everything is clear to them. Self-confident believers as well as confident atheists face this danger. Neither of them can understand the other who is in the opposite camp. Both of them are at risk of falling into fundamentalism and dangerous fanaticism. Halik (2012, 86) aptly draws attention to the saying: "Faith without critical questions would turn into a tedious and non-life ideology, infantile bigotry, or in fundamentalism and dangerous fanaticism. But the very rationality without spiritual and ethical impulses emanating from the world of religion would be similarly unilateral and dangerous; it could turn into cynical pragmatism or a hardened skepticism."

3. Readiness for God's Surprises

Pope Francis encourages us to be open always and everywhere to God and His surprises, stressing that "God infinitely transcends us; he is full of surprises. We are not the ones to determine when and how we will encounter him; the exact times and places of that encounter are not up to us. Someone who wants everything to be clear and sure presumes to control God's transcendence." (Francis 2018, no. 41)

Jesus himself encourages us towards this, by frequently using the verbs that invite—learn, listen, watch, realize. This is fundamental to the life of each of his disciples. Even more, this was also fundamentally true to Himself, to know His Father and His ways. He was not satisfied with the seeming, the self-evident. He was aware that what he sees and hears is not only what he "sees at first sight". There is much more behind that. On the path of discovering God, which was revealed to him by the Old Testament, whose disciple he was, his family and the community he belonged to, he withdrew into solitude—just like in the time of public action—to stop and start to watch and listen to all things and events more deeply, he allowed himself to be instructed in the mystery of God, in which he believed with all his people (Larrañaga 1999, 8–19).

Jesus was not only truly God, but also truly man. As truly man, he had to gradually discover who God is and who he was in relation to Him (this is indicated by Luke's report of Jesus' growing up—2:39-52). His greatest temptation was to give up his human limitations. However, he remained faithful to being a true man to the end, even at the time of rejection, misunderstanding, humiliation, false condemnation, suffering, and death on the cross, and after the resurrection as a glorified man. Why did he remain faithful? Certainly because he allowed himself to be taught in the power of the Holy Spirit by the Father who revealed to him how truly, infinitely, and freely he is being loved, that only the Father's love is real and eternal.

Because of this profound experience, he could speak of the Father so clearly and revealed His true face and concrete love and compassion. All of his parables clearly reveal to how he was able to see the Father everywhere at work (Jn 5:19), and how His everyday things and human tasks became the sign of the Father's care for humans, and the presence and growth of the Kingdom of God among us.

In the Holy Spirit, who led him in a special way from his baptism onwards, he was able to cooperate responsibly with the Father and live the joy of his sonship, even when He was left alone and remained alone with Him. This is why, at the last supper, He was able to demonstrate explicitly that He came to the world to serve people, as His Father serves every human being so that everyone can recognize that he or she is His beloved son, and that eternal life and holiness lie precisely in the acceptance of this serving love, and that everyone can live in and according to that Love. It is a constant and excellent incentive for Christians to remain faithful to His Spirit of service as well as to look bravely for God's presence and surprises today, as this was explained by anatheism.

The importance of accepting Jesus' attitude that indicates that, as a teacher, he was at all times also the disciple of his Father, and his ability to learn, watch, and listen in his way, was confirmed by some of the spiritual teachers in the history of Christianity. Let us highlight two of those who are among the best known. By following Jesus' example, St. Francis of Assisi was able to sing the hymn of creation at the end of his life from the whole of his heart and with all the power in him. He finally realized that everything in this creation was his brother or sister (Francis 2015, no. 1; 11–12). It all comes from the same Father, the creator of heaven and earth. All of us are connected by brotherly/sisterly relations. All are a gift of God for us and everyone is God's gift for others. We cannot live a true relationship with God, if, at the same time, we do not accept responsibility to everything as the responsibility to our brothers and sisters and begin to live the mutual brotherly/sisterly love.

The second spiritual teacher exhibiting this attitude is St. Ignatius of Loyola. At the end of the spiritual exercises lasting four weeks, he suggests to those who perform them to contemplate in order to attain love or enter into it (Spiritual Exercises, no. 230–237). He invites the person who is doing the exercises to ask for the intimate knowledge of so many good things received so that he or she can love God with all and serve him in his or her service to all (no. 233). He invites him or her also to think how God strives and works for him or her "in all things created on the earth, that is, he acts as one who performs hard work, both in the heavens, in the elements, in the plants, fruits, herds, etc. He gives them, and preserves them, gives them to live and feel, etc." (no. 236) These exercises reveal how St. Ignatius of Loyola looked at all of creation like Jesus Christ, and that he was instructed by Him about the Trinity, His active presence, and His immense, free, giving, and serving love. For this reason, he was able to find God in all things and to be his active interlocutor and co-worker everywhere. With this final exercise, however, he wanted to help all those who did these exercises to be able to live and work in the Spirit of Jesus Christ and, in His way, to love one another as he loves us.

Christians, especially theologians, are at risk of becoming only teachers without, at the same time, being aware that they cannot be fully satisfied if they do not continue to be disciples of Jesus Christ and his Father in the power of the Holy Spirit, and, of course, including the Church and her teaching. They are also supposed to let Him teach them in everyday things, animals, plants, events, and people who are sent by life to him, even those who are in doubt, confusion, disbelief, and even fighting atheists.

This is why Jesus invites his disciples to become like children (Mk 10:13-15). What is the fundamental characteristic of the child? The child can be amazed. He or she asks again and again. He or she listens to, watches with all his or her being, and penetrates into the depths of everything that exists. Everything is secret to him or her. It only goes without saying that he or she

is aware that he or she does not yet know everything, that everything he or she has already understood is not everything, but that there is a lot more for all of them. He or she is happy to accept the fact that he or she is a disciple; he or she is learning to imitate others, especially his or her parents. This attitude of discipleship allows him or her to become what he or she longs for at the depth of his or her soul, even though he or she does not know exactly what that is (Matjaž 2002, 184).

The Bible reveals to us that human's deepest desire is to become what he or she is according to creation: the image and likeness of God. Therefore, human's deepest desire[4] is to be like the Father, to become merciful as He is, to serve Him as He is (Szamocki 2012, 59–62; Roszak 2022a; Vanzini 2023). Therefore, whoever is always ready to be taught, to learn, to accept the attitude of discipleship, to be surprised, to nurture the child in his or her core, even when sent to teach others, he or she can actively and productively communicate what he or she has gained and grows in all dimensions of his or her life. Together with others, he or she is ready to step on the way of searching and questioning, along the path of Zaccheus (Lk 19:1-9). He or she is capable of seeing the continued learning as something very positive, because he or she is aware that God is always a completely different God as he or she already knows, that it is an inconceivable mystery that goes beyond all human understanding and established mental structures. On this path of learning, the stimulus of anatheism is also a wonderful opportunity for a deeper discovery of God who always surprises.

In his book *Close to the Distant Ones*, Tomas Halik (2012, 23) refers to the saying of the philosopher Eric Voegelin, who said, "The biggest problem of today's Christians is not that they do not know the correct answers, but that they have forgotten the questions that were asked and their answers."

4 Based on the biblical assumption (Gen 1:26; 2:7) that God formed "humankind in His image and likeness", the desire and search for God can be conveyed as a fundamental (ontological) need – the deepest desire rooted in the human likeness to God (Skralovnik 2022, 179).

The answers without questions asked by concrete people in concrete time and space are very abstract. They are similar to trees without roots, as non-believers would think of many Christian truths. We can come to the living truth, living trees—with their roots—spoken by Jesus in the parable of the Kingdom of God as a tree in which the birds nest the birds of heaven (Lk 13:19), in a living "dialogue" between the questions and answers. "The answers are in temptation", as Halik (2012, 23) explained, "to complete the process of our search, as the problem of the discussion was the problem—but the problem has already been solved. However, with the new question, the depth of the mystery is again opening up to dissolve." For this reason, we must live the way of searching and questioning, the path of discipleship, even when it seems to us a waste of time and strength, unnecessary, only a problem. Only in this way will we be able to become seekers with the seekers and help them on their journey of seeking answers that may surprise us too. We must be aware that the right answers cannot be given to them by us, but must be given to them by the grace of the Holy Spirit, who is the only true inner Teacher, Comforter and Guide, the One who is blowing where He wills and who often surprises us. (Jn 3:14-16)

In any case, in the search for truth, we must never separate it from love. We must always bear in mind what Pope Francis also stresses: "All of us, as believers, need to recognize that love takes first place: love must never be put at risk, and the greatest danger lies in failing to love (cf. 1 Cor 13:1-13)" (2020a, no. 92). Truth is also always "an inseparable companion of justice and mercy. All three together are essential to building peace; each, moreover, prevents the other from being altered." (no. 227)

As the Apostle Paul became all things to all people (1 Cor 9:22), Christians are also called to become all things to them so that they can become seekers with the one who seeks and the one who questions with the people who question. In this way, they will fully be able to enable the others who are, in one way or another, away from God to discover His proximity.

At the same time, this proximity denotes distance, because God is immanent and transcendent at the same time. There are ever more Christians who are convinced and claim that they have all the important answers. They offer ultimate answers, which are often cheap.

Every Christian is in danger of being a teacher who knows everything and has full certainty of faith, and therefore Pope Francis (2018, no. 41) stresses, "When somebody has an answer for every question, it is a sign that they are not on the right road." This can be a sign that they are false prophets who use religion for their own purposes, to promote their psychological or intellectual theories (no. 41).

Therefore, some Christians like Halik consciously choose to become a doubter with the doubters and a seeker with the seekers. God Himself then makes sure that their many religious certainties are undermined, but at the same time He gives them valuable gifts as Halik (2012, 24) testifies:

"Just in that "hollow', at the moment of crushing and undermining certainty, it is precisely through that "hole in the roof', precisely in that movement of always new questions and doubts, that He revealed His face to me as never before. I understood that "meeting with God', conversion, the faithful agreement with the way in which God reveals Himself and with the way how the Church demonstrates this disclosure, is not the end of the path. Faith is "tracking'; it has the nature of a path that never ends in this life."

4. Conclusion

Kearney's thinking about anatheism is a holistic view of how to overcome the limitations of a modern human's secularized thinking. Anatheism is the opening of our past, tradition, and religious teachings to new dimensions. This enables us to go deeper into the depths of creation and the beauty of our existence. Anatheism confronts us with the existential question of the

beauty or poverty of our existence. On one hand, it can be deeply personal and relational, and on the other hand, it is immersed in a certain immanent, impersonal, and time-dependent immanence. For believers as well as for non-believers, it is the challenge of where and in what way we are looking for the fullness of life.

For Christians, the challenge of anatheism is even greater, because it invites them to discover and enter into the mystery of God's and human existence more fully. It refuses to be embraced by rational structures. Anatheism can also be an encouragement for Christians to walk on the path of discipleship more intensively, so that they go again into the depths of the revelation of God, who has already revealed Himself, but this is an eternal newness. For this reason it is right that they should always be ready to be surprised again by God with a new perception of what He has already revealed to them, but which they have not yet fully grasped, because they have been caught up in the certainty of what they have already grasped and proclaimed, perhaps even declared to be dogma, or enacted into law in their own code of law.

In this way, Christianity will be given a freshness that will address contemporaries in a new way. This does not mean breaking with tradition, renouncing the teachings of the Church teachers and the Church's teaching, but rather, in their spirit, allowing God the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit to continue in them what He has already begun and put into practice in the history of the Church (Num 11:26-29; Joel 3:1-2) (Szamocki 2021, 636–639). This can only happen when all Christians, together with their leaders and teachers, are willing to learn to listen to the Gospel as the ultimate standard, and to the Church teaching which sustains it, in order to find what might be even more fruitful for the Church and the world today, and through which God's plan for the salvation and redemption of the whole world can be realized to an even greater extent. In doing so, they must guard against working from recipes or repeating what has worked well in the past.

What is good in one context is not guaranteed to be good in another. This is why Pope Francis (2018, no. 173) calls the whole Church to discernment when he says: "The discernment of spirits liberates us from rigidity, which has no place before the perennial 'today' of the risen Lord. The Spirit alone can penetrate what is obscure and hidden in every situation, and grasp its every nuance, so that the newness of the Gospel can emerge in another light."

Chapter 3

Accept or Reject the Physical Limits of the Human Being: Transhumanist and Christian Views

The desire to improve oneself and raise human nature to a higher level of human development is probably as old as human self-awareness. Throughout human history, the desire to transcend the limitations of human nature and to prolong the length of life has expressed itself in ever newer forms. The expression of this desire is seen in the emergence of transhumanism, or the theory that it is possible to transcend current physical limitations with the help of modern science and technology. At the same time, transhumanism raises new questions.

The first and perhaps the greatest challenge that transhumanism places in front of us is our understanding of the essence of being human that makes all humans equal despite differences in skin color, beauty,

or intelligence. The second challenge is the question of what constitutes good human beings despite their mortality and other natural limits? (Fukuyama 2004, 43) Biologically humans are a complex result of a very long evolutionary process and a synthesis or union of good and bad characteristics. Thanks to our rational nature, humans are able and called to transform/improve their incomplete humanness. As spiritual beings we are able to transcend our own limited nature and be in touch with the limitless and the transcendent.

Modifying any one of the key human characteristics will inevitably entail modifying a complex, interlinked package of traits, which will go beyond our anticipation of the ultimate outcome. Through the exploration of nature, the environmental movement teaches us humility and respect for the integrity of nonhuman nature. Similarly, we should remain humble and careful in the application of the latest technology to any modification of human nature. Rather than transforming biological aspects of human essence, we need a new all-encompassing spiritual understanding of human nature, which will allow us anew, with help of modern technology, to accept, integrate and transform fallen human nature on the universal level, leaving nobody behind.

This chapter introduces the thesis that living a life in Christ's way is the answer to a truncated view of transhumanism on human life. First, we will briefly present two fundamental ways of understanding transhumanism and its tenuous view of the human and his or her life. We will then show how transhumanist ideas can be a challenge to Christianity, especially Christian and ecclesial teaching. In the final chapter, we will try to see how a holistic understanding of Jesus Christ as a true human being and the true God as well as the life of Christians in Christ's way can give a response to an abbreviated view of transhumanism on human life.

1. Short History and Motivations Behind Transhumanism

The word transhumanism was first used in 1920 by Julian Huxley in his essay *Religion Without Revelation*. "The human species can, if it wishes, transcend itself—not just sporadically, an individual one way, an individual there in another way—but in its entirety, as humanity. We need a name for this new belief. Perhaps *transhumanism* will serve: man remaining man, but transcending himself, by realizing new possibilities of and for his human nature." (Huxley 1979, 195) Transhumanism as an organized movement of technologists, philosophers, and scientists began to emerge in the 1970s with the transhumanist philosopher and futurist FM-2030, born as Fereidoun M. Esfandiary. This pervasive movement and an important actant seek to hack the human biocomputer to extend life, increase welfare, and enhance the human condition in search of immortality.

This idea of bringing a golden age to humanity with the aid of technology can be traced back at least five hundred years to Francis Bacon (1561-1626), also called the father of contemporary science. In his main writing *Instauratio Magna*, his term *instauratio* can be translated as establishment and restoration of human faculties that were lost in the Fall. To bridge the rift between God and humanity is within the power of humanity. With discoveries of the boundaries of human's nature, and with religion, science and technology working together, humans should become able to transform their fallen nature, regain the central position in the entire cosmos and enjoy a more complete life in relation to God.

The meaning of transhumanism has gained new nuances and interpretations, especially in the past decades of accelerated advances in technology. These interpretations can be divided into two groups. The first group includes interpretations whose common denominator is the belief that humans must embrace science and technology, such as artificial intelligence

and genetic engineering, to overcome certain biological limitations. Within this group, some scholars have claimed that transhumanism will bring us closer to salvation and immortality, i.e. the promises of Judeo-Christian religions. Consequently, cyberspace will become the disembodied space of salvation with unheard of possibilities of new fantasies and practices that will overstep the boundaries of organic nature. Through the merger of biology and machines, we will reach a seamless continuity when machines will start thinking for humans. The post-biological world with its silicon-based life and ability of mind transplant will create intelligent machines that will provide humanity with personal immortality (Moravec 2020). Transhumanists seek to advance over the legacy of humanist thought with a philosophy of life that rejects deities, faith, and worship. Their view of values and meaningfulness is based on the nature and potentials of humans within a rational and scientific framework, which will bring radical changes by planetary communications technologies and technologies of the body (Pilsch 2017, 1).

The second group of transhumanists disagrees with the first group in the belief that human perfection of human beings through artificial means is not possible. Technology, especially new ways of transportation and easy access and exchange of information, will create a new global mind and a deepening of human consciousness. This, however, will not lead automatically toward alteration of the human person, but to creation and greater expansion of the human community and toward more being (Amendola 2023, 115). Greater socialization, unification, and advancement of technology will increase the freedom of individuals. The main representative of this group might be Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955).

Especially in academic circles, the second group of transhumanists, with its thought-provoking and more transient ideas does not trigger the same level of academic curiosity, skepticism and uncertainty as the first group does. Since development of technology is continuously opening new unheard of opportunities and challenges, it is almost impossible, and even unnecessary, to take a definite

position either in favor of or against transhumanism. Nonetheless, transhumanists' promises need to be critically examined in terms of idealism and realism, in order to avoid unrealistic illusions. What interests us are not so much new solutions and opportunities promised by the latest technology, but motivations, hope, and hidden energy behind transhumanists' promises and plans.

Pilsch (2017, 3–4) delineates transhumanism as utopian thought, as a retrogressive assertion of Cartesian humanism, a techno-secular reimagining of Christian fundamentalist salvation history, and a celebration of the most brutal forms of capitalist excess in the present. This utopia merges together the post-Marxist theories and neoliberal capitalist expansions using the human body and the human soul as the material for imagining a radical future as radically alien as communism's idea of a classless society. This utopian rhetoric of transhumanism, however flawed, must be taken seriously.

Transhumanism might be in many respects connected to Christian theories of eschatology. Christians' awaiting of the second return of God is, in the minds of transhumanists, replaced with a host of posthuman-making technologies. This phenomenon as such is nothing new and can be dated back to the Middle Age or to every time when most material and mundane activities become invested with spiritual and transcendent meaning. (Roszak 2022b, 588–590) Technological progress has been gradually replacing divine contemplation and associated with the return of lost human perfection (Noble 1997, 6–12).

Based on the accelerated development of technology, advocates of transhumanism believed in the replacement of religion with another system of meaning, this time based on posthuman technologies promising us a new perfection of fallen human nature. In addition, these technologies (e.g., neuroscience, neuropharmacology, nanotechnology, artificial intelligence) will create not only a new system of meaning, but a much more intimate relationship with our bodies as well. New technology will become so internalized and integrated with the human body that it will expand human potential to the point of transforming the innermost part of human nature.

When talking about new technology, Maxwell J. Mehlman (2009, 6–8) talks about enhancement that "raises a person up by improving performance, appearance or capability". Enhancement in this case is not meant as a therapy, aimed "at preventing, treating, or mitigating the effect of a disease or disorder", but to modification of human beings quite apart from any disease. The therapy/enhancement distinction remains blurred and will not go away. One cannot draw a simple line that separates the positive and negative use of technology. Consequently, even the definition and evaluation of enhancement remains blurred and challenging (Oleksowicz 2018, 235). An invasive transformation of a certain dimension of the human body opens the question about what we value most and what it takes to improve what we value most, states Ronald Cole-Turner (2011, 2). If we believe that the highest value of each individual is expressed in their search for the meaning of life, then the enhancement has to be left to individuals. This, however, opens another question: are individuals really free to choose their view of life and their way of achieving and enhancing the good? The same definition of *good* calls for a new ethical discussion, which by definition cannot be left to random decisions of individuals (Marinčić and Čović 2012, 112).

2. Understanding the Human Body in the History of Christianity

In short, we can say that in transhumanism, as such, humans, with all their limitations, especially at the physical, biological level, have no place: they must not exist. In no way can they accept human aging and dying. They "see" these two as a disease that must be overcome in any way possible so that human can live their lives in fullness. (Petkovšek 2018, 237) Nor can they accept the human body as it is. They see it as a prison from which they need to free themselves. They also see history, society, culture and religion as things that restrict them and not as opportunities for a blossoming of human life.

Such an understanding of the human was already present in the view of many Gnostic groups that existed before Christianity and also at its inception. Particularly it has remained present in some apocryphal gospels: e.g., Judah's Gospel, Thomas, Gnostic Gospel[5], Pilate's work etc. Such reflections on human beings have been excluded by Christianity from the outset. Nonetheless, the idea of Greek Neoplatonism, which sees the human body as a major obstacle on the path to divine unity, has been interwoven with it. The view of dualism, which sees the body as the fruit of an evil principle, has also been inserted. Thus, there were certain groups of believers among the first Christians who saw the body associated with evil and as a prison of the soul. Human salvation was understood as an escape from the body.

After the decline of Gnostic dualism, its remnants reappeared at the threshold of the second millennium with the Bogomils, and later with the Patarens and Katars. Against this background, the Catholic Church fought back with the Inquisition and Evangelization, which was entrusted to the religious mendicant orders. On one hand, they mortified the body, but on the other, they highly valued creation as the creation of God. This is particularly expressed by St. Francis' *The Canticle of Creation*. Thus, St. Francis asks his own body for forgiveness because he did not care enough for it. In the Renaissance, however, the body took on a new centrality. This prompted Christianity to focus on an ascetic, which characterized the body primarily from the perspective of temptation and sin. The slogan also appeared: "Save your soul!", which is reminiscent of a Neoplatonic thinking that sees the body as a prison of the soul. (Špelič 2019, 10–11)

The Second Vatican Council made it clear that the human body is very valuable and important for a human's full life, function and the establishment of a personal relationship with the Triune God. A human, by his or her bodily nature, takes on the physical elements of the physical

5 Transhumanism cannot accept a human body as it is. This is, for example, explicitly expressed in the Saying 114 of the Gospel of Thomas, which calls for transformation (e.g., of a woman into a man), see Jensterle 2011, 77–88.

world, so that they reach their peak in humanity, and raise the voice for the free glorification of the Creator (Gaudium et Spes, no. 14.1). The Second Vatican Council's teachings, which also refer to the 2nd century teaching of St. Irenaeus of Lyon, has supplanted centuries of captive Catholic theology and spirituality in the dualistic concept of a human. This captive concept often led to a negative view of the human body and its involvement in everyday personal, community, social and political life. (Zyzak 2013b, 222)

Despite the fact that it has been a long time since the Second Vatican Council and its clear doctrine on the body, we agree with Miran Špelič (2019, 10), who says: "The Christian view on the body is still "unchristianized', as many elements foreign to Christianity entered the view. These elements have deprived the body of the goodness bestowed through the Creator's hands." Our stand is that the phenomenon of transhumanism and its views on the body are challenging Christianity to further evangelize its vision of the body and allow seeing as Christ does.

The phenomenon of transhumanism, therefore, calls religious scholars and leaders to take a more active part in this discussion, which is apparently religious on its surface. The Catholic Church's official stance on issues related to modern technology was stated in 2004 in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (no. 473), published by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. In general, the document supports scientific progress and technological advancement; at the same time, the ever-expanding power of technology must always be subordinated to moral principles that respect human dignity and the integrity of other living creatures. Molecular biology, biotechnology, and genetics must bear in mind the ecological impact and long-term effects of one's actions, which should be guided by the order, beauty, and usefulness of individual living beings and their function in the ecosystem. These general guidelines are based on a belief that human beings have a privileged position throughout

the universe. Nature should nevertheless be seen as a gift, compelling humans not to dominate but to develop the natural world responsibly and in the light of its inherent harmony.

Transhumanists' promises require a more detailed theological debate, keeping in mind that modern technologies of enhancement, and the idea of human transformation, yearn for transcendence just as theology does. The question of death, human finitude and mortality are calling for a new salvific response and hope through human effort and history (Huzarek 2017, 217). Following this aspiration, B. Waters (2011, 164) claims that transhumanism is a late modern religious response to the finite and mortal constraints of human existence. Transhumanism is not a religion in the formal sense, but a new place of hope and confidence.

Christian theology grounds this transformation in a distinctive view of God, who became a human in order to transform the human condition. This transformation takes place through redemption and glorification. At this point one might claim that bioethics' distinction between therapy and enhancement, in many ways, overlaps with the theological principles of redemption and glorification. Both redemption and therapy try to restore what was the original or normal human state, and glorification and enhancement take us far beyond our present imperfect condition toward something completely new. Underlying this apparent similarity between redemption/therapy, and glorification/enhancement, lies the crucial dissimilarity as well. Human transformation as it is understood in Christianity would not be possible without God entering into the human condition of the body. God becomes like us so that we might be made like God. So human transformation in terms of redemption and sanctification does not happen without grace and divine intervention, which does not find a place in a general definition of transhumanism.[6]

6 For the consequences of man's failure to accept God's intervention, see also Žalec 2015, 222–223; 2017, 257–258; 2016a, 285–286; 2016b, 468; 2019, 415.

3. The human Body in the Light of Christ's Incarnation and Resurrection

The Old Testament description of Human Creation clearly shows that human beings, as such, are created according to God's image and likeness, and that man and woman are fully God's image (Gen 1:26-27). Thus, human beings' biological and physical limitations do not prevent them from being an image of God (Szamocki 2012, 56–64).[7] And human beings, with all their qualities and limitations, together with all creation, were proclaimed to be very good (Gen 1:31). This must always be kept in mind when we look at human beings in the light of the Holy Scriptures. (Roszak 2013, 519–525) Everything that is created is in itself good, because everything is desired, wanted and originated by God (Gen 1:1-24; Wis 11:24-25). But the quality of everything rises to the level of "very good" (Gen 1:28-31), when it enters into a relationship with human beings.

This view of human beings was embraced by the Jewish people during their great crisis, when they lost their land and temple and were exiled to Babylonia; however, it has been often lost. In various ways, the prophets have repeatedly revealed God's view on human beings and their basic mission to become more and more an image of God. In the midst of this world, human beings are called to represent God and to make Him present as well as to make visible God's relationship with all people and the whole creation. For human beings are called to be God's interlocutor and collaborator on earth.

The goodness of all, including of human beings in their limitations, was finally confirmed in the fullness of the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the

7 On the contrary: the verbal form of the root הוא characterizes the basic tendency for (self-) preservation, on the one hand, and the equivalent aspiration for God on the other. This means that longing for God and bodily needs are both described using the same terminology of existential attraction. This desire, therefore, represents the highest religious meaning in the Old Testament, on the one hand; on the other hand, in texts relating to the tradition of the Israelites' journey in the wilderness, the same desire marks the rejection of the Lord (Num 11:19-20) (Skralovnik 2020, 507–517).

second Person of the Trinity, the Son of God. (Jn 1:1-17) Because of the incarnation, the Word of God is not expressed and revealed only through human reason and spirit, but also through the human body (bones, blood, muscles, hair, etc.)[8] (McIntosh 2005, 182–185). God's Word has become a true and real man—not a virtual one—with all of man's limitations as well as with his biological and physical weaknesses. His body was subjected to disease, aging, pain and death. With the incarnation of God's Word, even all creation in it again revives its original language: the language of God, His Creator, His goodness, beauty and truth. (183–185; Petkovšek 2019, 19–21)

If we mistakenly understand the ancient hymn to Jesus Christ, which speaks of His incarnation as His humiliation and kenosis, His fundamental message may be obscured: "Who, being in the very nature of God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made Himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness." (Phil 2,6) His kenosis does not in any way mean that human life is something unworthy of God or that it is not something good. Rather, that *life* God lives in Himself in his infinite, absolute and differently different way than we can imagine. Therefore, the incarnation is the expression of God's immense love and mercy for human beings, his creation. God does not want to be close to human beings only in the sense that human beings are his image and his creation, but also wants to share with them his way of life, with all his limitations and vulnerabilities. That is why God's love for human beings is infinite. In incarnation, God accepts human beings' limitations and wants to make it quite tangible and clear to show this life is infinitely valuable to Him, and that he wants every human being to fully live his or her human life in the way that Jesus Christ lived as both a true man and true God. In Him, God revealed that it is possible for human beings to freely and responsibly accept

8 Faith in the Bible appears when one actually sees the "physical" divine activity in the history of salvation, and not vice versa (Palmisano 2013, 513). Both ancient and biblical thoughts attach to the logos (embodied God) two basic characteristics: the word (narrative, thought) and reality (phenomenon) at the same time (Matjaž 2007, 393).

Christ's way of life, which is the life of self-giving love and righteousness as well as being in relationship with God the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit (Celarc 2019, 445–448). Thus, it is not necessary for humans to refuse their physical limitations or to overcome them in any way, but just to accept them in freedom and to live them in a way that Jesus Christ lived in the power of the Holy Spirit given to Him through the Father.

Of course, it is not so easy; a human being always tries to reject his or her human limitations and sees them as obstacles that he or she must overcome if he or she wants to be happy and eternal. This is what the Biblical passages about the temptations of Adam and Eve in Paradise (Gen 3,1-7)[9] and those of Jesus in the desert (Mt 4,1-11; Mk 1,12-13; Lk 4,1-13) are telling us. Most often, the explanations of Jesus' temptations conclude with the message that Jesus was tempted by our most fundamental human temptations: wealth, fame and power. It turns out, however, that Jesus' fundamental temptation was not to accept that He was always and everywhere a true man living in harmony with human limitations. Satan did everything to turn Him away from living a true human life and make Him take advantage from being also true God, so that He wouldn't need to be subject to human boundaries (neither in the desert nor on the cross).

Jesus Christ, full of the Holy Spirit who led Him into the wilderness, to whom He completely surrendered Himself and allowed the Holy Spirit to guide Him, enabled Him to fully comprehend and accept, in the depths of His being, His true identity as God's Son, the Father's beloved one. Because He was so convinced about His identity and because He trusted that God the Father loved Him unconditionally, He could endure temptations. He did not question what He was going through, even though He felt the weight of human limitations and suffering because of all the evil and sin of mankind He accepted. Being one with the Father in the Holy Spirit, He persevered until

9 For a precise semantic analysis of the dynamics of the temptation in the Garden of Eden, see Skralovnik 2017, 273–284; 2016b, 86–96.

death on the cross in the self-giving love toward the Father and in Him (the Father) to all mankind. With His resurrection from the dead, He revealed the victories of love over hatred, of forgiveness over vengeance and of life over death. Through faith and rebirth in Him through the sacrament of baptism, each person can participate in this victory (Rom 6). Of course, this victory does not mean that human being no longer remains human being. Even the Resurrected Christ's body and life are still human, though completely transformed and exalted. This reality is revealed to us by several events when the resurrected Christ showed Himself to those whom He chose.

Crucified and risen, Jesus Christ appeared in the image of a wounded man (Lk 24,39; Jn 20,20); a worker who wants to help (Jn 20:15); a passing man who greets others kindly (Mt 28: 9); a traveler who approaches people (Lk 24:15); a stranger who listens and pays attention to a human being in his or her distress (Lk 24,17-24); an unknown person who interprets the Bible (Lk 24:25-27); a stranger who asks for food (Jn 21: 5); a person who brings peace (Jn 20:19; Lk 24:36); an unknown who counsels with good intention (Jn 21:6); a man who offers food (Jn 21:12); a person who takes bread, blesses it, breaks it and gives it to others (Lk 24:30) and a man who invites us to sit by a fire, rest and refresh. (Jn 21:9) Jesus has revealed Himself in all that is genuinely human: in greetings, encounters, gatherings, listening, teaching, reading and interpreting the Bible, in preparing food, eating, drinking, working, walking, rushing, grieving, in joy, doubts, search, flight, failure and acceptance of guests and strangers.

When we read the passages about the Resurrection, we can ask ourselves: Why didn't those to whom the resurrected Christ appeared immediately recognize Him as their Lord and Teacher? He came in the image of a stranger, an unknown person. He was recognized only by those who recognized His voice (Mt 28: 9; Jn 20:16); those who truly loved him (Jn 21: 7); the one who sincerely searched for Him, even through doubts (Jn 20: 11-18, 24-29); the ones who were gathered with their brothers and sisters who believed

in Him (Jn 20:26). Anyone looking for Him in the outward appearance the resurrected Christ had before could not find Him. With this He revealed to them and to all future generations that He is present in every human being and that He reveals Himself through every human being. Therefore, He tells the apostles to go to Galilee, where they will meet Him. (Mk 16:7) For this reason, as He said earlier about the last judgment: whatever you do to one of the least, you will do it to me. (Mt 25:31-46)

From these passages about the resurrected Christ, we can see that Christ's resurrection is revealed through all and in everything that is human. Christ wants to become and remain one with people; he wants to share His joy, His victory over evil and death, His relationship with the Father, the purpose of life in glorifying and serving the Father in every human being and caring for all creation. The resurrected Christ proves that all that is human is both good and a means of meeting with and through Him and, through Him, with the Father.

The Biblical passages about the resurrection of Christ also show that Christ is revealing Himself to human being, regardless of the situation in which human being finds him or herself. No human condition, even the most negative, can prevent Him from being able to reveal Himself to a human being and meet Him. It is also remarkable that the resurrected Jesus Christ allows the wounds to remain on His exalted body. (Jn 20:24-29) Thus, He demonstrates in a clear way that a human being doesn't have to avoid every potential wound or injury to which life subjects him or her. Even with all its wounds, the human body will be exalted.

The passage on Jesus' ascension also speaks about the preciousness of the human body. (Mk 16:19, Lk 24:50; Acts 1:6-11) It reveals that Christ's human body was transformed through the resurrection and was irrevocably accepted into union with the Father and the Holy Spirit; that is, into the very life of the Triune God. All obstacles that separated human being from God after original sin were overcome. Human nature, as represented by its body,

now has a real place in the Holy Trinity. (Jn 14,3) Through the resurrected and glorified Jesus Christ human being is now included in the life of Triune God. No one—no human—is excluded from self-giving love in God.

Jesus' incarnation, death, and resurrection reveal that life in its fullness is not life without the body or external to the body, its limitations and vulnerabilities. The union with God begins with the human transformation in the sacrament of baptism, when a human being, through his or her faith in Jesus Christ, dies to his or her old self and starts a new life in Christ. This allows him or her to become a son/daughter of God and a part of the glorious life in the Triune God. Yet, there still remains a human being with all the same limitations that Jesus Christ also accepted and lived. Of course, the human being is always tempted, as was Jesus Christ. But with Jesus, he or she can always overcome temptation and accept the plan of redemption and exaltation already realized in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, leading him or her to the fullness of life and eternal happiness.

For this reason, one does not need to fear one's own weaknesses and limitations or strive to eliminate them (Osredkar 2020). When the Apostle Paul was praying that he might be delivered from that "thorn" and begged the Lord three times that He might take it away from him (2 Cor 12:8), the Lord revealed to him that this effort was an unnecessary: "My grace is enough for you; for my power is made complete in what is weak." (2 Cor 12:9) Paul therefore begins to rejoice in his weaknesses in order to receive the power of Christ. He came to realize that he can rejoice not only in his weaknesses but also in reproaches, needs, persecutions and distress for Christ: "For when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Cor 12:10)

Some people see in the promise of the second coming of Christ and the ultimate fulfilment of God's Kingdom, an incentive for the ideas of transhumanism and the necessity to transcend human limitations, especially the imperfection of human body, with technology. In this truncated understanding of the Kingdom of God, Christians can see encouragement to rethink their understanding of the Kingdom of God, which Jesus Christ

came to proclaim and which has begun to be realized in the midst of this world: "The time has come and the kingdom of God is near. Let your hearts be turned from sin and have faith in the good news!" (Mk 1: 15)

Today the message about the Kingdom of God has been lost. It has been forgotten that Jesus Christ came not to announce Himself but the Father and His Kingdom. He who sees Him, sees the Father and how the kingdom of God is being realized. This kingdom is not something that will only be in eternity, after the death of human being and the coming of Christ. Of course, at that time, it will be fully realized; however, it has already begun to be realized with Christ, by means of His living and doing. The laws of this Kingdom are presented in a special way in the sermon on the mount. (Mt 5-7) God's Kingdom is a life of communion, a life that brings people together, connects and unites them. When a person tries to live so, he or she does something that gets him or her deeper and deeper into this new life For this Kingdom there are no human biological and physiological limitations, such as aging and death; all this represents the "blessing" of the Kingdom of God. Those who believe in Jesus Christ and with the baptism to put Him on, can, with Him, in the midst of this world, build the Kingdom of God despite their limitations and experience the reality of the blessings (Pagola 2017, 445–451).

4. The Human Body as *Topos* of Encounter with God

The Incarnation is an expression of God's immeasurable love for human beings. God the Creator and Father does not only want to be close to the human being in the sense of being his or her image, his or her child, but also wants to share with him or her, through the Son Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit, his or her way of life in the flesh. Human beings, therefore, do not need to reject their bodily limitations or to overcome them in any way, they need only to accept them in freedom and to live

them in the way of Jesus. Moreover, God wants to express Himself in and through the human body by permeating it with His rhythm, peace, harmony, openness, relaxation and transparency. The more the human being allows him or herself to be guided by the sense of the absolute and tries to remove the obstacles that oppose this devotion, "the more this corporeality becomes the 'material' in which the personal center expresses itself with its absolute" (Truhlar 2004, 59), which is the triune God. The human body is therefore called to harmonize with Him and to become ever more supplicatory for His living presence and activity in it.

The human being feels his or her body as something that is interwoven with the experience of God the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit (Truhlar 1974, 224). In fact, he or she longs for what he or she already possesses in some way in his or her center, in his or her greatest depth. This longing for the infinite proves his or her participation in "the infinite in the depth of being" (Truhlar 2004, 72), since he or she is the image of God (Gen 1:26) and the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19-20).

The senses are also a great help in entering into a personal dialogue with God. They open the human being to the environment and also to him or herself and all that he or she experiences in his or her own body. They enable him or her to respond to the most basic needs of life, so that he or she can live and sustain his or her life at all. Whoever does not feel is, so to speak, dead. Likewise, the senses are the basis of human symbolic activity, and with them he or she can also respond to his spiritual needs (Truhlar 1974, 101–102).

Vladimir Truhlar (101–102) encourages a more integrated view of the human being, because only in this light can his bodily senses acquire their true value. All choices that are freely and integrally made necessarily involve the sensory level. If it is not included, he or she loses his or her inner balance, harmony; disunity and tension arise within him or her. And this inner harmony is especially presupposed and needed by every healthy spiritual maturation. Without it, too, it is impossible to attain a personal experience of God.

True and transforming prayer[10] is holistic and integral. It takes place through the external senses, bodily postures and awareness of the breath and various bodily sensations. Then, it involves the psychic level: memory, intellect and will. After that, it penetrates into a person's deepest spiritual world, where the heart feels, tastes, sees and hears, and touches the spiritual reality, the real presence and activity of God, where the spirit is enlivened by the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, where "a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (Jn 4:14). Such meditative-contemplative prayer begins to transform a person in his or her interior, which in turn affects the exterior as well, as it radiates and spreads around the person love, goodness, charity, love for people, joy, peace, and the pleasing aroma of God (Truhlar 1974, 313–315).

In the Christian view of the body, it is necessary to keep in mind the theological view of the body that St John Paul II speaks of in his Theology of the Body. In it, he often points out: "The body, in fact, and only the body, is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and the divine. It has been created to transfer into the visible the reality of the world the mystery hidden from eternity in God, and thus to be a sign of it." (John Paul II 2006, no. 19, p. 203). Human beings cannot grasp the great mystery of their bodies by reason alone. They can only know its action and benefit greatly from it. But the body is not only biological, but also theological. Only if we can hear, see and grasp what it "says" to us also theologically, can we truly understand ourselves and know how the triune God is livingly and actively present in us, knowing the language of "gift" and "self-gift" (no. 111, p. 576–578) which He has inscribed in us and is still inscribing in us. The body bears witness to creation as a fundamental gift and, consequently, bears witness to its desire to love as the Love from which it proceeds (no. 111, p. 574–581).

The human body is therefore, according to Pope John Paul II, a *topos*, a place of encounter between God and human beings in a very concrete way

10 On such transforming (penitential) payer, see Skralovnik 2022a, 265–291.

(West 2014, 3–8). Our body "remembers" its Creator, the Father, through Christ in the Holy Spirit (John Paul II 2006, no. 11, p. 169–172), and it calls each one of us to become aware of Him and to live His Love, which is imprinted in it and in all its functions. Contemplation of the body can be a way for us to make this possible. We believe that this is the area where God the Father through Christ in the Holy Spirit is still waiting for Christians to discover Him and to enable Him to be with them in this too, and that everything that enables the body to exist and function, and also all its bodily functions, will become the place and time of their personal and deeply transforming encounter with Him and of a spirituality lived integrally. In this case, many Christians who seek a spirituality in which the body is actively integrated will no longer look for this outside Christianity, but will also be able to show others how it is only through the integration of the body that human life and spirituality can be fully lived.

5. Conclusion

The phenomenon of transhumanism, its truncated view of human life and its physical limitations constitute a challenge for Christianity, its theologians and thinkers as well as for the teaching of the Catholic Church. Last but not least, it presents an invitation to all Christians to truly turn toward and contemplate Jesus Christ. They are called to show, even more clearly, with their lives in Christ, how the human body and, indeed, the entirety of human life are where human is fully realized as the image of God.

With a deeper understanding of Christ's incarnation, suffering, death and resurrection, that is, His entire life, Christianity could more deeply see the human in his or her totality, accept it and enable him or her to discover his or her preciousness even in his or her limitations of body (Avsenik Nabergoj 2022). It is precisely in a human's limitations on the biological

level that God reveals His grace and power that enables humans to attain the fullness of life and eternal life in the gift of the self-giving love of the Holy Trinity.

It is human vulnerability that liberates human from the traps and deceptions of various forms of gnosticism and pelagianism, both of which match the transhumanistic view of human. Because of his or her vulnerability, a human can become ever more compassionate and empathetic with other people and with all creation and thus in solidarity with all humanity and creation (Globokar 2022, 8–14; Orphanopoulos 2023, 30–32).[11] It is only in this way that he or she can respond more fully to the ethical needs of today's world by virtues, especially solidarity. (Fleming 2019)

Transhumanism wants to free humans of their historical, social, cultural and religious boundaries (Guibert Elizalde 2023). In this, it sees an obstacle and not an opportunity for a flourishing of human life. Christianity, however, emphasizes that human beings cannot be fully human without being integrated into all of their dimensions. All this allows them to go out of themselves and become free for what they are in their essence: the image of God, the sons/daughters of God, the brothers/sisters of every human being. In union with Christ, in Him and through Him, in fact, they are increasingly the interlocutors and collaborators of God the Father in the Holy Spirit. In the midst of this world, they take part in building the Kingdom of God, which has come to the world through Jesus Christ (Pohar 2023). The Kingdom can be present through anyone who believes in Him and accepts through baptism being in a father-son/daughter relationship in the midst of this world. All human life is equally important and as sacred as prayer, reading of the Bible and celebrating sacraments. The more one is

11 Even from the point of view of Hartmut Rosa's seminal theory of resonance, we can say that a person can achieve full humanity only through involvement in resonant relationships, which implies a person's readiness for their own vulnerability (Žalec 2021b, 831). Corresponding to this is the fact that a person's genuine resilience implies their vulnerability, as it implies their being in resonance and their maturity. The latter, just like resonance, implies a person's vulnerability (Žalec 2021a, 142).

trying to be more human and benevolent, the more he or she is holy and divine. Moreover, the body itself and its activities can become a personal, profound and transforming encounter with God the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit, if we do not run away from it and reject it, but embrace it as the *topos* of the encounter with Him and contemplate it. It is in and through this body that we can fully live Christian spirituality in all its dimensions.

In this way, living Christianity and its vision of human will become a real challenge for transhumanism to rethink its view on human life. Thus transhumanism will be able to start looking for "transformations", which will enable human being to live fully within his or her limitations and be more and more human, responsible, free and capable of both giving love and practicing solidarity. Certainly, this is only possible if transhumanism has in front of it a true human being, if it cares for the common good and a common home for all mankind and if it accepts the valuable gift of religions for all mankind and creation.

The most comprehensive answer to the claims of transhumanism is obtained by comparing the biblical notion of "truth" with the notion of truth in common linguistic usage and in abstract philosophical definitions (Avsenik Nabergoj 2023a, 339–357). The biblical notion of truth essentially implies a "transformation" of value criteria from the merely material world, which is transitory, to the solidity of spiritual realities and values, which carry within them the promise of immortality. In the Bible, God's creation is an inexhaustible source of metaphors and symbols for expressing the transcendent spiritual gifts that call all people to unity in solidarity. Unity and solidarity are the surest reflection of the grace of God that exposes the limits of the appearance of reality in the material world and the falsehood of human self-assertion, by revealing the sparks of eternal truth planted by creation in the personal core of the spiritual nature of human beings.

Chapter 4

Technology, Philosophy and Christianity in Confrontation with the Human Desire for Immortality

The search for human immortality is a recurring old-new enigma, occupying the human mind since the very beginning of human existence (Pevec Rozman 2022, 245–246). That being human means one will die is not a comforting thought. Thus, it is no surprise that humans, perceiving their lives as imprisonment in the human body, want to escape toward the celestial realms of never-ending existence.

Modern medicine and technological advancements have been partially successful in pushing back the human expiration date; however, they cannot grant immortality. The human body might be able to live between 120 and 150 years, after which researchers anticipate a complete loss of the body's resilience (Pester 2021). To live beyond this limit, we would have to find

new ways to stop the body from aging. Nanotechnology, with the invention of nano-small machines, could repair damaged cells and cure certain diseases in our bodies. Virtual immortality could be reached by scanning our brains and transferring ourselves to a non-biological, computer-like device; however, we would still not be able to save our personality. Another solution presents an ongoing replacement of our organs and cells, even though this process does not guarantee the preservation of our memory. No doubt, modern science can postpone our bodies' expiration date. Whether this is the elixir of human immortality remains an unanswered question.

The struggle to live and save the human body reaches new dimensions with artificial intelligence, which can complement and replace the unique feature of human nature: the human capacity to think and make decisions, i.e., human freedom. This might only increase the uncomfortable human feeling of being imprisoned in the body, and at the same time, strengthen the desire to become immortal.

In all attempts to prolong human life, Christians and non-Christians alike are once again questioning the very essence of existence itself, in the face of the fact that human existence is, on the one hand, limited in time and, on the other, imbued with the desire for immortality.

1. Immortal Soul in the Mortal Body

The short play on the Greek words *σῶμα-σῆμα* (*soma-sema*), usually translated as body-tomb, exposes the archaic notion that "the body is the prison of the soul". This notion seems to be older than Plato and Pythagoras, who use it frequently in their writings. The *soma-sema* notion belongs to the Orphic mystery cults of ancient Greece. At the same time, it represents the fundamental teaching in much older Egyptian Pharaonic mysticism, in which Plato and Pythagoras were initiated. Either way, the recurring

challenge is the question of how to understand human existence in its dual nature: body on one side, and on the other, a divine spark or soul, calling for purification leading to the final reward, i.e., never-ending existence with the gods. The true meaning of the *soma-sema* connotation escapes the scientific or naturalist-literalist mentality, unable to see the allegory and parable encoded in the mysteries (Irigaray 2017, 1). The only way to understand it is with the help of spiritual allegory and parable, which are the very instruments of teaching of the mystics.

The notion that "the body is the prison of the soul" is frequently found in Plato's writings, which indicates its stunning importance In his *Apology,* which took place in 399 BC, Plato delivers Socrates' trial at the court. After being condemned to death, Socrates, without any doubt, fear, or hesitation, talks about his death as a blessing and advantage, allowing the human soul to be relieved from its bodily existence and enjoy the company of wise men and women (Plato 2002, 43–44). In *Phaedo*, Plato goes so far as to write, "those who practice philosophy in the right way are in training for dying" (104). In his famous *Allegory of the Cave*, Plato illustrates the life of prisoners in the cave, unable to move around and contemplating the shadows of material reality. Once free of the shackles, one's spiritual journey of new discoveries begins. The true reality cannot be perceived through sense perception; the real world is much different from the shadow world of the prison; the outer world is greater than the one in the cave (Plato 1992, 186–190). At the end of this allegory, Plato emphasizes the importance of education, which should not be exchanged for "putting knowledge into souls that lack it"; true education is about "turning the whole soul until it is able to study that which is and the brightest thing that is, namely, the one we call the good" (190). It should not be any surprise that the education of future warriors and philosophers takes so many years, including some years of physical and bodily training (80–88).

With these and similar passages, Plato continuously invites his students to the perception of things hidden from plain sight and existent beyond sensual

perception, where the intellect gets lost in the spheres of opinion by contemplating only the illusion of multiplicity (Irigaray 2017, 4). Plato's invitation to come out of the cave is an invitation to embrace the mystical practice of contemplation of the sight of cosmic principles, known as Forms or Ideas. They govern all things from a sphere of reality that can only be intellectually grasped as long as there is a true love of wisdom, i.e., *philo-sophia*. To explore the world of Ideas, one must transcend the boundaries of his or her body, which are not the boundaries of his or her soul (Čović and Marinčić 2016, 478).

It would be erroneous to conclude that Plato did not appreciate his material body. As an Athenian, Plato liked the balance of a beautiful body, physical exercises in a gym, or glistening oils on his strong body[12]. On multiple occasions, Plato discusses the body's beauty, health, and light, not to mention the care of the body. In addition, Socrates often philosophizes in gymnasiums, i.e., in the center of holistic training where body, mind, and soul are exercised together (Pappas 2023). History records that Plato practiced wrestling with Ariston the Argive, and became good enough for the Isthmian Games, an international wrestling tournament equivalent to the Olympics (Laertius 2020, 135).

The key to a proper comprehension of Socrates as the main actor of Plato's reflection is having an appropriate relationship with one's body. Plato is clear in his *Republic* that the boundaries of one's body are not the boundaries of one's soul. In his dialogue *Phaedo*, Plato describes the last hours of Socrates, who encourages his students to sense how the transcendence they have glimpsed with him in embodied life is a foretaste of the vision to come. Consequently, death might be good because it brings embodied life's fulfilment, not the end (Plato 2002, 118–119).

12 "Ancient Greeks held a fascination for the beauty of the body; they admired the beauty of the human body, and the body became an important subject of artistic endeavor for them. They attributed to the gods a human image, an image of ideal proportions, to which humans must aspire. The human body is at once sacred and secular, 'a system' that operates according to precise laws." (Pevec Rozman and Strehovec 2024, 2)

Referring to these and other similar passages from Plato's *opus*, the question arises of what the possible interpretation of the *soma-sema* notion might be, without finishing with an uncritical interpretation of Plato's dualism in terms of the separation of the human soul and body. Consequently, the human body literally becomes the prison for the soul, desperately waiting to be relieved from its bodily confinement. Such interpretations might be due to ignorance of the Egyptian and Orphic mysteries familiar to Plato, or his idea of the soul's immortality and the soul's ongoing return to the material bodies (1992, 285–292). In his interpretations of the soul's immortality and its return to material reality, Plato refers to the religious and mystic components, implicitly confessing that here we are dealing with something that the human mind struggles to grasp adequately.

Analogically speaking, the integration of the human body with all its boundaries of material existence presents an enigmatic challenge to the father of modernity, René Descartes (1596-1650). In his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, he reflects on the essence of human nature and concludes that nothing else belongs to his human essence except that he is a thinking thing. Even though the human essence is very closely joined with its material body as an extended thing, Descartes does not pay much attention to his body. What matters is his mind, understood as a thinking thing distinct from his body to the point that it can exist without his body (Descartes 1993, 51). The phenomenon and development of so-called *Cartesian dualism,* overemphasizing the importance of the human mind over its embodiment in its material reality, can be taken as an escape from the human body, which will inevitably mark the development of the Western thought of the recent centuries. Cartesian dualism can be also taken as a distant reflection of Plato's *soma-sema* notion, i.e., a struggle to integrate the human body's existence adequately. At least on the surface, Descartes was not looking for the immortality of being, but for a way of being that was independent of bodily limitation and transience. The material body is by definition trapped

in the this-sidedness of human existence, which causes restlessness and discomfort in the human soul. The question of the possibility of an existence independent of the material body inevitably arises.

2. Search for Immortality through Modern Technology

With the recent advances in technology and new discoveries in medicine providing new options for a prolonged existence of the human body, the *soma-sema* notions in terms of "the body as a prison of the soul" reaches new dimensions. Consumption of modern dietary supplements has been nowadays taken for granted, not so much to cure illnesses, but to strengthen health, or even grant immortality. The quest for everlasting life is becoming more scientific, funded by Silicon Valley elites and researchers, believing that humans have never been so close to the everlasting life (Gabbat 2019). The Internet and other ways of communication are loaded with pseudo-philosophical, pseudo-spiritual and pseudo-scientific reflections with neat formulas on how to understand the life-giving feelings of our human existence properly but fail to grasp the essence of human life as such, especially the bodily boundaries of human existence. If Descartes overemphasized the importance of the human mind and struggled to properly integrate the existence of his body, with the development of artificial intelligence, nowadays we struggle to find an adequate place for the human mind. Human essence, described as a thinking device like computer software, is apparently losing its importance with the fast development of supercomputers and artificial intelligence, steadily occupying more space and replacing humans in decision-making, planning, and ethical thinking (Shevlin et al. 2019).

The question of how to live in the human body on this earth leads to new challenges due to the fact that modern technology also enables space

exploration. In the prologue to her book *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt describes with unmitigated feelings the launch in the universe of Sputnik 1 in 1957 as an unprecedented advancement in modern technology. Joy, pride, and awe filled the hearts of men who could look up from the earth toward the skies and observe a thing of their own power and mastery, even though primarily meant for military purposes. At the same time, Arendt (2018, 1) also described this success as a relief about the first "step toward escape from men's imprisonment to the earth". The *soma-sema* notion, with its underlying ideas of imprisonment, reaches new dimensions. What had been previously buried in non-respectable science fiction suddenly became a reality. Paraphrasing Arendt's reflection, to the Christian narrative about the earth as a vale of tears, and philosophical statements about the human body's imprisonment of the human mind and soul, now we can add another one: the earth is conceived as a prison for men's bodies, and finally we can escape from it. "Should the emancipation and secularization of the modern age, which began with a turning-away, not necessarily from God, but from a god who was the Father of men in heaven, end with an even more fateful repudiation of an Earth who was the Mother of all living creature under the sky?" (Arendt 2018, 2)

On the same page, Arendt describes the colossal consequences of this step. The earth, as such, provides whatever is necessary for human's breathing without effort and without artifice. With great scientific endeavors, humans are now able to cut the last ties with the earth and survive in an artificial environment. Underneath this effort to escape imprisonment on the earth, or in the attempts to alter the size, shape, and function of human beings, as well as to produce under the microscope superior human beings, lies "the hope to extend man's life far beyond the hundred-year limit /.../ This future man /…/ seems to be possessed by a rebellion against human existence as it has been given, a free gift from nowhere (secularly speaking), which he wishes to exchange for something, as it were, he has made himself." (2–3)

To better clarify this human desire to escape from imprisonment, Arendt recalls the distinction between immortality and eternity. "Immortality means endurance in time, deathless life on this earth and in this world as it was given." (18) Referring to the Greek understanding of the universe, in the world of deathless and ageless gods' lives are placed men, the only mortals in an immortal, but a not eternal, universe. Consequently, people are continuously confronted with the immortal lives of their gods. The Greek gods have the same nature and shape as men; however, the gods are immortal, which is not the case for men. Embedded in a cosmos of immortal nature and gods, mortality became the hallmark of human existence. It should not be a surprise that an individual human wants to find a way out of their mortality and find their own place in the cosmos where everything but they are immortal. "The task and potential greatness of mortals lie in their ability to produce things—works and deeds and words—which would deserve to be and, at least to a degree, are at home in everlastingness." (19) By leaving behind non-perishable traces, men hope to attain immortality of their own and prove themselves to be of a "divine" nature. This privilege deserves only the best, superior, and noble (*ἄριστος*) who constantly prove themselves to be the best (*ἀριστεύειν*) by preferring immortal fame to mortal things.

In this context of an ongoing effort to gain immortality, Arendt (20–21) places Socrates' taking a step further and beyond immortality. As a great thinker, Socrates never wrote down his thoughts, which would be a sign of concern to leave some traces of his thoughts. Unconcerned with immortality, he strives for eternity. The nature of eternity, as such, remains rather enigmatic because of the human lack of a possible experience. Plato describes it as *ἄρητον*, which means *unspeakable*, *not to be uttered because it is too sacred*. Aristotle describes it as *ἄνευ λόγου*, i.e. *without words*. In the Allegory of the Cave, Plato describes it as the realm beyond human concerns and outside the plurality of men. The philosopher leaves the cave by himself, neither accompanied nor followed by others. He literally dies to his existence among men. Arendt describes this experience of the eternal as a contradiction to

what is immortal; eternal has no correspondence with this world and cannot be transformed into any activity whatsoever. The same activity of thinking about it is inadequate; every attempt to grasp it results as inadequate. What remains is contemplation or *theôria*, allowing an experience of the eternal.

3. The Good News of Christianity: the Inseparability of Body and Soul

The Christian concept of the body is based on the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. The Yahwistic narratives of the human being's creation emphasize that he or she is the Creator's creation. That he or she is formed from the earth, *adamah* (Gen 2:7; 3:19), points to his or her inferiority, transience, helplessness and insignificance. The "breath of life" (*nephesh*)[13] is breathed into him or her, revealing his or her needs and dependencies, in a special way his or her dependence on God.

The priestly texts on the creation of human beings (Gen 1:26; 5:1; 9:6) speak of his or her God-likeness, which makes him or her transcend all things, but at the same time he or she is not God. It is not a likeness such as between parent and child (Gen 5:3). The human being is quite close to God, but he or she is not divine. In all his or her fullness he or she is called to dwell in communion with God, he or she is a creature of relationships (Lah 2003, 254–256).

The Old Testament views human beings in their total creational dependence on God and their absolute orientation towards Him. This dynamic existential relationship with God is expressed by the concept of "spirit" (*ruach*) (Deut 1:2; 3:8; 8:1; Ex 10:13, 19; Ps 51:12; Ezek 11:19; 36:26). It always sees human beings in an extremely integrated way and is alien to the separation into "body and soul".

13 The term, which denotes the human totality, does not only express physical needs, but also the highest form of need - the desire for God (Skralovnik 2022b, 120).

The New Testament also speaks of human being as created by God (Mt 5:17), dependent on Him (Mt 11:25; Lk 10:21), who cares for him or her (Mt 6:25-34), because He knows that he or she is weak (Mk 10:27). However, a human being's worth is revealed in a particular way by the incarnation of the Second Person of God, the Son of God. By becoming human and assuming human bodily life, and by rising again with a glorified body after his death, He confirmed definitively and for all time the goodness of the body and its immeasurable value (Stegu 2019).

In spite of the continuity of the New Testament with the Old Testament view of human beings, we can trace a newness and originality in the conception, which lies precisely in the unique rootedness of the "new human being" in Christ and the Holy Spirit (Eph 2:4) and in belonging to the "new creation" (2 Cor 5:17). The new human being is defined by sharing in the life and love of God himself through Christ (Col 3:4, 14; Phil 1:21; Gal 3:26; Eph 2:19) (Lah 2003, 252; Petkovšek 2022, 600–608).

The Second Vatican Council summarizes a long-standing effort to find a view of the human body that is in accord with the biblical view of it:

> "Though made of body and soul, man is one. Through his bodily composition he gathers to himself the elements of the material world; thus they reach their crown through him, and through him raise their voices in free praise of the Creator. For this reason man is not allowed to despise his bodily life, rather he is obliged to regard his body as good and honorable since God has created it and will raise it up on the last day. /…/ Thus, when he recognizes in himself a spiritual and immortal soul, he is not being mocked by a fantasy born only of physical or social influences, but is rather laying hold of the proper truth of the matter." (Gaudium et Spes, no. 14)

The fundamental message of biblical anthropology, and of the continuing teaching of the Church's magisterium, is therefore that a human being is a unitary being. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (no. 362) sums this up when it says: "The human person, created in the image of God, is a being

at once corporeal and spiritual." The body is the expression of human's spiritual reality, which can only exist and express itself in the body, and for this reason there is no body without a soul and no soul without a body. This connection between the two is so close that it does not cease even with death, but continues to exist in some way (Rahner 1958).

Avguštin Lah (2003, 262–265) points out that there has been much recent criticism of the notion of the "soul" as a "spiritual substance" distinct from and independent of matter, which, together with the body, constitutes human being. In order to go beyond this notion, which is rooted in the Greek philosophical tradition, it is necessary, he argues, to return to the biblical concept of the spirit, which is that reality of God through which God reveals himself to the human being and makes him or her participate in God's own life.

"In the original biblical conception, then, we are not dealing with categories of substance, but much more with categories of relationship or interpersonal encounter and communion of life. In the New Testament this relationship is characterized as an incarnation in Christ (1 Cor 6:17), which does not concern only one aspect of man, but embraces the whole man; the whole human being is 'lifted up' into the dimension of the divine. God personally calls every man and the whole man, as he is, into communion with him through Christ and in the Holy Spirit." (Lah 2003, 264–265; cf. Skralovnik and Matjaž 2020, 505–518)

Because of this personal call of the whole and every human being to a life of communion with God, which he creates in earthly life as well as in the life after death, it makes sense to speak of the human soul as his "I". The self becomes "I" and receives meaning alongside God, to whom it is oriented with the whole being as a unique and divine image.

This integrated conception of human being in Christianity makes the body neither a prison nor an obstacle for the soul. It is only through it and in it that human being can establish and live an integral relationship with God, self, others and creation, and realize his or her vocation in the world and in eternity.

4. Human Immortality in Christianity

The Bible reveals that the human being is not immortal in him or her self, but as an interlocutor with God the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. Since God established a dialogue with the human being when He gave him life by creation and sustains it by continually creating, human being can also sustain this life in a continuous dialogue with Him.

Ratzinger (2004, 247) calls this dialogical immortality: "Immortality results not simply from the self-evident inability of the indivisible to die but from the saving deed of the lover who has the necessary power: man can no longer totally perish because he is known and loved by God. All love wants eternity, and God's love not only wants it but effects it and is it."

The biblical thought of the resurrection grew out of the believer's dialogical relationship with God. Faith knew that God would establish justice (Job 19:25-27; Ps 73:23-28; Tob 3) (Skralovnik 2022a, 265–291). Faith believed that those who suffered for the cause of God would also receive the fulfilment of the promises (2 Macc 7:9, 14, 23, 29). Immortality in the biblical sense, therefore, does not derive from a human being's own nature, which would be indissoluble of itself, but from his being involved in a dialogue with God the Creator (Roszak 2022b, 587). A human being's immortality does not mean that he or she does not die, but that is raised from the dead. Ratzinger (2004, 247) therefore stresses: "Because the Creator intends, not just the soul, but the man physically existing in the midst of history and gives *him* immortality, it must be called 'awakening of the dead' 'of men.'"

In a human being's dialogical nature, both soul and body are important. The whole human being, as a unity of body and soul, is oriented to the Other/God and the other/human/creature. The Christian conception of immortality is decisively rooted in the conception of God and therefore bears a dialogical nature. Since God is the God of the living and calls His

creature, the human being, by name, this being cannot perish (Ratzinger 1988, 150–156). In the Bible, the most unifying force is love, which is both human and divine in nature. As Irena Avsenik Nabergoj notes, many biblical texts, through their poetic form, which contains enormous metaphorical potential, reveal to us with great sensitivity and conviction the human and divine dimensions of love in its deeper reality. The unifying power of love and its immortality is particularly convincingly portrayed in the Song of Songs, which uses the poetic structure of dialogue as a form to express the feelings of longing, searching, fulfilment of love, violence of a foreign force and rediscovery between man and woman:

> "The poetic-literary structure of the poem expresses the existential possibilities that no other mode of representation could express so convincingly. The theme of the Song of Songs and the remarkable plurality of interpretations in Judaism and Christianity in religious and secular circles confirms the correctness of a 'holistic' literary approach to interpreting the poem. The literary representations of the main themes, which concern the emotional and rational worlds of our being, express with utter concreteness the possibilities of man for universal meaning in a world of opposites." (Avsenik Nabergoj 2021, 652)

The immortal is not the soul separated from the body, but God's relationship to the human being in his or her unity of body and soul. In his analysis of Ratzinger's interpretation of dialogical immortality, Ciril Sorč (2003, 644–645) points to his insight that

> "the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, as formulated by Thomas Aquinas, is something quite new in comparison with the ancient conception of immortality. The specificity of the Christian conception of the soul, Ratzinger is convinced, is the vocation to an uninterrupted dialogue with eternal truth and love. The soul is not a kind of veiled reality, but a dynamic of infinite openness, which means at the same time a participating in the infinite, the eternal."

The Platonic view of the human body persisted far into scholasticism due to the great influence of St. Augustine. Thomas Aquinas rebelled against it. Although he accepted Aristotle's understanding of the human being, he did not mechanically repeat his doctrine (Roszak 2013). St. Thomas argues that the body and the soul are two separable existential givens which are at the same time mutually oriented. The rational soul is the agent that gives the human being his or her form and makes him or her a living being (Roszak 2019). Without it the human body cannot exist. Of course, the soul and the body are not "two beings", two separate realities. A human being is always fully soul and fully body at the same time. It is a "*unio substantialis*". Death demolishes the unity of human being. In this, the human being's soul does not succumb to disintegration, but such a life is not natural for it. It cannot be called a person. For scholastic theologians, death is the separation of body and soul, but for them this does not mean the liberation of the soul. It is the destruction of a human's humanity. The doctrine of the immortality of the soul holds, above all, that the human being exists both in life and in death only when he or she is in relationship with God, his or her Creator, through Jesus Christ, through whom he or she shares in His resurrection of the flesh (Sorč 2003, 639–640).

5. Conclusion

The immense investment in the development of technology, especially artificial intelligence, is deep down an expression of the human desire for immortality. Artificial intelligence enables ever faster and more complex information processing, leading to new discoveries and a different understanding of both human nature and the universe as a whole. Even at its current stage of technological development, artificial intelligence can think faster and more accurately than humans, including decision-making.

We may have reached a tectonic shift in the intellectual evolution of the human mind. What has been the exclusive domain of the human being as the heart of his or her nature and the reflection of his or her freedom is slowly being superseded by artificial thinking as the result of the computer processing of embedded data.

This raises the question of whether we are witnessing a new enigma of human entrapment. Ancient thinkers were confronted with the question of how to live in a body that should not be a prison for the human spirit. They understood the reason as something divine, something that belongs exclusively to human being alone and enables him or her to become godlike. The use of artificial intelligence, however, raises the question of how to revalorize human reason and thus the very essence of human person, without becoming subordinate to computers. If the use of artificial intelligence means that human person renounces his or her privileged place in the universe, it also raises the question of the uniqueness and inimitability of the very essence of the human person, endowed with reason and freedom.

The answer to this question should be primarily theological. If the integration of the body has been one of the major challenges of Western Christianity in recent centuries, the integration and place of human reason and freedom will be a fundamental issue for the present and future generation of Christianity (Vodičar 2019, 701). What remains unanswered is the question of the meaning of human life, embedded in mortality and the desire for immortality.

Christianity stresses that the whole human being, with his or her body and mind, is oriented to God (Šegula 2022, 687). There is no other fullness for the human being on earth and in eternity than that which, after his or her earthly death, involves resurrection to eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ and remaining in his love. (Jn 15:1-9) Artificial intelligence cannot replace this orientation towards God and a personal relationship

with God. Nor can modern technology discard or replace the communal and communitarian dimension of human life (Kraner 2021, 736). But it challenges us to discover in a profound way what faith in God alone makes possible—eternal life and the making sense of death as an integral part of life and the passage to eternal life.

Modern technology, together with artificial intelligence, wants to achieve human being's final liberation of the soul (mind) from the body and attain technological immortality, which is the timelessness of artificial superintelligence. This raises questions, which Branko Klun (2019, 593) also points out: "Would life without death be authentic life? /.../ Would such a life really be 'better' than one in which, because of the finality (and death) accompanying every decision and experience, life takes on a peculiar intensity and finality? One might reasonably ask whether death might not be preferable to technological immortality, where the mind would be uploaded onto a computer and could not die—after no information had completely disappeared."

Christianity does not understand human being's immortality and eternal life without his or her bodily death. Human beings can therefore be freed from the fear of death and the search for all possible ways to avoid it if he or she is prepared to accept death as an integral part of his life. This means that the human being is willing to accept that death, the timing of which he or she will not determine, will be the natural end of his or her life, for which he or she did not determine the time and place when it was given to him or her. Of course, human beings will never be able to accept death as something purely natural or as a gift, because it means a separation from a healthy and genuine attachment to the beautiful, the good and the true, especially from the people he has loved and with whom he has shared his life. No one can see the meaning in his natural death if he or she does not have the opportunity to gradually say goodbye to his or her earthly life and to loved ones. Research on the accompaniment of

dying persons confirms that only those who have satisfied their spiritual needs are able to see their death in this way (Platovnjak 2022).

So those who are willing to accept their death as the natural conclusion of earthly life, this helps them to give meaning to life, because they see it as a gift given to them so that through it they themselves can become a gift for others. This is also the basic message of the biblical revelation about the creation of human beings: they originate from God, who is love (1 Jn 4:16), and therefore their life has meaning only if they live it themselves and become as perfect as God their Father (Mt 5:45-48). When human beings live love in all its dimensions, they are on the path to immortality, because their story of love, which they live with the help of their body in union with the love of the Triune God (like the branch on the vine—Jn 15:1-10) in the midst of this world and time, will continue after their bodily death. For the love of God is all-powerful and overcomes even the death of the body, as the Good News of the resurrection of Jesus Crist proclaims to us.

Chapter 5

Contemplative Attitude towards the World and God

The search for life in its fullness and the inner connection with the world, the self and the transcendent has accompanied humanity at every stage of history, right up to the present day. Both in the Bible and in Greek philosophy, we find many descriptions of the human desire to live in deeper harmony with people, the surrounding nature, and with that which transcends them. The Ancient Greeks claimed that such resonance is achievable through the activity of contemplation, understood as seeing a reality that remains inaccessible to sense perception. The Greek word for contemplation is the noun *theôria* (*θεωρία*) and the verb *theorein* (*θεωρειν*), which the *Online Etymology Dictionary* (2017) translates as "conception, mental scheme, contemplation, speculation, a looking at, viewing, a sight, show, spectacle, things looked at," depending on the context in which the word has been used.

Why contemplate or seek a deeper meaning? Aristotle takes a step forward and introduces human wonder as the foundation of these activities. Through wondering, which leads to *theôria*/contemplation, the human mind wants to escape ignorance and move to a state of certainty (Aristotle 1994, 1554). The Church Fathers adopted the word contemplation, as well as Aristotle' ideas of wondering, perplexity, and desire to escape human ignorance. With them, the word contemplation has taken on a new meaning, which can be interpreted as an effort to enter into a loving relationship with God the Father and Creator and with Jesus Christ the Redeemer and the Holy Spirit. They were aware that this relationship can only be partially described, because God, who has fully revealed Himself through Jesus Christ, always infinitely transcends what we can understand with our limited reason, and formulate in our own words in philosophical or theological language. Every knowledge of God is His free gift. It cannot be attained by any method alone, not even by contemplation. But through it we can, in the freedom given to us, consciously open ourselves to God, who seeks us and invites us into a personal relationship with Himself, to cooperate with Him. In this way, we permit Him, by His gracious action, to make us fully what we are through Him, His image, and to fulfil our mission in the world, to re-present His nearness, to build fraternity/coexistence with one another, and to care for the common good and the common home. He also enables us to realize our deeper desires to be loved and respected, and to be able to love and respect others and live forever.

Wonder, helplessness, and the search for a way out of the state of ignorance also accompany modern humans, who, in their own way, search for a connection to the world, to themselves, and to the transcendent. Instead of contemplation, they prefer to use words like attunement and resonance, which they understand as the primordial principle of the spiritual life.

Hence the word *contemplation* expresses in different historical contexts the same human desire to be more attuned with himself, nature, and transcendence. The realization of this desire is only possible if the individual

is able to overcome him or herself and does not put him or herself in the first place, which otherwise leads to an attitude of domination, submission, and non-recognition of the other. What is common to all these forms of contemplation is the human desire to create a resonant attitude towards the world and transcendent. Following Rosa's (2019) argument, it is prayer that enables human to establish such an attitude (Fritz 2020). Since we know different forms of prayer in Christianity, we will limit ourselves to contemplation, where listening and looking are at the forefront as the foundation of a resonating attitude.

1. Ancient Greek Theoria or Contemplation

Why contemplate, practice *theôria*, or search for wisdom? Aristotle provides a concise answer at the beginning of his *Metaphysics* (982b) by introducing human wonder as the foundation of these activities. The desire to know is triggered by human wondering in experiencing perplexity about things with greater matters. While perplexed and wondering, man finds himself ignorant and, therefore, wants to escape this ignorance by practicing philosophy (Aristotle 1994, 1554). By being perplexed in a situation without a path, man wants to move from a state of wonder to a state of certainty, which can be described as *theôria*, or contemplating/seeing the cause of what is perplexing (Barrientos 2020).

The ancient interpretations of *theôria* are much more complex and sophisticated than modern and postmodern ones (Sylvester 2005). The latter are more based on the subject who is extensively occupied with him or herself and his or her own interpretations of *theôria*. The Cartesian dualism in terms of separation of mind and body, with its overemphasis of the importance of the human mind, remains the foundation of this modern mindset. The mind-body dualism creates in the modern subject a belief that

he or she can stay at a distance from the object of his or her gaze, which should allow him or her to apprehend the object in a neutral and undistorted fashion. Consequently, *theôria* does not require the gaze of the subject to be directly engaged with the object of his or her gazing. From here it follows that *theôria* can be understood as a flight away from this world calling for action, as well as a position of power, vested with claims to objectivity.

Such understanding of *theôria* was unknown to the ancient Greeks. Nightingale's book *Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy: Theôria in its Cultural Context* is the main source of this oversimplified overview of the Greek cultural and intellectual context as the birthplace of *theôria*. Their understanding of *theôria* is far away from a neutral and scientific comprehension of the world achieved at a distance; it is the result of pragmatic contestations and dialogue between traditional ideologies and practices in an ongoing search for a cultural capital (Nightingale 2009, 14–15). Our investigation will be limited to the pre-philosophic and philosophic period (Plato and Aristotle), introducing diverse interpretations of *theôria*.

1.1 Pre-Platonic Period

This is the period before Plato, when there was no separation or distinction between theoretical, practical, and productive wisdom. The intellectuals of that time believed in a more fluid and inclusive conception of wisdom, in which theoretical knowledge was not privileged over practical or political activities. The notion of the wise human—*sophos* included poets, prophets, scientists, historians, all kinds of artisans: all of them were *sophoi*, cultivating *theôria* and competing with their intellectual competency for authority and prestige (29). Thomas claims that in that time, the community did not put emphasis on the division of specialties, but on the power of a given theory and counter-theory. Whether a *physiologos* or scientist or doctor or sophist presented a theory was of secondary importance (Thomas 2000, 160).

The oldest understanding of *theôria* designates "a venerable cultural practice characterized by a journey abroad for the sake of witnessing an event or spectacle" (Nightingale 2009, 40). The active participant in this practice was called the pilgrim or *theoros*, who was usually chosen as an ambassador or representative of the city to attend an event of panhellenic nature. This cultural practice, or *theôria*, was established in three parts (40–70).[14]

- 1) A journey abroad: the *theoros* traveled outside of his territory to extra-urban religious sanctuaries or festivals, taking place geographically distant from his proper city. Symbolically speaking, he detached himself from his stable and familiar home environment and exposed himself to something ambiguous, unknown, foreign, and sacred. Away from norms and ideologies of his city, he experienced a higher degree of freedom.
- 2) The liminal phase: once at a religious sanctuary or festival, the *theoros* became part of a larger community, made of *theoroi* as representatives of different parts of the panhellenic world. This larger community helped a singular *theoros* transcend his own traditional, political, social, and hierarchical order, and at the same time invited him to share his own perspective, practices, ideas, and otherness with other *theoroi*. All of them were encouraged to rise above their differences and join together as people with a common language, religion and culture. As part of this community, each *theoros* eye-witnessed/gazed at sacred spectacles and participated in rituals, which were celebration and promulgation of a panhellenic and "Greek" identity. Through his gazing, active participation in rituals, and interaction with people from other cities, the *theoros* was transformed by seeing and hearing a broader perspective and new political and religious ideas. *Theôria* as a religious festival had a special transformative power

14 Not only an illustrative example of this three-part cultural practice but also an interesting development in terms of religion in the Western world is the pilgrimage at the Camino de Santiago and its increased popularity in postmodernity (Brumec and Aracki Rosenfeld 2021).

because the *theoros* viewed other worshippers from the point of view of the divine, he viewed the divinity among the worshipers, the worshiping community as divine and recognized the power of the divine. It is not surprising that there is an open debate among scholars whether the true meaning of *theôria* derives from *theos/*θεός (god) or *thea/*θεά (sight, spectacle) (Rutherford 2000, 133–138).

- 3) Home return: upon exposure to new ideas and events, the *theo*ros returned to his home city where he shared new ideas, perspectives, and practices. Since the city sponsored his journey, the *theoros* had a duty to immediately prepare an official report. However, the city council did not automatically abide his new ideas; this journey might have either transformative or corruptive results, and consequently either positive or negative effects for the entire polis. After scrutiny, the city council decided whether he brought back valuable information that can be shared with people or forbid him to talk with people about his experience. Introduction of new ideas and practices is always a political event, which might have dangerous consequences. Of course, such a report was not expected by an individual *theoros*, who was not sponsored by the city.

1.2 Plato's and Aristotle's Understanding of Contemplation

Following Nightingale's presentation, the fourth-century intellectuals established the ground for the separation of theoretical knowledge from other types of knowledge and activities in polis. So-called "theoretical knowledge" became the domain of philosophers, who were looking for a new legitimacy, authority, and status in their polis. They instituted new centres of "knowledge", i.e., the first schools of higher education. These schools created a new, cosmopolitan elite, named *aristos*, which was more identified by their culture and education, and less by political power and wealth, as was the case in the classical period (Nightingale 2009, 15). They claimed that the new knowledge, *theôria*, should be nonproductive, leisured,

fully free, disembedded from the social and political systems of exchange, and opposite to the traditional mundane, economic, manual, and servile forms of knowledge. There is no doubt that Plato and Aristotle are the main pioneers of the new understanding of *theôria*.

- 1) Plato. In his dialogue, Plato appropriated and, at the same time, transformed the traditional understanding of *theôria* based on the idea of a journey abroad. The idea of a journey to a festival or religious sanctuary should be taken metaphorically, as a journey away from the world in pursuit of a vision of metaphysical reality. Nightingale in the chapter *Inventing Philosophic Theôria* presents this change in understanding *theôria* by referring to Plato's *Republic* (72–93). It is true that the opening scene (Socrates and his friends are coming from a festival) as well as the last part of Plato's *Republic* (The myth of Er) depicts elements from the traditional understanding of *theôria* in terms of the celebration of festivals and religious events, but all these are necessary to highlight the relevance of the more philosophical *theôria* as it is presented in the center of *Republic* in Plato's Allegory of the Cave. This allegory illustrates the transformation of the *theoros* from "a lover of sight and sound" to "the lover of the sight of truth", found only in the metaphysical realm of the Forms.

Looking at the forms as true beings or what is the really real, and enjoying the fullest kind of existence, is not possible with a physical eye or sense perception, but only with the eye of the soul, i.e., knowledge acquired through special education, preparing the soul to look upwards towards truth and reality. The soul turns from the realm of becoming to the realm of what is (Plato 1992, 193). In Plato's narrative, this kind of seeing or contemplation of true being is reserved only to those who master dialectics, i.e., the science that enables the philosopher to give "an account of the essence of each thing" (206). Upon gazing upon the true forms of reality, i.e., the practice of *theôria*, Plato's *theoros* brings his findings back to his polis

to their benefit. Following the same way of thinking, Plato in his *education curriculum* requires from the best students upon studying dialectics to serve and be involved in political pursuits, which reveals Plato's conviction that the philosophic *theôria* must be utilized towards the practice of civic *theôria*, even though this is not the primary intention of the philosophic *theôria*. The philosophic *theôria* primarily aids to the transformation of the individual soul in looking for wisdom, happiness, and blessedness.

If *Republic* still holds a strong bridge between the philosophic and civic *theôria*, which was taken for granted in the pre-Platonic period, Plato's dialogues *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* present a step forward and become closer to the *theoros*' private *theôria*. Through the aid of philosophic *theôria*, the *theoros* embarks on his own transformation through purification of his soul, which makes him wise and happy in this life as well as in the next. Philosophic *theôria* of the Forms resembles to a religious revelation, allowing the participant to recollect true knowledge, which is the knowledge represented in the Forms of Justice, Temperance, etc., and in a special way in the primordial Form of Beauty and the Good. Contemplation of the metaphysical reality transforms him intellectually, emotionally, and affectively; as such, he begins dealing with the world in a just and impartial way, using the apprehension of the Forms as a measure for all his actions. This provides him the ground for his virtuous action, leading him to virtuous social and practical activities in his environment. In this way he benefits his society by instantiating his invisible knowledge expecting nothing in return (Ober 1989, 226–236).

The same philosophic *theôria* brings the *theoros* to struggle with how to communicate his experience to the masses because they would not understand him. In addition, his behavior might create suspicion in his environment regarding his experience and consequently result in social isolation. By saying this, Nightingale does not conclude that Plato's *theoros* is completely disembedded from his socio-political environment because of his philosophical activities: his disembeddedment is due to his rejection of

traditional social and political systems based on the exchange of his wisdom for any kind of material, symbolic or political recompense or payback. Despite his transformative contemplation of the Forms, the *theoros* does not possess a panoptic vision, allowing him to see the changing and unchanging realm together in a harmonic way. When contemplating the Forms, he does not see the world of the changing reality, and once pursuing practical and political activities, he sees the Forms less clearly. His metaphysical contemplation does not grant him a panoptic vision of all things, which would be something divine. Knowing something about the forms and at the same time not having a complete understanding of truth keeps him in a place of *aporia* and *atopia*, a kind of homelessness and foreignness in his own town (Nightingale 2009, 105–106). When in Plato's cave, one of the prisoners freed of the chains, is suddenly able to stand up and look around, he is in pain, dazzled and unable to see or understand what is more true (Plato 1992, 187–188).

- 2) Aristotle. If Plato's philosophic *theôria* is still based on the traditional *theôria*, even though only metaphorically, but still leading towards practical and political engagement, Aristotle presents a distinct departure from the traditional understanding. His *theôria* involves detachment from any kind of practical and productive affairs. There is no return to the polis after the act of spectating. The spectating or contemplation is the final goal, consisting in an individual intellectual vision and comprehension of something divine, sacred, and true. This activity as such provides a higher form of knowledge, which as such does not want to deal with the human world; for this reason, it cuts off the connection with social life. While other practical and political activities are useful and necessary in the human world, this one is "useless" because it does not lead to any practical goal beyond itself; its only goal is contemplation as such (Globokar 2019, 613). This uselessness should not be understood as "worthless" or "unimportant", but as something eminently important and valuable for the actualization of human happiness.

Following the same logic, this activity is also unnecessary: while other activities are necessary when dealing with the necessities of this life, this one has no external end, it produces nothing other than itself. Nightingale supports the nature of "uselessness" of *theôria* with the idea of freedom. For Aristotle, only those people are free who do not exist for other people, their activities do not aim at utility, and they are not ruled by other people (Aristotle 1994, 1553). These are noble people, who are neither serving nor ruled by anybody. They are able to experience a leisurely life because they are able to practice leisurely activities. Similarly, contemplation is considered as a free and leisure activity: it is not done for other activities, it is never serviceable or useful as already explained, and it is not ruled by other activities. Muller in his article provides a useful analysis of the complexities of Aristotle's notion of freedom and the free human (Muller 1993).

The ancient interpreters of *theôria*, as seen in the pre-Platonic period, Plato, and Aristotle, in their wondering and perplexity looked for certainty in religious belief and a reverence for the sacred. Their understanding of contemplation and philosophical wondering in front of the transcendental realm reached new dimensions with Judaism and Christianity. In what follows, we confine ourselves to Christianity. In doing so, we take into account the holistic understanding of contemplation in the Old Testament. In all literal types and genres, the perception of God and human beings takes place in the interaction between cognition and the emotional experience of relationships (Avsenik Nabergoj 2023b, 46–47).

2. Contemplation in the Christian Tradition

Clement of Alexandria (*Stromata,* VII, 13,83) was the first in the history of Christianity to write about contemplation in terms of *theoria*, the sum of which is gnosis, the highest knowledge of God. Origen describes the ideal

of Christianity as the communion of the soul, which is the bride, with the Bridegroom, as the unity of love which gives rise to affective knowledge, i.e. contemplation. For Augustine, contemplation is the knowledge that comes from God's love and enables the Christian to love Him more. For Hugh of Saint Victor, contemplation is the penetrating and free gaze of the spirit, which fully embraces the realities that human can see. This definition was completed by Richard of Saint Victor. For him, contemplation is a work of the spirit that freely penetrates into the wonders that God has scattered throughout the visible and invisible world (Herráiz 1998, 341). For Thomas Aquinas, the driving force of contemplation is charity: "The contemplative life consists chiefly in the contemplation of God, of which charity is the motive." (*Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 180, a. 7, ad 4) In contemplation, human beings unite themselves with the persons of God in an intense exchange of knowledge and love (Prijatelj 2018, 448). In this way, here and now, they taste eternal life and the glory of the blessed in heaven in advance as Jesus says: "Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." (Jn 17:3)

John of the Cross (1987, II, 18,5) also stresses that contemplation is at the service of love. For him, contemplation is "the science of love". This science is "the infused loving knowledge of God which at once enlightens the soul and inflames it in love until, from stage to stage, it is lifted up to God, its Creator. Love alone unites the soul to God."

In the Christian tradition, there are different divisions of contemplation. The best known is the classical division into acquired and infused (higher) contemplation (Poulain 1908). Acquired contemplation is linked to ordinary prayer, which is divided into four stages: vocal (oral) prayer, meditation, affective prayer, and prayer of simplicity or simple gazing. The last two stages, which some also call prayer of the heart, are particularly close to the mystical states. Affective prayer belongs to the mental prayers. Affective actions are much more present in it than are thinking and reasoning. The

prayer of simplicity is a mental prayer. In it thinking is largely replaced by intuition, and feelings and decisions are expressed in few words. It is a prayer of loving attention to God. In contrast to acquired contemplation, mystical contemplation is called intuitive, passive, infused, extraordinary or higher contemplation. In her books The Life of Teresa of Jesus (1998, ch. 14-21) and *The Interior Castle* (2003, IV-VII), St Teresa speaks of four stages of mystical union: imperfect union, or prayer in silence; perfect or half-ecstatic union, or the prayer of union; ecstatic union, or ecstasy; transforming or devotional union, or the spiritual marriage of the soul with God (Poulain 1908).

The Dominican school does not recognize that acquired contemplation is possible. Vladimir Truhlar (1974, 258) agrees that contemplation is always "infused" [*infusa*], since it is always the fruit of the self-revelation of the absolute which human "receives". At the same time, he also stresses that all contemplation is "acquired" [*acquisita*] because "reception" always presupposes the participation of human and depends "in its intensity and coloring also on human natures". For him, contemplation "is nothing other than an experience which, although it is always in fact in some way clothed in images, words, ideas, sentences, nevertheless remains—in its basic reality—always a super-object sensation of the absolute" (258).

There are many forms of contemplation in the history of Christianity because each spiritual school has developed on its own. But they all agree on one essential point: contemplation has no end in itself. Its goal is union with the triune God in love. Insofar as it is subordinate to love or leads to love, it always plays a very important role in the life of the Christian (Herráiz 1998, 342).

Let us briefly look at three forms of contemplation that can enable a person to have a resonant attitude towards the world.

2.1 Contemplative Reading

When we speak of contemplation in Christianity, we cannot we cannot ignore *lectio divina*, which is the ancient prayerful reading of the Bible and

represents the summit of contemplation (Guigo II. 2004). It involves first *lectio* (reading, listening to) the Word of God, then *meditatio*, which is more of a mental and cognitive reflection on the Word of God. This is followed by *oratio*, a prayerful response to the fruits of listening and meditation received, and finally *contemplatio*, which brings to the fore, passivity, attentiveness, being with, listening, gazing, affectivity, tasting, resonating, wondering, and gratitude (Schwanda 2011, 370–371).

Within *lectio divina*, one learns to read the signs of God contemplatively, which are not only recorded in the Bible but also in the book of nature and in everyday life. The process of reading itself is essential. Reading ranges from deciphering the signs to hearing the voice of the Lover. Reading, interpreting and understanding the "text" has as its ultimate goal that the Christian be touched by the "voice of God" as the presence of God. The "text" for this reading process can be anything. It is essential to be exposed to the "other" and "to be moved by the other" (Waaijman 2020, 438). This is why Origen, one of the most famous teachers of allegorical reading, insists that the reader must attune himself to the "voice of God" (Roszak and Huzarek 2019). The first, object reading, focuses on the "word" (sign, content, articulation, reference). The second reading, the contemplative reading, touches on the "voice" (presence, spirit, face, you). In this process of contemplative reading, then, "the essential aspect is aesthetic, in the sense that it touches us and moves us, not in the sense of 'I like it', but as a paradox of attraction and transcendence, similar to that of admiration and wonder, the biblical *jir'at jhwh*, the fountain of wisdom" (Waaijman 2020, 438).

2.2 Ignatian Contemplation

Ignatian contemplation, also called imaginative prayer by some, became known through the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556). Ignatius was convinced that the triune God could also communicate with human being through his or her capacity for inner imagination, through his

or her thoughts, memories and experiences, including art (Godawa 2020, 570–571). This contemplation enables human being to encounter the triune God personally through the Bible and in all things, to discover the ways in which He seeks and finds him or her, speaks to him or her in the depths of his or her heart, and reveals to him or her His loving and active presence and will (Platovnjak 2018, 1040–1045). It happens when human being, with all his senses and imagination, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, "enters" into the story of the Bible and "lives" it (Wickham 1978, 35–36). This is why, at the beginning of contemplation, he or she is invited to determine and relocate the place where the story takes place (Spiritual Exercises, no. 91, 112, 138, 192) and to ask for the grace he or she wishes to receive. In this way he or she becomes a participant in the story. When he or she finishes reading it, it continues interiorly: in his or her heart, mind, spirit, imagination and sensibility. It is necessary for him or her to surrender completely to the Holy Spirit, to be guided by Him in his or her contemplation. Through interior looking, listening, meditating, the Holy Spirit presents to him or her the mystery of the life of Jesus in a way that is relevant to him or her at that very moment and enables him or her to share in the graces he needs (Spiritual Exercises, no. 2; Godawa 2015, 528–531). He or she must not force him or herself to make anything happen. In all freedom and non-attachment (Spiritual Exercises, no. 23), he or she allows whatever will happen to happen in him or her and with him or her and around him or her, and accepts it all as His gratuitous gift.

Ignatian contemplation enables human beings to gaze more deeply, to taste and perceive each person and all things, and to experience interiorly the active presence of the Triune God and His love which permeates, enables and guides everything (Spiritual Exercises, no. 234–237). Through it, human being comes to know Jesus Christ more and more interiorly, in order to love Him more and more and to follow Him more, and thus to become more and more His disciple (no. 104). He also becomes open to and able to respond to His addresses and calls (no. 91).

The contemplation to attain the love of God (no. 230–237), which in a certain way sums up the whole dynamic of the entire spiritual exercises and of all of its contemplations can enable a person to be touched by the loving and active presence of the Triune God in all of creation and in every human being (Platovnjak 2017, 85–87). When, moved by experience, he comes to know the immeasurable and gratuitous love of God and its invitation to respond to it, he can freely surrender himself. In this he can be sustained by Ignatius' prayer of surrender: "Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and all my will—all that I have and possess. You, Lord, have given all that to me. I now give it back to you, O Lord. All of it is yours. Dispose of it according to your will. Give me love of yourself along with your grace, for that is enough for me." (Spiritual Exercises, no. 234)

Contemplation can only happen in relation to and response to something else: a book of Scripture or of nature or of the events of everyday life, in fact to everything that exists. Such a relationship is reciprocal rather than unidirectional. The real effect of contemplation is a mutual resonance in the sense of a consonant love, a union in love. Ignatius points out, "Love consists in a mutual communication between the two persons. That is, the one who loves gives and communicates to the beloved what he or she has, or a part of what one has or can have; and the beloved in return does the same to the lover." (no. 231) Through contemplation, the triune God can gradually transform human being so that he or she is open to Him, so that He can find him or her everywhere and in everything, forming him or her as His interlocutor and collaborator, able to act in His Spirit and in His way wherever he or she is and in the time in which he or she is.

2.3 Contemplation of the Presence of God

The contemplation of the Presence of God, described by Brother Lawrence (1614-1692) in his booklet Exercises of the Presence of God, is becoming more and more well-known in our time. For about thirty years he lived consciously

in the constant presence of God. In his letter he wrote: "I cannot imagine how religious persons can live satisfied without the practice of the presence of God. For my part I keep myself retired with Him in the depth of the center of my soul as much as I can; and while I am so with Him I fear nothing; but the least turning from Him is insupportable." (Brother Lawrence 2016, 16)

He distanced himself from the methods and practices recommended by the important books on contemplation and, in his holy freedom, devoted himself completely to God with a single exercise: to live in the presence of God (16). He was deeply aware of his sinfulness and of the immeasurable grace of the free forgiveness he had received. He experienced God as Father and King, who does not punish him, but—as he himself wrote— "embraces me with love, makes me eat at His table, serves me with His own hands, gives me the key of His treasures; He converses and delights Himself with me incessantly, in a thousand and a thousand ways, and treats me in all respects as His favorite." (12) He gave himself completely to this God so that He could do with him whatever He pleased (12). He did not do this by force. He emphasized, "No, we must serve God in a holy freedom, we must do our business faithfully, without trouble or disquiet; recalling our mind to God mildly and with tranquility, as often as we find it wandering from Him." (12)

The way of life in contemplation of God's presence was so important to him that he wrote: "Were I a preacher, I should above all other things preach the practice of the presence of God; and were I a director, I should advise all the world to do it: so necessary do I think it, and so easy too." (15)

In short, we can say that his contemplation is a loving gaze that finds God everywhere (Finnegan 2007, 570–572). It enables human being to be constantly in His presence, especially in his or her interior, and in everything to serve Him with love where he or she is and in what is given to him or her. It does not distance him or her from the world, but enables him or her to be present in it in an integral way, with all respect for the other and the capacity to be with him or her in God's way. It enables him or her to resonate in a

sense of consonance with the Triune God and, in Him, with every human being and all creation. It also makes it possible to achieve harmony between action and contemplation (Zyzak 2013a, 220). The essential elements of Christian spirituality, such as action and contemplation, come together harmoniously in the modern spirituality of Ignatius of Loyola, Francis de Sales, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross (Zyzak 2011, 142).

3. Conclusion

The last two centuries of Western intellectual history were shaped by the Enlightenment's reliance on the power of human reason, followed by a period of profound disappointment. Moving away from the religious dimensions of existence, some modern thinkers went so far that they believed that we might be able to live without certainty. In Nietzsche's writing, when humans abandoned religion and became the sole master of an empty universe, humans "became cold, hard, and tough in the realization that the way of this world is anything but divine; even by human standards is not rational, merciful, or just. /…/, the world in which we live is ungodly, immoral, 'inhuman'; we have interpreted it far too long in a false and mendacious way, which is to say, according to our needs." (Nietzsche 1974, 286). This Nietzsche's statement, in alliance with other advocates of Existentialism, are calling us to rediscover the cosmos and complexity of human existence in a way that is meaningful. "Existentialism /…/ seeks to bring the whole man—the concrete individual in the whole context of his everyday life, and in his total mystery and questionableness—into philosophy." (Barrett 1990, 275)

This whole human being is not whole without unpleasant things, such as death, anxiety, guilt, fear and trembling, and despair, which are like the Furies for us, i.e., hostile forces from which we would escape. They represent all those dimensions of human existence for which the Enlightenment two centuries

ago, as well as modernity today, fail to find a meaningful interpretation. Once alienated and pushed into the unconscious, the Furies are backfiring and calling for special attention in the wondering minds of the Existentialists and modern thinkers. These Furies are creating a new aporia in the modern world, which despite its unprecedented power of technological advancements, struggles to integrate them. These parts of human existence cannot be simply bought off with our modern tranquilizers and diversion; they need to be placated through being given their just and due respect (Kraner 2018).

Understanding the essence of human life in all its dimensions remains inaccessible insofar as a human puts his or her own self at the center. Such an attitude, which is an attitude of domination, seeks to subordinate, if not to abolish, the other and his or her otherness. As an alternative, the sociologist Rosa (2019) offers the world a resonant attitude towards the world that foregrounds the recognition of the other. This attitude opens up to the other and responds to his or her otherness. In this attitude, listening comes first, based on the desire to hear the other and to be endowed with it. In this listening, however, there can be a response, a response that enables the other to be what he or she is. For resonance only happens in relation to and in response to something else. Such a relationship is not unidirectional but reciprocal. The real effect of resonance is mutual resonance in the sense of consonance.

Although at first sight the Greek philosophers' interpretation of contemplation seems to fit and correspond to the Christian understanding of contemplation, there is a fundamental difference in the background. What they have in common is the search for the meaning of life in relation to something that transcends life as such. Contemplation is an expression of this search. What remains incomprehensible to Greek philosophy is the idea that contemplation can also be a way to the triune God who created everything and who reveals His love for human beings through the whole of creation. Contemplation in the Christian context, however, is an expression

of a human's opening to the other and responding to his or her otherness, which reminds him or her of God and radiates him or her (Jeglič 2022, 138–139). In such a relationship, listening comes first, based on the desire to hear the other and, through him or her, the voice of God and to be endowed by him or her to whom he or she points. Looking and all the other senses are equally important. Only when one is with the other (the Other) with all the senses (including the inner, spiritual senses) can one perceive, see and hear Him integrally. It is then that a response can also happen, a response that enables the other to be what he or she is, to receive him or her as a gift.

In this response, it also enables the triune God to be who He truly is for him or her, and to fulfil His redemptive and salvific mission in and through him or her, and to build up the kingdom of God. This is, among other things, the world of human fraternity in consonance with one another in care for the common home and well-being of all people.

Through contemplation, human is free to unite him or herself with the Triune God in His love and to enter into her flow through which all things came into existence and all things exist like the branches on the vine (Jn 15,1-10). In this way he or she becomes able to see how all things are in relation to one another, a gift to one another. It enables him or her to admire the many bonds of life for the other that exist between created beings, and also to discover the key to his or her own realization. Human comes to know experientially that the self-giving love of God the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit, which is imprinted in all things, makes possible a resonant relationship between them, and also between human beings, if they choose it in their own freedom.

What both resonance and contemplation have in common is that they are about resonating with something that transcends us and allows us to see and live with a new integrity and find meaning in life. This attitude also allows us to live spirituality in an integral way.

Chapter 6

Resiliency: Challenge for Spirituality in Today's World

Neither human life nor events in nature follow a linear principle. Surprises, deviations, changes, exceptions, dangers, catastrophes, diseases, are increasingly becoming a common feature of our lives, giving rise to feelings of fear, uncertainty, vulnerability and transience. The unexpected and crisis moments in our lives confront us with the existential questions asking what is so unchanging, solid, stable, hopeful, and eternal that we do not break down in times of rapid and unexpected change.

The fast tempo of life, personal adaptation to new circumstances, climate change, population growth, AI technology, and the process of globalization among other factors, require of each individual and the whole community a great deal of spiritual wisdom, which must be based on something solid and unmovable. Finding the balance between what is changing and what is not changing is a challenge for us as we reflect on resilience.

Resilience can be defined as flexibility, plasticity, elasticity, adaptability, ability to reassume the original position, or simply as good. This is, however, only a first-level definition. These conceptual terms suggest that we are dealing with a complex reality, still escaping to a more adequate philosophical, theological, or political comprehension. The true meaning of resilience is "only comprehensible if one already understands the 'core purpose' of the system in question" (Parker 2019, IX).[15] For example, flexibility cannot be taken as a quality if it does not at the same time indicate that which allows for oscillation or fluctuation. Plasticity and elasticity are much more than the ability of the subject to transform its own shape; the same ability should refer us to the subject capable of transformation. So, resiliency refers us to what changes, recovers, adapts on one side, and on the other, to what remains unchanged. Consequently, our conversation about resiliency should lead us to uncovering or rediscovering the reality that allows any kind of change. Recovery, the ability to reassume the unique position, sustainability and similar meanings of resilience lead us to uncovering of the original state or shape, presently covered by the system.

Following this logic, spiritual resilience, defined as the ability to sustain and nourish a sense of self and purpose through a system of beliefs, principles and values, is no exception. Spirituality as such within the mindset of postmodernity gains new dimensions and challenges us how to rediscover and strengthen those core values and principles, which make us more human and closer to God. A thorough cross-examination should bring out the core values and principles underlying a modern self-understanding, the unchecked foundation of secular Western Civilization, and the rediscovery of beauty in Christianity. Secular reflections, though

15 For a more detailed analysis and presentation of the concept of resilience and its various dimensions, including existential and spiritual, see Žalec 2020 and Žalec 2022. Žalec particularly emphasizes the importance of theological virtues (faith, hope, love) for human resilience.

they abjure religious reality, can challenge us to discover the Absolute with greater intellectual and spiritual detachment.[16]

1. Search of the Spiritual in Secular Society

Even though Western societies have embraced the process of secularization, it is not clear what this process entails and brings to a spiritual life. C. Taylor in his *A Secular Age* presents an historical background of secularization and clarifies possible paths to the spiritual in our age. Secularity refers not only to the retreat of religion from the public space and the falling off of religious practices, but also to "a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is to be understood to be one option among other, and frequently not the easiest to embrace" (Taylor 2007, 3). Secularization as the move away from the traditional, and rediscovery of the spiritual as such, triggers the human agent to search for new moral, spiritual and religious experiences, which should create in the agent the sense of "fullness" through our ordinary being in the world. Taylor describes this as a move "from a world in which the place of fullness was understood as unproblematically outside of or 'beyond' human life, to a conflicted age in which this construal is challenged by others which place it 'within' human life" (15). This move creates a new self-understanding, which is much more than a new theory about ourselves; it is a lived understanding or a construal we live in without being aware of, ever formulating it, and imagining no alternative to it (30, 549).

Such self-understanding encourages people to find their own fulfilment, realization and true selves. The spiritual as such is, strictly speaking, less

16 A compelling instance of this practice is evident in the postmodern pilgrimage of the Camino de Santiago. This meaningful and memorable experience can lead to shifts in a pilgrim's personal hierarchy of values, emphasizing concern for the welfare and interests of others, such as universalism and benevolence (Brumec 2022b), as well as a profound deepening of spirituality (Brumec 2022a).

reliant on a specific doctrine, society, culture, tradition; the spiritual becomes linked to the personal search for fulfillment through universalization, psychologization, and individualization (Van der Braak 2008, 45). This leads us to a moral dilemma: "Are we willing to open ourselves to others to the point in which I recognize in them, despite cultural, religious, linguistic, and other differences among us, the same inner desire to be more human and have a fulfilled life?" (Svetelj 2016, 231)

The so-called scientific and objective mind, resurging during the period of Enlightenment, frees the modern agent from perspectives based on specific religious, cultural, linguistic, societal or historical background. New perspective should be all-encompassing, universal, including the whole and serving that whole (Taylor 2007, 251). Consequently, even the new spiritual has to reflect and present a universal validity and an objective truth, pushing aside as inadequate all those universalities that are too one-sided.

The apparently neutral universal perspective enables the human agent to think globally and in an all-encompassing fashion, but leaves the human agent struggling to grasp adequately the richness and complexity of his or her own interiority. The inner depth of the human agent does not let it be encapsulated within universal terms, unable to describe the particularity of the agent's own depth. This depth was previously located out there in the enchanted world and meaningful cosmos; now it is placed within the agent (540). Access to this inner depth becomes the domain of psychology, promising a better understanding of the inner dynamicity and complexity, including of the spiritual.

Jamnik describes the modern man as a seeker, a nomad, a vagabond, a tourist, and a pilgrim, who looks for different substitutes when trying to realize his or her inner yearnings. Liberalism, understood in terms of immanentism, anthropocentrism, ethical skepticism, individualism, and secularization, do not appease his or her innermost desire to do good and his or her longing for the Devine (Jamnik 2010, 7).

Caught between the universal and interior, the agent in search of the spiritual finds expressive individualism as a solution and the way of fulfillment. "The notion that each one of us has an original way of being entails that each of us has to discover what it is to be ourselves." (Taylor 1991, 61) This search shifts modernity into widespread expressive individualism. From this perspective, psychology can be seen as an encouragement to its clients to discover, analyze and control their true inner self.

Universalization, psychologization, and individualization delineate the background of the postmodern understanding of spiritual and "religious experience". The origin of this expression goes to the early nineteenth century, and its resurgence is based on interest "in freeing religious doctrine and practice from dependence on metaphysical beliefs and ecclesiastical institutions" (Proudfoot 1985, XIII). The search for a spiritual life based on self-fulfillment and self-sufficiency becomes an alternative option to religion. "Religion" carries a negative connotation, while "spiritual" indicates something positive. The spiritual in this case includes a broad spectrum of meanings: from direct experience of the sacred, immediacy, spontaneity, to unity, wholeness, integrity, harmony, balance, being at one (Taylor 2007, 507). The new understanding of spiritual life is consequently based on something personal, self-examination and development, authentic, and less on traditional collective rituals. Heelas and Woodhead (2005, 7) describe this as a "spiritual revolution". While forms of religion based on conformity with external principles are in decline, those forms of spirituality that foster the deepest, sacred dimension of one own's life within are growing. However, the rise of spirituality can be seen as a result of commercialization. Today spirituality is found in education, health-care, counseling, business training, marketing, basically in "all aspects of human cultural expression in (so-called) 'advanced' capitalist societies" (Carette and King 2005, X). This kind of spirituality seems to be uncomfortable with questions of transcendence, as well as with questions of social justice.

Different descriptions of the resurgence of spirituality have one common aspect: there is not much space for communal rituals of religious life. The practitioner's connection with the transcendent or fulfillment has to be something immanent and not affected by collective forms of religious life. While such an emphasis on personal spirituality and authenticity is something new in the West, it is quite common in many non-Western religious traditions (Taylor 2003, 4–29).

However, since secular humanists do not provide satisfactory answers for the modern agent's search of spirituality, the agent might be willing to return to the religious, but hesitates to be trapped within organized Western religions. In other words, the agent is aware of insufficiency of his or her life within the immanent frame; he or she holds a lot of positive energy, sincere desire and willingness to be open to the transcendental dimension, but at the same time he or she struggles to shape his or her spiritual or religious life by embracing external expectations, which do not fit his or her own inner experience. This perspective opens new possibilities for rediscovery of the authentic Christian message rooted in the life, passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

2. Alternate Interpretations of Secular Society

It would be unreasonable to conclude that the proclamation of the Christian message has lost its meaningfulness. Despite deviations and the exclusiveness of secularization (materialism, liberalism, relativism), God is still calling us, revealing His face to us and showing us His love. The original covenant between God and his people, as it is presented in many ways in the Old Testament and renewed through the life and resurrection of Jesus Christ, has not been broken by secularized modernity. By applying resiliency to this particular situation, Christianity in Western societies is called not so much to restore or keep alive some of the past religious structures or forms, but to rediscover and uncover beneath the essence and mission of Christianity as such. If we stay only with

external social changes or downwards trending statistics about Christianity in Western societies, we remain on the first level definition of resilience, which does not reveal "the core purpose of the system in question" (Parker 2019, IX).

A completely accurate reading of modernity remains a never-ending task, always risking leaving out what matters. Williams, by following Nietzsche, accepts secularization as a process of ineluctable decline of faith and religious practices. By looking at human nature and history, all seems to be over, God is dead, there is no place for Christianity in modernity. "We are in an ethical condition that lies not only beyond Christianity, but beyond its Kantian and its Hegelian legacies /.../ We know that the world was not made for us, or we for the world, that our history tells no purposeful story, and that there is no position outside the world or outside history from which we might hope to authenticate our activities." (Williams 1993, 166)

MacIntyre seems to be more open to Christianity and suggests going backwards in it, which involves rejection of modernity. Since modern sciences cannot come to agreement with religion, neither atheists with theists, nor reason with faith and emotions, it is not possible to create a moral consensus; what remains is a culture based on "bureaucratic individualism /.../ where free and arbitrary choices of individuals are sovereign" (MacIntyre 2007, 35). As a way out, MacIntyre refers to St. Benedict and his ideas of cultivating local forms of religious, moral, and intellectual community life. Such a return to local communities is a way of withstanding the culture of liberalism with its so-called neutrality (263).

If MacIntyre seems to be more pessimist, Taylor offers a more optimist reading. In his *A Catholic Modernity*, he defends modern secular society as a mingling of authentic developments of the gospel, an incarnational mode of life, and also of a closing off to God that negates the gospel. He also sees secularization as a necessary breakout for the development of certain facets of Christian life (Taylor 1999, 16). A modern understanding of freedom allows us to live the gospel in a purer and more authentic way (18). The

individual search for meaningful life and authenticity in modernity is something unprecedented in Western history. In addition, modernity is more concerned with universal justice and solidarity, which are secularized expressions of Christian *agape*.

None of these three readings of secular society seems to be entirely accurate; however, there is some truth to each one of them, and as such they are instructive for our effort to keep Christianity alive.

3. Resiliency: Discovering God's Search for Humans

Inspired by Taylor's optimistic view of modernity, the question of resiliency within the framework of Christianity poses the question of how to hear God's call in secular society. Flexibility, adaptability, quick recovery from difficulties—some of the characteristics of resiliency—should not be seen as an attempt to return to past forms of religious life, but to become attentive listeners who can identify and recognize God's calling and search for humans in order to share His love with them (Skralovnik 2016). The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob remains faithful to His covenant not only in the Old Testament (Szamocki 2019, 519–521); God taking care of humans continues in the New Testament and beyond including our time. In his teaching Jesus did not avoid certain categories of people; he taught sinners (Lk 5:30), tax collectors (Lk 15:1), Pharisees (Lk 14:3), and priests (Mt 21:45), no one was excluded. He was looking for the lost (Lk 15:1-32) (Celarc 2020, 402–407). Jesus' teaching and God's search for humans do not stop with Jesus' resurrection. God never stops looking for man and sees man as his beloved child (Iz 49:14-16; Jer 31:3; Ef 5:1).

In announcing God's kingdom, Jesus spoke in parables, which are different ways of revealing the spiritual conditions of men: they look but do not see, listen but do not hear and do not understand, even though they think they do (Mt 13:10-17). Why does Jesus never stop with his invitations to continue looking for and listening to? Because this is the only way that

human can transcend the apparent and self-evident reality in front of his eyes and ears. To uncover the underlying reality, humans need to become silent, as Jesus did many times, and look at the present reality on a deeper level, on the level of the invisible God's presence and love. This was the way Jesus took when he was proclaiming the Gospel. Consequently, external signs and proofs of God's invisible presence among us remain unnecessary and insufficient; they have no relevance, if they are not based on a deeper understanding and willingness to hear and see differently (Roszak 2016).

If the main characteristics of modernity are the individual search for freedom, authenticity, and spirituality, modern human struggles to embrace Christianity are understood as something that burdens him and makes demands of him. He sees the commandments and Church requirements as something external that limits his freedom and search for fulfillment. Consequently, he looks for meaningful answers in esoteric or secular forms of spirituality, based on human's self-fulfillment.

Even Church-going Christians do not remain immune to these burdens and external requirements. A fruitful spiritual life is much more than awareness of what God has done for us in the past, especially through Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. Even a regular sacramental life and daily reflection on scripture do not seem to be sufficient. Of course, all of these are necessary, but at the same time, they might become a burden that hides the true face of God. If we look at God as somebody who is continuously demanding and asking us to do something, our spiritual life will soon become flattened (Matjaž 2020, 51–71; Roszak 2017). If our prayer is nothing but persistent asking God to fulfill our requests, disappointment and frustrations will follow with the conclusion: How can God love us if he does not hear our prayers? In a similar way, daily scrutiny of one's sinfulness might lead us to God that continuously counts our sins.

For the believer as well as for the non-theist, the way out of this cycle is to enter into Jesus' way of looking at this world, on which God is spreading His

love. The first step is to become silent and stand back from the necessity of continuously talking (Godawa 2019). Catholic spirituality is rich with different forms of contemplative prayer, the importance of quiet, the importance of adoration; the secular world speaks about awareness, mindfulness, the importance of gratefulness. The second step is an ongoing examination of our daily life in a spirit of gratitude, repentance of personal sins, and repeating the decision for a life with God (Spiritual Exercises, no. 43). Saint Ignatius writes that awareness of daily events, circumstances, relationships and experiences is not sufficient if the same awareness does not also include the presence of God in these events, His search for me and His sharing of His love with me. The key point is that the examiner becomes aware that he is deeply loved by God, who wants him to have fullness of life.

4. Being in Silence and Remaining Quiet with God

In this age of secularism and postmodern spirituality, Christians are therefore encouraged to become even more aware of the presence of the God of the Bible, who is always present and close to us here and now. For when He appeared to Moses and asked Him His name, He replied that His name is "I am who I am" (Exod 3:14). He is therefore the One who is always present. This same God created human beings in His image and is always the first to seek them out and reveal Himself to them (Genesis 1-3). Moreover. The God of Jesus Christ is the God who is with every human being. All human beings "live and move and have our being" in Him (Acts 17:28), as the Apostle Paul points out. After His resurrection, Jesus promised to be with us until the end of the world (Mt 28:20).

God, who has revealed Himself fully in Jesus Christ, does not wait for humans in the sense that He will be close to them and will reveal Himself to them when they are perfect, without weakness or sin, keeping all His

commandments and thus deserving of His nearness (Roszak 2023b). God is always the first to speak and to address each person as His own image. The initiative is always God's (Stegu 2022). But the human being is called to listen to Him, to respond to Him, to allow Him to be with him or her, to be close to him or her. Just as a newborn baby is called to "respond to the gaze and voice of its mother and father" (Francis 2022a).

In this day and age, when, thanks to modern technology, we are almost constantly bombarded with multiple possibilities to always be listening to something or talking to someone, it is all the more necessary to consciously give this up and enter into silence and remain quiet. This allows us to be with God, with Him who is with us as the eternal Presence and Nearness, and to let Him find us and reveal to us His Presence, which is a loving, tender, compassionate, merciful, forgiving, liberating, respectful and secure nearness.

Prayer, which should be a place of encounter with God for believers, is most often filled with petitions or thanksgiving to God, that is, speaking, not silence. For many, this is the only kind of prayer that is right. Few realize that the most important thing is to be with God and to allow Him to reveal Himself to them and to reveal His active presence and closeness in their lives. And this is precisely the purpose of prayer: to allow God to reveal His love and respect for us, to remain in this with gratitude, adoration, trust and the practice of the commandments, and in this way to witness and communicate this to others and to all creation.

If we desire to allow Him to reveal Himself to us and to discover in Him our greatness, our true self, our true image, it is necessary to enter into silence and remain quiet, and to open ourselves with our whole being to the closeness of God. For He is our image, after which we are made and which we bear within us and which, like Him, is unchangeable (Gen 1:26-27). Naturally, external silence alone is not sufficient for us to achieve this. Often it is not even that necessary. Above all, it is necessary to remain completely quiet, inwardly and outwardly, and to open our spiritual senses

to the presence of God the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit. In this way we allow Him to speak and tell us what He desires and how He desires. In this way we give Him the possibility to make His Word happen in us, as we read in the prophets Samuel (1 Sam 15:10), Nathan (2 Sam 7:4), Elijah (1 Kings 19:9), etc. All we need to do is to persevere in faith and trust, even when nothing seems to be happening. That is the hardest thing to do. No one is used to this. That is why it is necessary to practice remaining quiet and attentive.

We are often unaware that God the Father, through Christ in the Holy Spirit, desires to speak to us in a completely personal, immediate way, as St Ignatius of Loyola points out in his Spiritual Exercises (no. 15, 330). When we stop speaking, and thus remain quiet, we often have the feeling that we are listening only to ourselves, to our thoughts, memories, desires, worries and fears, and not to the living God. For when we want only to silently listen, there is suddenly a silence, an emptiness. Because this quickly confuses us, we immediately start thinking or saying something. We do not take enough time for what He wants to happen in us, and how He desires to happen, when we are just with Him, listening to Him in faith. That is why it is necessary not to give space to all that prevents us from remaining quiet. Then we humbly ask the Holy Spirit, who is in us, to enable us to believe that God the Father, through Christ, is with us and wants to speak to our hearts, not only through His Word in the Bible, but through all His creation, people and events, including ourselves, our senses, emotions, impulses, memories, desires, dreams and thoughts (no. 39).

Few people realize that they are bringing to their prayer what they are used to in their conversations with others, when most often they are just looking for an opportunity to say what interests or burdens them, and only listen enough to get a word in edgewise. There are also few people who allow others to talk about what they want. Similarly, we find it difficult to give God the opportunity to say what He wants or to lead the conversation.

This is especially difficult because we cannot see Him and it seems to us as if there is only quietness on the other side. Until we learn to understand His language, which is completely different from ours, it seems to us that God is remaining quiet. But it is often through silence and quietness that He speaks to us with His living presence and nearness (no. 230–237).

It is necessary to learn to surrender completely to the nearness of God and to be completely free for whatever happens (no. 23). Let us trust in God and His plan of love for us and for all humanity. Even if we feel nothing, and various thoughts come up again and again to lead us away from Him, and it seems a waste of time, let us believe that it is not. He is our loving Father (Mt 7:11) and Friend (Jn 15:15-16). He knows what we really need, and He will do it. He only needs our trust and free consent to do what He knows is right and good for us and others (Spiritual Exercises, no. 234).

Different thoughts and images, emotions and feelings often arise naturally during silent prayer. It is difficult to stay focused. It is a misconception that distraction is something that prevents us from praying. If a thought occurs to us even a hundred times in the course of a half-hour or an hour of prayer, it means that we will reject it a hundred times because it distracted us, took us away from God, and we will return to Him. It means that a hundred times we have said "no" to ourselves or to the tempter and "yes" to God. In this way, we have one hundred times performed the act of unconditional love that enables us to die to the old self so that the new self can be born in us (Rom 6:1-14) (Muszala 2016).

When listening to God's voice, it is also important to bear in mind that every voice we hear or perceive as a thought, impulse, image, feeling or emotion (e.g., consolation or desolation) when we listen while remaining quiet is not God's voice. It is necessary to discern. If the "voice" accuses and leads to accusations against others and ourselves, it is the voice of the "accuser", which is the literal meaning of the biblical word "Satan". Accusation or blame that shames and humiliates is not the way God speaks to us. When

the God of Jesus Christ reveals our sin, He enables us to taste in advance His free forgiving love and the dignity of God's childhood, sonship/sisterhood in Christ. And above all, God is non-violent and non-intrusive. He always leaves freedom. He knocks silently and waits for us to open our hearts to Him. God's voice sounds like the voice of consolation, of faith, of tenderness, of patient love, of the intimate lover of our innermost depth, of the heart, of trust, of devotion, of common sense. God does not shame anyone, but lovingly draws everyone to Himself (Lorrain 2017, 17–40; Rohr 2019, 87–89).

When we listen to Jesus Christ as the sheep to their shepherd, we discover that He knows us (Jn 10). In the Bible, to know is also to love. When God the Father through Christ knows us inside out, He loves us, He does not condemn us. When we listen to Him, we discover that He loves us. After deep listening, our relationship with Him will no longer be cold, impersonal or wearisome, but fervent, friendly, confidential, intimate and liberating. He will give us the new and wonderful knowledge that He always loves us, rejoices over us, respects and appreciates us, and that He will never abandon us and leave us to ourselves or to others (Francis 2022b). When we are with Him, we experience what the psalmist (23:4) wrote: "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me."

In the prayer of listening while remaining quiet, as we gradually become more and more aware of how immeasurably gifted we really are, how all that we are and all that we have is God's gift, we are inwardly overwhelmed and totally addressed. This awakens, on the one hand, immense gratitude and joy and a constant prayer of thanksgiving and praise, which can also be expressed in a simple attitude of gratitude towards God, people and all creation. It also gives us an inner strength and certainty that enables us to maintain peace within ourselves even in the midst of turbulence, certainty in the midst of uncertainty, confidence in the triumph of the love, mercy and justice of God in the midst of various trials, temptations, disappointments,

injustices, stresses and tragedies (Jerebic, Bošnjaković, and Jerebic 2023, 355). On the other hand, it encourages us to desire to become like God Himself, who is the Giver of all and the constant Nearness. It awakens in us the desire to become, together with Him, a gift and a nearness to others. For this reason, we want and are willing to make ourselves completely free at His disposal and to cooperate with Him in our daily lives, knowing that His love and grace are completely sufficient for us, as St Ignatius of Loyola points out (Spiritual Exercises, no. 234).

The more we remain in interior quietness with God in all we live and do, the more we remain one with Him, like the branches with the vine (Jn 15:1-10). His active closeness increasingly fills all our senses and emotions, thoughts, memories and imagination, enabling us to taste and live the fullness of life in the midst of this world. In the face of all this, we cannot remain unchanged. We ourselves also become like the Father, who in His love does not exclude anyone, but gives to all what they need to live with dignity (Mt 5:43-48). We are also like Jesus, who did not come to be served, but to serve (Mt 20:28) and to make life abundant for all (Jn 10:10).

5. Conclusion

Whether we consider ourselves religious or non-religious, part of our lives is constantly changing. That is why it is so important that in the process of change we also discover the part of ourselves that does not change and as such enables the process of change itself. In this sense, we began the reflection of this chapter by defining resilience as the reality that makes all change possible.

For the Christian, it is the perception and awareness of the presence of God, who is close to him or her in His love, goodness, mercy, tenderness, respect and justice, that is unchanging and constant in his or her life. On

this or on Him can he or she always rely. To Him he or she can always return. In Him he or she discovers him or herself and his or her true self, the true image he or she bears through God, his or her Creator and Father, his or her uniqueness and priceless worth. With Him, he or she can be formed and become more and more what he or she is in his or her deepest reality, what he or she is in him or herself for His sake. Because of such awareness and verification (examen), it is no longer so important how his or her daily life looks externally; everything becomes an occasion and an experience of God's generosity and free love. This gives new meaning to Catholic resilience, which enables the believer to find new hope, meaning and fullness of life in every possible situation.

Through awareness and examination, the Christian is empowered to face various trials, knowing that he or she is never alone, but that God is with him or her in many ways, not only through the sacraments, the Word of God and prayer, but also through all that surrounds him or her, including the love, respect and mercy that he or she receives through others, or gives to others. The more he or she lives all his or her relationships in the Spirit of Christ, the more he or she knows that nothing can separate him or her from Him, but can lead him or her to a deeper life with Him, if he or she sees and receives everything in His Spirit. Such a lived faith or Christian spirituality in all its dimensions enables him or her to grow in resilience and gives him or her the support to face all trials and temptations (Simončič 2019, 543–544) and also to accept his or her vulnerability. Each person's vulnerability exposes him or her, on the one hand, to the possibility of being wounded, but on the other hand, it is a condition for the possibility of an interpersonal relationship that enables him or her to become fully human (Simonič, Osewska, and Pate 2019, 535–550). If he or she were self-sufficient, fully resilient, impervious and fully independent, he or she could not be wounded, but would also be condemned to the most monotonous and absurd solipsism (Orphanopoulos 2023, 30). Vulnerability promotes cooperation, solidarity, care for the other, compassion,

and therefore, according to Globokar (2022, 13), "it is the starting point for a new humanism, for a global ethic—and thus for a brighter future for all humanity. Catholic theology, centered in the Paschal mystery of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, can contribute, through its view of the human person, to a courageous acceptance of vulnerability and a responsible care for one's own life, for the life of one's fellow human beings and for the life of other living beings."[17]

No one can take away the presence and closeness of God from a person except him or herself, if he or she closes him or herself off from it. This closing off from it can also be led by an externalized religiosity, based on an externalized celebration of the sacraments and prayer, which is not rooted in a personal and safe relationship with God and a deep and authentic union with brothers and sisters in Christ (Vodičar 2020, 263). Indeed, God of Jesus Christ, through the incarnation, life, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus, is no longer bound to the temple, to the sanctuary, to the church, but is with each person where he or she is, because through baptism he or she is his or her sanctuary (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19). But if the Christian does not learn to recognize this living, tender and active presence and closeness of God, he or she remains alone without the resilience and support that a deeply personal and integral Christian spirituality, in union with the communion of the Church in the Holy Spirit, can offer, even when for various reasons (e.g., because of the measures taken against the pandemic) he or she is physically unable to be with others in the celebration of the Holy Mass or in other gatherings. But it is also important for every Christian to be aware that to believe is to accept the fact that faith is always contradictory and that it is normal to often experience almost simultaneously faith and unbelief, certainty and uncertainty, clarity and ambiguity, the nearness of God and His distance (Osredkar 2023).

17 On the importance of global ethics for respecting the dignity of every human being, see Čović and Marinčić (2016).

Chapter 7

Chronological and Kairological Aspects of Hope in the Midst of the World

Hope is a deep and complex human emotion, characterized by optimistic expectation and desire that something positive is likely to happen. Hope is a feeling of anticipation, often rooted in a belief that things will improve or turn out well. This feeling includes the expectation of obtaining that which is desired, which goes beyond simple wishes, longing, or wishful thinking. Hope provides motivation, resilience, and a sense of purpose, necessary especially during uncertain times or in difficult situations.

Hope can range from small everyday hopes to profound long-term aspirations. It is the driving force in individuals and communities, influencing their way of thinking, attitudes, and decisions. Hopeful people overcome their obstacles with increased efforts, higher resilience and faster problem-solving.

This relatively broad description of hope in English gains new dimensions by referring to the Hebrew equivalent word *tikvah* (teek-VAH),

translated as a cord, expectation, and hope. The root of this word is *kavah*, which means to bind together, collect; to expect, wait (for, on, upon). While hope in English remains an abstract notion, in Hebrew it becomes very visual as a cord or rope that one can see with the eyes and hold in the hand. Consequently, hope becomes something that is not out of our reach but real enough that we can cling to it so as to ensure our safety and security. It does not imply, however, that simply by holding the rope one will be automatically safe. This depends on what the rope is tied onto, as well as on waiting, patience, and expectation for the expected outcome. Biblical hope, together with human desire[18], is tied to the promises of God, which are tangible and secure. Prior to digging into the biblical theological dimensions of hope, as will be presented in the second half of this chapter let us analyze hope as a philosophical phenomenon.

1. Hope as a Philosophical Phenomenon

Hope as expectation of something better is that dimension of human existence that is cultivated and nourished in our daily life, and in a particular way in the moments of negativity, despair, and suffering, when we wait for what is beyond our immediate reach, i.e. promised or hoped for safety and security. Hope introduces, then, a glimpse beyond the things-themselves towards the things-to-come (Žalec 2020, 274). This glimpse is rooted in an eschatology that allows us to envision the invisible and the unapparent in a temporality that goes beyond time.

18 Desire too, in the Hebrew Bible includes intention, which goes beyond simple wishes or longing. The term desire in the Hebrew Bible covers a wide range of human longings, emotions, and cravings. Although, in the Hebrew Bible, desire is indicated by a variety of lexical forms (roots), the direct and explicit term indicating desire is limited to only two roots - the verb forms of the lexical roots *hmd* and *'wh*, which reflect not only the dynamics of desire occurring in human beings but also those found in God (Skralovnik in Matjaž 2020, 507).

Defining the relationship between time and hope, or where hope takes its place, is the first question calling for our attention. Referring to Kierkegaard's (1987, 68) statement that "All other media have space as their element. Only music occurs in time", we claim that hope also occurs only in time. As music cannot exist somewhere in space but only in time, so too does hope. Space as such can contain a painting or a sculpture, architecture takes place in a strictly defined place; however, there is no space that can contain music, only time can do so. Of course, every piece of music is performed in a specific space, but it is not the space that contains music, it is time. The same is the case for hope, whose existence cannot be bounded by space but only by time. In addition, for music to exist, one has to perform it; similarly, for hope to exist, one has to live it. Again, this is possible only in time. The question is, what time are we talking about?

The Greek distinction of temporality in terms of *chronos* and *kairos* brings us a step deeper. *Chronos* is simply time of duration and the passing by of moments measured in seconds, minutes, hours, days. *Chronos* allows us to count the span of our lives or to place historical events within a certain period of our history. Even though it is essential for understanding history, time as such does not exist; it is only an indefinite repetition of "nows" that cannot be adequately measured. Augustine in his *Confessions, Book XI,* explains that what is passing cannot be measured because once we start measuring it, it is already the past. Similarly, we cannot measure the future because it does not exist yet. We cannot measure past and future time because they do not exist. What remains is the now that comes from nothing and disappears in nothing. Augustine claims that the past, the present, and the future exist only in our minds as memories, sight and expectations (Augustine 2006, 246–247). In his *Being and Time*, Heidegger goes even further and calls such chronological understanding of time vulgar and inauthentic. The idea of time as a linear and infinite series of "now", based on *Aristotle's Physics*, is an ordinary conception of time, where priority is always given to the present (Heidegger 1962, 472–473).

In opposition to the chronological understanding of temporality, which is horizontal and based on duration and the continuation of "now", lies *kairos*, which is vertical, discontinuous, and cannot be measured at all since it occurs only at the moment. This one moment or all moments together cannot be measured with categories through which we measure chronological temporality. Each moment of *kairos* presents something unique and unrepeatable in a sense that we cannot create two or more identical moments of *kairos*. In the ancient Greek literature, *kairos* was the time of opportunity, calling for decisive and courageous action (Kinneavy 1986, 80). Aristotle uses the word *kairos* in his *Rhetoric* as the matter of right timing and due measure, which creates the moment when a rhetorical proof will be delivered and consequently, the audience will be prepared to accept the proposed argument. Hence, *kairos* becomes the crucial rhetorical tool or moment in political, legal, ethical discussions, especially in the treatment of the emotions and mental confusion (Kinneavy 1994, 135–140).

The Ancient Greek understanding of *kairos* finds new dimensions in the Christian liturgical context. The liturgical celebration of the past events, such as Jesus' death and resurrection, takes place now, i.e., in the time of the celebration of liturgy. Consequently, liturgy is not a memorial event of the past historical events; liturgy is repetition of the past events in a unique and unrepeatable way that can take place with its actualization only in the "now", i.e., in the moment of celebration. Even more, the liturgy is at the time of celebration also a connection with a future reality, eternity, that is reaching us in the present. By celebrating Jesus' resurrection now, we are invited to enter into eternity, eschatological reality, which is in its fullness awaiting on us at the end of time, but we become part of it already in the present. In Kierkegaard's words, the understanding of *kairos* reaches new dimensions in Christianity: "The pivotal concept in Christianity, that which made all things new, is the fullness of time, but the fullness of time is the moment as the eternal, and yet this eternal is also the future and the past." (Kierkegaard 1980, 90)

Let us return now to the question of the relationship between time and hope. As already stated, hope, like music, can exist only in time. This time, however, if reduced to a chronological understanding of temporality, offers only a partial explanation of the connection between hope and time. It is true that our actualization of hope always resides in time; nonetheless, that actualization can take place only in the present moment (Pineda et al. 2020). Our hopeful and courageous actions in the past as such do not exist anymore; what remains of them is more or less inspiring memories imbued in hope. These memories become crucial for the actualization of hope in the present moment as positive energy and encouragement. If one's mind and past actions were permeated by hope, it is likely that something similar will happen now and continue in the future. As past events can have a positive impact on our present time, they can also become an unbearable weight conditioning our present. Past events cannot be changed; they are fixed facts conditioning our present identity, our way of thinking, feeling, and acting, following us like shadow (Vodičar 2020, 263). What can be changed is our relationship with them. One's readiness to change the relationship towards his or her past is already an act of hope that the quality of the past events does not predetermine the quality of one's present and future. Again, this readiness or hope can take place only in the now, there is no other time.

What seems easy to grasp intellectually is difficult to practice and actualize in our society, overwhelmed by archeological memories and the wish to know what happened in the past. Ongoing collections of financial, medical, and police records, transcripts, searching for new achievements in view of improving our resumes, our need for digging into our psyche with the hope of re-discovering remote reasons for present traumas, are expressions of an understanding of our existence primarily in chronological dimensions (Terelak 2021). As stated previously, chronological time can be measured, observed, written down in files and recorded, and by doing so, one believes he or she is able to determine the cause for certain effects in the present.

The question is how to transcend such a way of thinking (Roszak 2017). A chronological interpretation of temporality, and within it our actualization of hope, is challenged by a series of events that as such did happen in the past, but their true meaning is revealed only if they are seen from the future. For example, if trying to understand the "cause" of Jesus' crucifixion, it does not make sense to look for it in the events of Jesus' life before his death on cross. The true cause is the resurrection that follows. This resurrection cannot be seen as a result or the effect of Christ's passion, the true meaning of resurrection is much more than that, something that has not come yet. "Even the historical event of our Lord's resurrection would make no sense if there was not to be a final resurrection of all human beings in the end: 'if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ was risen.'" (Zizioulas 1999, 7) So, the cause does not lie in the beginning but at the end, staying in the kingdom of God that is the origin of the cause. At this point, we are already in the kairological dimension, which with its verticality cannot be measured chronologically. Kairological reality is a complete discontinuation, something unrepeatable and unique. Consequently, hope as such cannot find its grounding in the past events because the past events can provide only positive memories of hopeful acting. The true foundation of hope are the events coming to us from the future. In Christian context, this is the promise of God's unchanging and unconditional bond with us humans, as will be explained in the second half of this reflection.

Within this framework of eschatology, hope with its gaze fixed on future events that are already taking place in the present, combined with patient waiting, become the transforming forces of daily life. This transformation takes place in a moment that cannot be measured chronologically because it is not bounded by time. Hope takes place in a moment that is a glimpse of the timelessness which allows us to see the invisible. In this glimpse, hope moves us beyond the things-themselves toward the things-to-come. There are at least two ways to describe this glimpse: Plato talks about *exaiphnes* (ἐξαίφνης), and Heidegger

about *der Augenblick*. Both terms should be taken within the tradition of an eschatological anticipation of the kingdom's advent and its *kairos*.

Following the interpretation of J. P. Manoussakis (2007, 64), Plato's *exaiphnes* is generally translated as "suddenly", or "the instant", or "the moment". In Parmenides (156d-e), Plato himself writes that *exaiphnes* seems to signify that from which something changes to something else.[19] The preposition "*ex*" means the "from which" or "from out of", and the second half of the word (*a-phanes*) can be etymologically translated as "in-visible". Therefore, the *exaiphnes* is the occasion of "coming out of what is in-visible". What is in-visible in this case is what is different, unknown, unforeseen, something that will be revealed only in the future. Since it is hard to foresee it, the translation "sudden" seems to be appropriate. This appearance of the in-visible cannot be measured chronologically, hence "in an instant" or "in a moment". In any case, at the occasion of *exaiphnes*, the apparent things have to disappear in order to allow the in-visible to appear.

Luther introduced the German word *Augenblick* in his translation of St. Paul's first letter to Corinthians: "We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye /*Augenblick*/, at the last trumpet" (1 Cor 15:51-52). This moment cannot be described in chronological terms; it is a kairological moment indicating eschatological change that is beyond any historical measurements. Kierkegaard takes it a step further and makes an explicit connection between Plato's *exaiphnes* and *Augenblick*, when he writes: "A blink is therefore a designation of time, but mark well, of time in the fateful conflict when it is touched by eternity. What we call the moment [*Augenblick*]

19 Parmenides (156c-d): "So when does it change? For it does not change while it is at rest or in motion, or while it is in time?" — "Yes, you're quite right." — "Is there, then, this queer thing in which it might be, just when it changes?" — "What queer thing?" — "The instant. The instant seems to signify something such that changing occurs from it to each of two states. For a thing doesn't change from rest while rest continues, or from motion while motion continues. Rather, this queer creature, the instant, lurks between motion and rest—being in no time at all—and to it and from it the moving thing changes to resting and the resting thing changes to moving." (Plato 1997, 388)

Plato calls τὸ *ἐξαίφνης*. /…/ whatever its etymological explanation, it is related to the category of the invisible." (Kierkegaard 1980, 87–88)

Aware of this connection between exaiphnes and *Augenblick*, Heidegger (1995, 102) in his analysis of the first and second letters to Thessalonians uses the word *Augenblick* to translate St. Paul's comprehension of *kairos*. *Kairos* becomes the occasion when, from the meeting of something temporal with something that cannot be measured chronologically emerges the invisible at the blink of the eye. That blink of the eye designates a temporality that is beyond time, in which the invisible and the unapparent can be caught.

This short analysis of time in its chronological and kairological dimensions leads us to a deeper understanding of hope as it is presented in the Bible.

2. "The Time Has Come!" (Mk 1:15)—A biblical Understanding of Hope

The Bible tells us that God created time for human by creating the world (1 Mz 1:14-19). Time therefore has a start and is linear (Lk 3:23-28; 21:7-28; Mt 28:18-20; Acts 1:1-11) and will cease when its purpose is fulfilled at the end of time (Gen 8:22; Rev 21:1-6a).[20]

The Greek word *chronos* used in the Septuagint and New Testament means linear or chronological time. This is the quantitative time measured by successive objects, events, or moments (Zodhiates 1992, 1487). But when God enters time, or when eternity coincides with time, this time becomes *kairos*, which means the time of fulfilment (Lk 21:24; 1 Thess 5:1-2). It is a qualitative time. The most prominent example of *kairos* is the incarnation of the Son of God, of which the apostle Paul speaks in Gal 4:4.

20 According to the Hebrew conception of time, the history of mankind is like a tree: it has its beginning, its growth and development. This history is goal-oriented, fruit-oriented. It is a progressive, growing and evolving reality (Skralovnik 2021, 130–131).

In the Old Testament, however, we can see several examples of this time; Abraham's covenants with God (Gen 15:17); the three visitors (Gen 18); the sacrifice of Isaac (Gen 22:1-18); Jacob fights with God (Gen 32:24-32); Moses talks to God in the burning bush (Ex 3:1-4:16); Job's conversations with God (Job 38,1-42.9), etc. In the New Testament, *kairos* can be found in Jesus' baptism (Mt 3:13-17), transfiguration (Mt 17:1-13), crucifixion (Mt 27:32-56), resurrection (Mt 28:1-10), ascension (Mk 16:19-20) and in the future - the Lord's Day (Rev 22). In all these and many other cases, we can see how *chronos* and *kairos* coexist.

In the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament (e.g., Gen 15:17; Mk 1:15) we see that the true foundation of hope is in God's promise. There is, of course, a progression from the promise towards its fulfilment, that does not mean an end, but it makes sense of the whole journey (Globokar 2019, 612–614). In such a view of time, every moment is important. So, time becomes a "space" where the hope given by God's promise is fulfilled. Time becomes a "space" of progression towards the novelty that God gives through his Son, in whom God also shows and reveals God's self.

The highest goal of the spiritual life is not the abundance of knowledge, information or the experience of space or things, but the encounter with sacred moments, i.e., *kairos*. The spiritual experience is not about things that are given to humans, but about Presence experienced by humans (Roszak and Huzarek 2019). The moment of insight, the touch of the eternal in time, happens within the human, and not in the place or space where this event took space (Heschel 2015,17–21; Avsenik Nabergoj 2020, 522–534).

In Mark's gospel, Jesus' first words are: "The time has come! God's kingdom will soon be here. Turn back to God and believe the good news!" (Mk 1:15) These words make it clear that he ended the time of expectation. Now, this moment has been set by God to save mankind. No longer will the law of repetition apply, the law under which human beings perceive time as circling, as the rhythm of the seasons, as a journey from birth to death. Such

an understanding of time poisons the entirety of a man's life and kills him because it takes away his hope. "This natural conception of time stifles hope and history: it cuts the wings of every possibility of a path that would lead to something different and positive." (Fausti 2007, 32)

Jesus first draws attention to the value of the present. Everything is decided in it. A favorable time, *kairos*, comes when a human being understands that the moment of choice for God, His kingdom, is now. "The decisive moment," as Fausti (2007, 33) highlights, "is the decision itself. The present is therefore the point in which it is flowing, what it was, and from which it comes what it will be, and both are united in a decision that makes sense of the past and the meaning of the future."

In such an understanding of time, Jesus is faithful to Judaism, which, as Rabbi Heschel (2015, 20) points out, is "the religion of time": "Unlike a human who is oriented to a space for which time is monotonous, repetitive, immutable and for which all hours are equal, without peculiarities, empty shells, the Bible perceives the varied character of time. Not even two hours are the same. Every hour is unique and the only one which is given to us at that moment, is the first-class and infinitely precious."

With Jesus came a decisive moment in the history of mankind (Celarc 2019), because with him came the kingdom of God, which makes visible and unites all the expectations of the people of the Old Testament. When we listen to Jesus' teachings and look at his life, we see this kingdom. Fausti (2007, 34) points out that this kingdom is Jesus himself, "God for humanity and humanity for God, who fully realizes God's love for humanity and humanity's love for God. No one is far from it or excluded from it; everyone enters into it when he turns to him, loves him and follows him on his path by 'following him' and sharing his destiny of cross and glory, struggle and victory (Mk 8:34-38)."

Of course, it is always necessary to have the awareness that when we listen to and watch Jesus Christ, we see the Father and his kingdom. Therefore, Jesus focuses all of his proclamation on the coming of the Kingdom of God

(Mk 1:14.15.38; 2:10; 9:45-47; 10:25.26). This is a good news, a gospel, an announcement of hope—the kingdom of God is for all (for sinners, the poor, the oppressed, the suffering) (Mk 2:9-11; Mt 9:1-8; 11:2-6; 12:18-21). This hope is given to a Christian by an invitation to the Kingdom of God. He renews this hope whenever he prays: "Thy kingdom come." (Sorč 2003, 399–401) The kingdom of God is a free gift of God, but entry is left to human freedom. Conversion, to which Jesus encourages us, means turning to him and following him on the path he has shown and shows through his Spirit (Prijatelj 2018, 445; Petkovšek 2019).

Christian hope is the entire life of Jesus Christ (Rom 8:1-16; 2 Cor 8:9; Flp 2:6-11), which, due to his resurrection, carries within it the dimension of the last and ultimate - the eschaton (Rom 6:9.10) (Benedict XVI 2007, no. 6, 26-28). This hope comes from the eschatological gift of the Resurrected–the gift of the Holy Spirit (Rom 15:13; 8:2-3; Gal 5:5). The Spirit is the one that awakens in the heart of the faithful the Son's trust in the Father (Rom 8:1-16; Gal 4:5-7). Through the Spirit, believers are given hope, which does not embarrass, because after him God's love is poured out into their hearts (Rom 5:5) (Sorč1995, 123–125; Benedict XVI 2007, no. 4–8.50; Doud 2019, 92–96).

The Judeo-Christian faith is not opium, allowing a human being to forget the present evil or dream of a good future. It calls every human being to live the present moment in its fullness (Godawa 2018, 829–832). We can say that every passage of the gospel contains the promise of God on which hope is based, which does not deceive (Rom 5; Heb 6). For the one who reads it, it becomes "reality" when he or she realizes that "the time has been fulfilled" in which God, through His Son, wishes to do for him or her in the power of the Holy Spirit what the narrative speaks of, if he or she is willing to ask and accept His free gift with trusting faith.

In a special way Christians renew and live this hope in the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice of thanksgiving on Sunday, which is "a day of

blessed hope and a day of hope for ultimate bliss" (Krajnc 2009, 27). The Eucharist makes it possible to taste in advance the taste of Christ's promises of full joy (Jn 15:11).

It expresses a trusting expectation of fulfilling the promise of the final arrival of Jesus Christ in glory, explicitly summed up by the mass prayer/embolism of the Our Father: "when we are full of hope we await the arrival of our Savior Jesus Christ." (Rimski misal [Roman Missal] 2010) When the Church brings before God everything humanity carries in itself, "joy and hope, sadness and anxiety", (Gaudium et Spes, no. 1) it receives through Christ the indestructible and firm hope (2 Thess 2:13-17) (John Paul II 1998, no. 42–43).

Sunday is a weekly Easter for Christians when they celebrate the memory of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the victory over death, evil and sin, and the beginning of the "new creation" (2 Cor 5:7) (no. 13). This is the day of remembrance of baptism, when every Christian rises to a new life and hope in Christ (Kol 2:12; Rom 6:4-6). Through the celebration of Sunday Eucharist, Christians collectively "testify to God's holiness and their hope of salvation. They strengthen one another under the guidance of the Holy Spirit." (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1993, no. 2182)

This day is a living memory and thanksgiving for the creation of the world and for God's blessing of the Sabbath (Gen 1:1-2:3), and also for the "last day", when Christ will come to eternal glory (Acts 1:11) and will renovate all creation (John Paul II 1998, no. 13). This day is a never-ending prediction of the last day, an immortal life (32). Within it, *chronos* becomes the "time of grace", *kairos* (Krajnc 2009, 17). This is a day for joy when Christians thank God for their rebirth through the resurrection of his Son that gave them a hope that never dies. (John Paul II 1998, no. 17)

This is a festive day that allows a human to become a man or woman of hope. Without festive days, as Krajnc (2018, 800) points out, "hope has no space to exist". Celebrating Sunday deters Christians from the danger that

everyday times could shut them down. With the eucharistic celebration and festive rest, they can direct their view of Christ and His second coming, and so opening the *chronos* to the *kairos* that Christ brought and brings them again and again especially on this day. When the whole Christian community cries out together "Maránatha, come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev 22:20), full of hope and expectation of the last day, it revives its hopes and supports the hope of all people (Paul VI 1975, no. 78). In this way, the Christian community puts into practice a spirituality of hope and life in fullness. This eschatological hope also includes the hope of the union of all human beings in the truth, because the human being hopes to find, at the end of the agony of misunderstanding, an understanding of the world, of life and of the human being, and to be able at last to rest and to enjoy the fruits of his or her efforts. (Pohar 2023)

3. Christian Spirituality and Hope

From a philosophical point of view, spirituality is awakened in a person when an event interrupts the normal routine of his or her life, forcing him or her to start asking existential questions, i.e. to adopt and assume a posture of radical self-questioning (Klun 2012). Sooner or later, when a person is living and working, he or she is confronted with various hardships and setbacks. At that time, he or she can no longer ignore questions about the existence of suffering, evil or death. He or she may be more or less shaken in his or her understanding of self, others and the world. So he or she is forced to go from the surface of his or her life to its depths. For many, this marks the beginning of their true spiritual journey (Platovnjak 2022, 59–61). Spirituality understood in this way is not at all a field reserved for religiosity. Therefore, according to Klun (2012, 77), "philosophical questioning is also one, though not the only, form of spiritual life".

So when something shakes up our lives and we start asking ourselves holistic questions, we can look for answers not only within ourselves but also within existing religions. We can say that we start living a religious spirituality when we experience something through religion that changes the way we live, the way we understand ourselves, others and the world. It is a message of redemption, *kairos* that enables us to live in a new way. Life takes on a new meaning and purpose that we could not give it on our own. It is, as it were, about receiving the light, *kairos*, which comes from outside and illuminates our life or the world in a new way, giving everything a new hope and meaning.

Accepting religion is not primarily about accepting religious truths, but about accepting a new horizon, *kairos*, in which we see the same things we saw before in a new light and in a new way. Pope Francis (2013a, no. 18) says that for a Christian, to believe means to see life, oneself, others, events and God with the eyes of Jesus. This view is found in the Gospels. It is only when we begin to see and perceive everything in this new light, *kairos*, that the truths of faith take on their true meaning and can be understood. In any case, accepting the horizon of faith does not exclude the possibility of other answers. Every true believer knows doubt. He or she must also decide again and again whether or not to accept the answer that religion gives (Klun 2012, 79).

Questioning requires effort. For this reason, the spiritual life is not easy, but requires us to constantly strive for a deeper understanding of life. This is why questioning and the search for answers is a never-ending task and effort of the spiritual life, which may take place within religions or contemporary beliefs or the various human sciences (Sheldrake 2012, 8–17).

Whatever we understand spirituality to be, it is certainly not just one part of human life, but includes "life as a whole" and strives for the "sacred". This may include faith in God or in the boundless mysteries of the universe, but it can also refer to the depths of human life. In its broadest sense,

spirituality is a way of life that enables people to seek and find content, purpose and meaning in life, hope and values, and answers to life's deepest questions. Such a spiritual life leads to a holistic relationship with oneself, others, creation and transcendence, the Absolute, which for believers is God (Nolan, Saltmarsh and Leget 2011; 2022, 58–62; Rego et al. 2018; Sheldrake 2012, 4–8; Cvetek and Cvetek 2018, 1087–1089; Jerebic, Bošnjaković and Jerebic 2023, 361–363; Pate 2023, 221–239).

Cardinal Kasper describes Christian spirituality as the fruit of the collaboration (conscious or unconscious, active or passive) of two factors. The first factor is "from above": it is the Holy Spirit. He is, in fact, its foundation and source. Without Him, Christian spirituality is not possible at all, nor is the *kairos* that can happen within its realization. He is unchangeable and always the same, but at the same time He gives different inspirations, gifts, charisms, missions, as the Apostle Paul explains (1 Cor 12-14). The second factor of spirituality is "from below". It is the Christian who is deeply marked by his or her creation, physicality and psyche, humanity and God-likeness, sinfulness and holiness, freedom and bondage, faith and unbelief, abilities and limitations, etc. At the same time, he or she is also deeply involved in and dependent on the time and the environment in which he or she lives and works, on social, cultural and ecclesial life. All this greatly influences his or her response to the action of the Holy Spirit and, therefore, to the realization of the spirituality that he or she lives and co-creates in his or her own time and place (Kasper 2007, III).

If we look at Christian spirituality in terms of *chronos* and *kairos*, we can say that it makes possible *chronos*, that is, the time and place where *kairos*, and with it hope and meaning in life, can happen. For this to happen, it is important that the various "activities" and dimensions of the spiritual life have their irreplaceable place in it, and that they are balanced with one another: personal and communal prayer, meditation and contemplation, meditation on the Word of God, the sacramental and liturgical life, moments

of silence and solitude, rest and celebration, as well as life in the various communities, service and evangelization, commitment to cultural, social and political life, care for the poor and the environment, for justice and peace, daily and professional work, etc. There is always a need to find a balance between the "inner" personal life and the "outer" personal and community life and action. One or the other dimension of life and action must never be neglected at the expense of the other, pretending that something is more important, more spiritual, more holy, more divine, because none of them is more or less open to *kairos*, which is a pure and free gift of God's grace, and never happens because of our practicing spirituality. However, it offers the possibility of it happening, and that is very important.

4. Conclusion

Either in the philosophical reflection or in the biblical texts, hope is primarily an invitation to transcend the factual reality measured in terms of horizontal *chronos*, which is also an invitation to find the meaning of life. "Anyone /…/, who seeks to understand temporality without restriction as the necessary mark of human existence will find hidden from him not only the 'life beyond' time, but also the very meaning of life in *time*." (Pieper 1986, 16–17) Humans reach their deepest expectations, desires, wishes and longing only if rooted in a spaceless *kairos*, which is vertical, discontinuous, and beyond measurement. *Kairos* as a look into the future takes place only in the present "now", which is as such the foundation of hope. While in the philosophical context *kairos* and hope become an encounter with the invisible that is beyond time, the same encounter in the Biblical context presents the fulfilment of God's promise. In this context, Christian spirituality is the *chronos* where *kairos* can happen and with it hope and meaning in life.

Chapter 8

Integrative Approach: from "Either-Or" to "Both-And"

In a world of fragmentation, specialization, separation, and secularization, there is an urgent need to create a new vision based on integration, reconciliation, and synthesis of what seems to be separated. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) firmly believed that we could easily find solutions by correctly using human reason. The Age of Enlightenment finally succeeded the dark Middle Ages, introducing human reason as the light replacing the darkness of Premodernity. Inspired by Kant's insight, the scholars of Modernity witnessed and supported social, cultural, religious, economic, and technological changes. In the middle of the 20th century, Modernity's overarching beliefs and values seemed to come to an end, replaced by Postmodernity as a critique of Modernity.

The premodern, modern, and postmodern perspectives characterize recent centuries of Western Thought's organic and dynamic development,

covering pendulum-like reactions of ideas. Each age offers a different perspective on what to doubt, affirm, and submit. To avoid extremes and one-sidedness, our challenge is to find a healthy balance between doubting, affirming, and submitting, as Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) states in one of his fragments.[21]

While keeping a critical distance from these perspectives, we will merge them into something more organically connected; let us call this an integrative perspective or the age of synthesis. The premodern, modern, and postmodern perspectives should be taken as complementary reflections, offering an integrative paradigm of what is healthy, ethical, and spiritual, i.e., what really matters in our time. The integrative perspective is an opportunity to reflect creatively on how to find a meaningful balance between faith and reason, spiritual and material, relative and absolute, authority and freedom, and immanence and transcendence. It is an invitation to find again what the universal human is (e.g., Svetelj 2021). In this perspective, the Christian message with its two-thousand year long tradition reappears lucidly lifegiving with its spirit of unification and divinization of humans.

The integrative approach moves away from the logic based on "either-or", rooted in exclusion and separation, leading toward an almost black and white interpretation of reality. This logic should be replaced by the principle of integration, grounded in the "both-and" approach (Francis 2020b, 78–81; Just 2022). Both spirituality and religiosity, mind and body, immanence and transcendence, spiritual and material, human and divine, as well as many other dyads, find their place in the new approach of integration.

21 "One must know when it is right to doubt, to affirm, to submit. Anyone who does otherwise does not understand the force of reason. Some men run counter to these three principles, either affirming that everything can be proved, because they know nothing about proof, or doubting everything, because they do not know when to submit, or always submitting, because they do not know when judgment is called for." (Pascal 1995, no. 170, p. 54)

1. Premodern, Modern, and Postmodern Perspective

Premodernity covers the centuries of European history up to the 17th century. The Greco-Roman worldview and way of thinking had merged with Judeo-Christian theological reflections. For the purpose of this reflection, a simple list of the main characteristics of Premodernity is sufficient. The premodern way of thinking was influenced by the presence of Christianity. Christian practices and activities, rooted in solid theological reflections, were often mixed with superstition and magic, especially among the laity. Perception of time was based on religious rituals and ceremonies, shaping people's daily routines. Settlements were set up around churches, shrines, and temples, serving as the focal points for religious activities. Religious knowledge was transmitted through sacred texts and oral tradition. Premodern cosmology included notions of divine or sacred order governing the universe; the cosmos was seen as a reflection of something divine. Natural events were often interpreted as divine signs and messages. Knowledge of the world for many people became synonymous with religious knowledge. There was a strong belief that the ultimate truth is knowable, even though not yet completely revealed, but always disclosing itself to those looking for it. In epistemological terms, the source of the ultimate truth was divine revelation or God's initiative and willingness to reveal Himself to humans in specific times and places. The final goal of life was synonymous with spiritual progress based on beliefs about the afterlife.

A premodern thinker or believer evaluated his spirituality in correspondence with approved theology. This theology could not be self-made or a simple collage of one's preferences, which is typical for a postmodern believer (Roszak 2023). The premodern believer's spirituality is evaluated through his adherence to an established religion in a specific culture. He uses the language of his cultural and religious immersion to express his spiritual life. Let us describe this approach as emic, a term borrowed from the anthropological theory. The emic approach

analyzes given phenomena from the participant's perspective. His accounts are consistent with his subjective perspectives, creating emic knowledge grounded on the consensual perception of cultural insiders (Lett 1996, 382–383). Accordingly, the emic accounts consider belief systems and cultures as two interconnected systems that cannot be separated. Accurately describing one's spirituality requires a holistic view, covering one's spiritual beliefs, adherence to a community of the faithful, spiritual experts or authorities, formal doctrines and spiritual prescriptions, and traditional religious systems. If done accurately, etic descriptions present details of spiritual beliefs and cultural meanings on their own terms (e.g., Morris 1999, 781–796).

Modernity was raised as a critique of the premodern intellectual and spiritual worldviews, creating new possibilities of self-perception. The rise of empirical and rational methods of inquiry steadily distances and criticizes the power of the Church authority and its religious activities, especially those mingled with superstition. Strong belief in the ultimate truth is not anymore the exclusive domain of the Church and aristocracy (Pevec Rozman 2009, 18–20).

Science and philosophy are becoming new intellectual authorities, prevailing over religion and theology. Divine revelation is replaced by rationalism and empiricism as the only valid scientific method. Academics and scientists are becoming new sources of intellectual authority. The nature of the new knowledge remains universal as it was in the premodern time, but not based on revelation. Objective reality was considered knowable and based on universal truths, which can be discovered through rationalism, materialism, and reductionism. The entire nature operates as a unified whole that scientists can observe and measure.

All new scientific findings are supposed to be transparent, accountable, and verifiable. What cannot be measured cannot be proven, therefore questionable. Since faith, sacred, and spirituality belong to the nonmaterial reality, they cannot be judged based on rationality, empirical outcomes, and

observations. The goal of modernity was not any more spiritual progress with the final reward in the afterlife, but material progress and improvement of social conditions, in view of the liberation of inquiry from tradition and religion. Let us call this secularization of society.[22] The realm of spirituality was gradually replaced by the first emergence of modern psychological and psychiatric perspectives, separating mental illnesses from religious and moral conceptions. The importance of the individual with his rights became more and more important.

If the premodern approach is primarily based on the emic approach, the modern approach favors its etic components, i.e., the study or description of a particular culture, social system, belief, and language in accordance with the scientific method. The results must be objective, replicable, falsifiable, comprehensive, and precise (Lett 1996, 382–383). Abstract descriptions, cross-cultural constructs, survey data, and cross-cultural constructs are almost mandatory in this approach. The observer does not feel constrained by his own worldview and belief systems. Following the etic approach, the description of spirituality results in observational claims, which are interpreted logically and exposed to mathematical analyses. Such results present generalizable and cumulative knowledge. The nature of spirituality as such is measured in terms of spiritual development, positive functioning in society, personal or collective well-being, and health outcomes.

A strong emphasis on material reality opened the door to criticism as well. A mindset frightened by the non-material reality struggles to provide a strong foundation for moral values, which remain elusive. The new scientific discoveries are often misused for destruction, leading to negative impacts of the same scientific development (Laugharne 2002, 207–210). There is a growing tension between faith and science, different worldviews, or between the etic and emic approaches. The etic approach can be well-suited for both religious advocates (Watson 2008, 5–18) as well as atheist

22 For different meanings of "secularization" see Taylor 2007; Žalec 2019, 412–413.

polemicists (e.g., Harris 2004), who find the etic approach as an objective tool for their analyses of conflicts between religious traditions and modern metaphysics; however, their conclusions can be completely opposing. The biggest limit of the etic evaluations of spirituality is the struggle to grasp the fundamental core of spirituality, i.e., the human experience of the sacred.

The genesis of the postmodern era is often traced to the 1950s. Its main characteristic is a refutation of Modernity (e.g., Downing 2006). Postmodernists do not believe in the ultimate truth; there is no such thing as the ultimate truth (Pevec Rozman 2009, 19–21). Even more, they consider this idea to be potentially dangerous. Instead of having a universal truth, they suggest a metaphysics of local and contextual truths, which are constructed and not discovered (Bruner 1991, 3). Holding to objective truth claims becomes, for Postmodernity, equal to holding the means of power for control, marginalization, and oppression of others. Postmodernism suggests "distrust toward the modern concept of universal reason and related claims to know objective truth" (Smith 2005, 53). Consequently, there should be no metanarratives or cross-contextual frames, including the idea of progress. While modern narratives and theories are still based on values, postmodernists cannot tolerate these narratives because they are relative, biased, and narrow. Different truths can be known through multiple methods; no truth or method should be privileged; all statements about reality are caught in the same relativistic language trap (Watson 2008, 5–18). Any experience of so-called reality is already influenced by words that condition the observer's experience. All discourses are trapped in a relativity of "various discrete languages. And since we cannot know a supposedly objective world apart from language, we make our own worlds by how we use our language. Therefore, language and world are internally related." (Smith 2005, 53–54) Any narrative of postmodern spirituality is bound to the cultural context, language, pragmatic usefulness, and social systems. Such a postmodern assumption of linguistic relativity can be deeply troubling to Christian commitment to the Absolute.

Following this framework, every authority should be distrusted, including the modern reliance on science and philosophy. If Modernity believed in good in terms of promoting equality, freedom, and justice, Postmodernity takes a pragmatic approach to the meaning of good, which is considered to be internally coherent in a given context but not universally applicable. The final goal of life is neither religious progress nor material, social progress; what matters is respect for others, conditioned by an individual's relative gains and losses. A postmodern thinker sees spirituality as a cultural narrative measured in terms of utility, internal coherence, and part of a social power hierarchy.

2. Toward the Integrative Perspective

Looking back on three perspectives, we find ourselves privileged by dealing with immense experiences and reflections, allowing us to integrate and maintain the best of each perspective without including its limitations. Let us call this an integrative perspective, which is also the perspective of becoming more human in the context of globalization (e.g., Svetelj 2014). This perspective is based on the postmodern perspective and, at the same time, remains attentive to the key features of the premodern and modern perspectives. The integrative perspective recognizes the possibility of multiple truths and investigations in metaphysics and epistemology, especially in ethical inquiry. Thus, by merging the etic and emic analyses of spirituality, both premodernity and modernity come together.

The integrative approach embraces the multidimensionality of spirituality. On the horizontal level, it refers to various psychological dimensions, biology, sensation, cognition, creativity, personality, self-awareness, pain, spiritual activities like fasting, and spiritual insights (e.g., Emmons and Paloutzian 2003). The vertical level covers from microscopic

dimensions of human existence (atoms and cells) to the macroscopic levels (family, community, culture, nation) (e.g., Zinnbauer and Pargament 2005). Of course, the picture of multidimensionality would not be complete without the transcendental dimension of human nature, which expresses itself in the human desire to reach the Holy and the Absolute. Premodernity, Modernity and Postmodernity put different emphases on how to describe and actualize the deepest human longing.

In addition, the integrative approach introduces the concept of the "half-life" of truth. One needs to add temporal and historical truths to the subjective, objective, and contextual truths. The integrative approach is aware that the actual comprehension of truth is only temporal and transitory, far from being all-encompassing. As such, there is always some space for a more complex understanding in the future. Applying this logic to Christian spirituality, a distinction needs to be made between the practitioner of spirituality and his present understanding of the transcendence on the one side and, on the other, the transcendence as such. Since the present understanding is always incomplete and temporal, the practitioner should remain detached from his temporal mental constructs, aware that his knowing is not complete, and hoping to know better in the future.

What is the place of authority, good, and the goal of life in the integrative approach? Strictly following the principles of the integrative perspective, even the nature of the power of authority, remains contextual and limited by historical coordinates. Similarly, the meaning of good remains flexible and conditioned by its positioning on the universal and local levels. Analogously, the goal of life is defined from the observer's point of view. At the same time, the observer needs to continuously go beyond his present relative position and remain in search of the absolute. In short, the integrative approach creates a strong awareness that the meaning of authority, good, and the goal of life are relative to the historical and cultural context in which this awareness arises. At the same time, the same awareness allows new space for a deepened reflection

on the true nature of the absolute as well as the meaning of authority, good, and the goal of life, which are waiting to be rediscovered.

The integrative approach can be illustrated with anatheism, introduced in Richard Kearney's books *Anatheism: Returning to God after God* and *Reimaging the Sacred*, as presented in Chapter 2 of this book. For a more comprehensive understanding of the integrative approach, let us emphasize the key ideas of *anatheism* again.

In the last centuries of Western intellectual and spiritual history, the phenomena related to secularization have gradually occupied areas once reserved for the ancient all-power God, dogmatic certainties and strong metaphysics. The apparent departure of God should not be taken literally but as a departure of a particular understanding of God, influenced by our perspectives, traditions, cultures, and theology. After this departure, there is a new opening and refreshed interest in the sacred with its spiritual and religious spheres. For Kearney, God cannot be described phenomenologically as a "thing", but as a call and cry that invites us different interpretations by asking us: "What do you say that I am?" (Kearney 2016b, 241) In this context, Kearney places his concept of anatheism as an attempt to reimagine God in our time. The *a* in the prefix *ana-* has a double meaning: "ab" (away from God) and "ad" (toward God). Kearny talks about the return of the lost God, which is returning as a more real, powerful, and moving presence. There is an epiphany or retrieval of past experience that moves forward, gives new life to memory and a future to the past (Kearney 2016a, 6–7). "The ana- of *anatheism* makes sure that God who has already come is always still to come." (18) In other words, Kearney's returning to God after God is a hermeneutical retrieval of sacred things from the past, reminding us about unrealized potentiality to be more fully realized in the future.

The key idea of the integrative approach is the openness to a new foundation or genuine curiosity about something absolute and universal, which postmodernity struggles to explain. This binding foundation cannot be found

through introspection and self-knowledge, as postmodernity claimed to be the case. A rational subject cannot find in himself regulative principles of the ultimate truth; the best he can find is an energetic indifference. To know oneself does not mean to determine one's own identity but to become aware of one own groundlessness. (Sloterdijk 1989, 264–265). While Premodernity and Modernity provide great mythological, religious, or metaphysical metanarratives in which an individual finds his own place, Postmodernity resists new metanarratives. The individual stays locked within his short, subjective narratives, which do not provide solidity and stability in his positioning in the cosmos, but ambivalence and relativity. Following the integrative approach, the human mind has to start looking for stability and objectivity outside himself, as modernity did in its search for something objective and universal.

It may be time to return to the premodern sensitive and spiritual curiosity, opening our eyes and hearts to see beyond capitalism, consumerism, materialism, Marxism, historicism, and other postmodern narratives. The solution is neither in ceaseless problematization, dismantling, and trivialization of these narratives because this makes us nervous with feelings of insecurity. What we need are new big narratives that are consequent in themselves, i.e., able to inspire hope and ideals, optimism, enable personal identification, establish the foundations for moral behavior, the basic feeling of justice, archetypal wisdom for right compassion, faith, and provide, at least temporarily, acceptable explanations for the unknowable (Postman 1999, 101–119). For Postman, the answer is not in inventing new narratives but in rediscovering the old ones that are calling us to ally them with new knowledge.

In summary, the integrative perspective synthesizes elements from the premodern, modern, and postmodern worldviews and emphasizes cultural points of view and change processes. As such, it creates the framework for a spirituality of synthesis and rediscovery of unheard options of becoming more human and, consequently, becoming more Christian (Vodičar 2022, 698).

3. Accept and Respect Different Spiritualities

The word spirituality first came into use in Christianity. It comes from the Latin word *spiritualitas*. According to Paul, a "spiritual person" (1 Cor 2:14-15) is one in whom the Spirit of God dwells or who lives in and through Him, who is the Spirit of the Father and of the Son. Christian spirituality is the Christian faith lived personally in all its dimensions in the power and under the guidance of the Spirit of Christ and of the Father, in union with brothers and sisters in the communion of the Church, in various communities in the midst of society, nation, culture and world, in the light of Scripture, Christian theology and tradition. This is the concrete life of the Christian in all its dimensions (physical, mental, social and spiritual) where he or she lives and works. It enables the Christian to search for and find the content, purpose and meaning of life, the fundamental values and the answers to life's deepest questions within his or her faith. Of course, within Christianity there are many different Christian spiritualities according to the affiliation to different Churches, and within these again there are many different forms.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, most authors today agree that spirituality is a way of life that enables people to search for and find the content, purpose and meaning of life and the answers to the deepest questions of life. Such a spiritual life leads to an integral relationship with oneself, others, creation and transcendence, the Absolute, which for believers is God.

In the history of humankind, such spirituality has first been realized within different religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and it is therefore legitimate to speak of different religious spiritualities. During the Enlightenment, secularism, modernity and postmodernity, when, especially in Europe and the USA, society became separated from religion and religion no longer had a central place in society, there emerged spiritualities that can be called secular spiritualities. These are

realized within the values they profess, the various schools of philosophy, cosmologies, psychologies, arts, etc. There is a third category of spiritualities that has elements of both of these (Sheldrake 2012, 8–17).

Visiting bookstores, going online or walking the streets of major cities in Europe or North America today, one quickly sees a myriad of different offerings that seek to enable people to find different spiritual experiences and spiritualities outside the known religions and their institutions, especially Christian ones. The separation of religion/religiosity and spirituality is often traced, often even in opposition to religion and its spirituality. This is also evident in many studies on spirituality in healthcare and spiritual care of patients and in palliative care, where most authors consistently distinguish between religion/religiosity and spirituality. Somehow they cannot accept that a patient who is actively involved in a religion lives his or her spirituality within it and will find satisfaction of his or her spiritual needs in it.

It will probably be a long time before both individual religions or their representatives, as well as thinkers and spiritual seekers within modernity or postmodernity, will give up their monopoly on spirituality, claiming that only their understanding of spirituality is correct, as well as their way of practicing it (Platovnjak 2022, 60). It is right to acknowledge that there are different categories of spiritualities, which can be religious, secular and esoteric, and that each person is free to choose, according to his or her own conscience, what category he or she will live. Of course, it is important that everyone also respects the freedom of others and strives together with them for the common good and the common home, and to build a compassionate, benevolent and respectful brotherhood.[23]

A look at the history of the world and at the present teaches us that such mutual respect and freedom for others is not easy to achieve, even among members of different religions. Pope Francis, building on the teachings of the

23 Regarding the possibility of building brotherhood between Christians and Muslims, see Platovnjak and Türkan (2022).

Second Vatican Council and his predecessors, in his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* (2020a), encourages all Christians and the whole of humanity that enough of war, exclusion and contempt has happened, and that the time has come for mutual respect and dialogue, because without it we will not be able to coexist and survive. God, who is the Creator of every human being, calls us all to become brothers and to work together for the common good and a common home. Francis' exhortation is fully in line with an integrative way of thinking, which makes possible integration and coexistence in spite of differences.

If we want to create dialogue, it is necessary to approach believers of other religions and listen to them respectfully, so that we can learn what is sacred to them, where they find the content and meaning of life, the values and answers to life's questions, and the hope and strength to face their various hardships and trials (Nostra Aetate, no. 1). If we listen to them and welcome them as we would like them to welcome us, it is possible that we ourselves will be welcomed by them. Someone has to start first. We must not just wait for others (Osredkar 2021). Here it is not a question of conversion and persuasion, but of learning to live with diversity, respecting each other's freedom, so that each one can choose to live according to his or her conscience what is most helpful to him or her, so that he or she can become a brother/sister to others, and can find content and meaning in his or her life on earth and beyond death, and can help in the pursuit of the common good and the common home.

When Christians discover other religious, as well as secular and esoteric spiritualities, in listening and dialogue, we can see how the Spirit of the Father and of Christ leads them on a different path and how He helps them to become more human or brotherly, sisterly towards others and towards us.[24] This does not mean, however, for us and for them that we give up our

24 An important criterion for the authenticity of any spirituality is that it helps us to become more human, or more brotherly, sisterly, that is to say, closer to every human being. This is the criterion for Christian spirituality as well as for any other spirituality. If it does not lead us to this, then it is not a "healthy" spirituality, even if it calls itself Christian.

own spiritual path within our own spirituality, but that each one remains faithful to his or her own. For us Christians, it does not mean that we give up faith in Jesus Christ as the only Redeemer for all humanity, but that we believe that each one will be saved according to his or her own conscience (Gaudium et Spes, no. 16) and the practice of love (Mt 25:31-46). How Christ will bring this about remains a mystery of God for us, and that is right. We certainly proclaim and "must ever proclaim Christ, 'the way, the truth and the life' (Jn 14:6), in whom men can find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to himself" (Nostra Aetate, no. 2), but at the same time we must respect the freedom of each person to make his or her own choice according to his or her own conscience.

If it is true that we can only know ourselves in relation to others, could this not also be true of our spirituality? If we embark on this path, we will be able to discover the reality of this principle. In any case, we must first give up trying to convince one another of our own right and universal truth, any kind of syncretism or search for a synthesis in a new spirituality. And then to decide that we want to discover the uniqueness and preciousness of our own spirituality in relation to others and vice versa, and to walk the path of acceptance and respect for every spiritual path and the effort to build up mutual fraternity in the concern for the common good and harmony.

4. Integration of the Three Dimensions of (Christian) Spirituality

Based on Walter Principe's attempt to define spirituality (2003, s.v. "*Spiritualitá cristiana*"), we can identify three dimensions in any spirituality: 1) *The personal-experiential dimension of spirituality*. Spirituality cannot exist unless one is personally involved in it and lives it personally. 2) *The communal and institutional dimension of spirituality*. Each person can

only become what he or she is in personal relation to other persons and in involvement in a particular community, tradition, mentality, culture and institution. It is only in this dimension that the fruits of spirituality can be discerned. 3) *The rational-reflective and studious dimension of spirituality*. In the broadest sense, it means any personal and communal rational reflection on and articulation of lived spirituality; in the narrower sense, it means the systematic, comparative and critical study of spiritual experiences and the teachings that have developed from them or that have made them possible.

These three dimensions cannot be separated. They are integrally intertwined and interlinked, they are interdependent and each is irreplaceable. If any one of these dimensions is lost, spirituality can quickly be reduced to one or the other, or to just two. This can impoverish or distort spirituality, even make it unhealthy or toxic, and certainly prevent it from fully realizing its mission. A look at Premodernity, Modernity and Postmodernity shows that these three dimensions of spirituality have been emphasized differently throughout history.

4.1 Personal-Experiential Dimension of Spirituality

Karl Rahner (1980, 375) famously argued that "the Christian of the future will be a mystic or he will no longer be a Christian". A mystic, of course, in the sense of having "a genuine experience of God that comes from an existential center". Personal spiritual experience is not only demanded by today's human being in the postmodern age[25] and its spirituality, but by the very nature of the Christian faith. We must realize that the Bible itself is based on the personal

25 Expanding upon the investigation into the spirituality of postmodern Camino de Santiago pilgrims, Brumec (2024) contends that in a consumer-driven society, individuals are actively prompted to seek diverse experiences. Within the context of postmodernity, marked by a culture of individualism and consumption, there is a significant emphasis on subjective experience. Consequently, the understanding of reality is predominantly molded through subjective encounters. Thus, it is unsurprising that exceptional human experiences, notably transcendent occurrences like religious encounters, play a pivotal role in shaping the epistemic framework of pilgrims.

experience of the patriarchs, the prophets, the Israelites, Jesus, His disciples and all those who encountered Him personally. The evangelist John wrote: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life." (1 Jn 1:1) The apostle Peter also emphasizes the importance of personal experience for him and the other apostles: "For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty." (2 Pt 1:16) It was because of this that they were able to believe firmly in what Jesus preached and to give even their lives for it.

The Christian faith is not based solely on accepting faith in the existence of God, trusting in Him, receiving the sacraments and praying and living according to His commandments, but also on a personal experience of the presence and love of God the Father through Christ in the Holy Spirit in a personal relationship with Him (Roszak 2022). This experience can take place in personal and communal prayer, in the celebration of the sacraments, rituals and popular devotions, in the meditation on the Word of God, but also in the midst of the everyday world and life, in events and encounters, in literature, in nature and in art. No one can be a true Christian if he or she has only a true understanding of God and of faith in Him, that is, the rational dimension of spirituality, or if he or she has only an outward belonging to Christianity, to the Church as an institution, has all the sacraments, occasionally attends services and accepts Christian tradition, that is, the communal dimension of spirituality. The two dimensions of spirituality must be integrated.

Garcìa (2004, 148) points out that spiritual experience "comes from life and returns to life" and is especially realized in caritas, i.e. active service of love to others in everyday life. He notes that the experience of God the Father through Christ in the Holy Spirit is possible, at least in an initial way, for every human being, and that a concrete introduction to spiritual experience, or

spiritual mystagogy, is of great help to him or her. A spiritual accompaniment can be of great help to the person on this journey, since he or she may himself or herself fall into various false and inauthentic experiences which are far removed from the true experience of faith in God the Father through Christ and of following Him (Barry and Connolly 2006, 21–144).

Every Christian more or less believes and knows intellectually that God the Father, through the Son in the Holy Spirit, is close to him or her: spatially (not only in churches, but also in the midst of everyday life, in the kitchen, the dining room, the bathroom, the bedroom, the workplace and the courtyard, etc.); temporally (in the past and the present and also in the future, in good times and difficult times, in large and small events and circumstances that are part of the life of every human being and of all of society and of the whole world); institutionally (in the Church's tradition and sacraments, in the Bible, in the parish and Eucharistic communion, in the hierarchy of the Church, in the Pope, the bishops, the priests and deacons). The question is whether he or she has experienced experientially that God, as the loving Father through Christ in the Holy Spirit, seeks him and wants to reveal Himself to him in a completely personal way (Jn 15:16). That He longs for him as a father and a mother long for their beloved child (Isa 49:15), or as a bride and groom long for each other (Isa 62:5; Song 1-8). And that his or her heart will not be at peace until it has rested in Him, as St. Augustine had already discovered. Each one experiences this in his or her own way. In any case, it is not enough for anyone to believe and know it intellectually, so it is necessary to integrate personal experience as well.

In the history of Christian spirituality, there have been periods when, due to various spiritual movements (e.g., Montanism, Donatism, the "Brethren of the Free Spirit", Quietistism, Jansenism, some 20th century sects, etc.), spiritual experiences have become the object of suspicion and even rejection. When these various movements defended the experience as an autonomous instance which they invoked against the external institution of the Church

and its doctrine, the Church responded with condemnations. Modernism, which considered experience as the foundation of the belief in the existence of God and in the truth of dogmas, also provoked a very harsh reaction. Catholic theology, by contrast, emphasized above all the primacy of objective norms and the rational justification of faith (Truhlar 2004, 21–23). Such a one-sided apologetic stance, which excludes any integration, is never suitable for a deeper understanding of reality and dialogue. This was surpassed by the Second Vatican Council, which once again openly underlined the inner teaching that a person receives from his or her conscience, where God speaks to the ears "of the heart". In conscience, a person is "alone with God, Whose voice echoes in his depths" (Gaudium et Spes, no. 16). There, "discerns his proper destiny beneath the eyes of God" (no. 14).

The great spiritual teachers, including St Ignatius of Loyola, were aware of the danger that spiritual experiences could close a person in on him or herself and lead him or her away from life with God and others, and so he drew up rules for discerning spirits (Spiritual Exercises, no. 313–336). Since there is always a danger of reducing the spiritual life to a personal experiential dimension to the exclusion of all others, every spiritual experience must be examined and critically analyzed. In the context of Christianity, a genuine spiritual experience of God is in accordance with the Scriptures and with the experience of Jesus Christ on Good Friday, Saturday, and Easter Sunday, and with the experience of the saints and mystics. It is alien to any exclusion of the earthly, the sensual and the limited, in order to ascend or deepen into the realm of the Divine without it. It is always the fruit of the meeting of two freedoms: the infinite freedom of God and the finite freedom of human beings. It is not inherent in human nature, but is always a gift of the Holy Spirit. The distinguishing sign is always active love and joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness and self-control (Gal 5:22-23; Jerebic and Jerebic 2011, 290–292). It is necessary to make a clear distinction between what happens spontaneously in the depths of the spirit and what is arrived at by reflection or various exercises. Only what

is clearly God's work is accepted. Truth is more important than emotions. The encounter with God has positive effects on the building of one's identity, and through it one's relationships with others improve and one's action becomes more effective. It is always necessary to check if any of the common deceptions (illusions) are present: rational, moral or emotional, the search for a higher knowledge, psychological experience, intimate spiritualism (Sovernigo 2007, 34–35). The sign of a genuine Christian spirituality is the close connection between faith and life, it is never an escape from life and responsibility, it is always an integration of all the dimensions of spirituality.

4.2 Communal and Institutional Dimension of Spirituality

Human beings have a dialogical nature, since they are created in dialogue with the love of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit, and are all oriented towards God and humankind and creation (Deut 1-2). Since human beings are the image of God, they share in what God is in Himself, that is, relationality (Lah 2003, 262–265). This means that only in relationship with others can they realize themselves fully and live their spirituality. If one closes in on oneself in one's individualism, one detaches oneself from the source of life and gradually withers away and "dies".

Christian spirituality is Trinitarian, since it is rooted in the mutual relationship of the giving love of the three persons of God. Its imprint is present in every human being and in all creation. It calls and enables each one to live it in the way of Christ in relation to others in different communities (Francis 2015, no. 238–240). Deep union with the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit is the source of a spirituality of communion, of solidarity with each and all, and of a spirituality of service, hospitality, integration and interconnection. It enables the Christian to become more and more a brother to every human being, and to go beyond being trapped within his or her own limited horizons or those of his or her community.

Christian spirituality is not about the self-actualization of the human being, but about his or her actualization. Each one is called to realize in all its fullness who he or she is in his or her essence as the image of God through creation and as a son or daughter of God in Jesus Christ through baptism. Through baptism he or she is born into a new community of brothers and sisters in Christ, which is the Church. Human actualization is called holiness, which consists in sharing God's love and making it real (Mt 5:48). The striving for holiness does not direct the Christian to him or herself and to the search for his or her own perfection, but to a constant effort to love God, others, self and creation as Jesus Christ did in the Holy Spirit or together with Him (Jn 15:1-10). The other is never an obstacle to one's spiritual growth, but above all a path to holiness. That is why Pope Francis (2013b, no. 272) stresses: "Loving others is a spiritual force drawing us to union with God." Whoever lives the mysticism of love for people by approaching people and seeking their well-being opens up new spiritual horizons, becomes more receptive to the knowledge of the action of the Holy Spirit, who leads him or her out of his or her limited horizons (no. 272). Family life is also a path "which the Lord is using to lead them to the heights of mystical union" (Francis 2016, no. 316).

Just as a person cannot exist without a relationship to another (Huzarek 2018), so too not without an institution that is immediately present in various forms when two or more people are together. Institutions play an important role in all areas of human life, including the spiritual. Of course, in the area of spirituality, their importance varies according to the category of spirituality one lives: religious, secular or esoteric. Churches, synagogues, mosques, temples and other sacred spaces allow the community to gather and be taught, supported, accompanied, protected and guided. Through worship, religious services, rituals, communal or personal prayer and teaching, individuals can strengthen their spiritual connectedness and deeper understanding of their faith and how to live it. Religious institutions

also preserve traditions and great stories and transmit them forward, providing communities and individuals with security and certainty, identity, and the preservation and transmission of core values.

Certainly, any institution—even in Christianity—can quickly fall into, as Pope Francis (2018, no. 57) warns, "an obsession with the law, an absorption with social and political advantages, a punctilious concern for the Church's liturgy, doctrine and prestige, a vanity about the ability to manage practical matters, and an excessive concern with programs of self-help and personal fulfilment". When we accept the Pelagian mentality, according to which everything depends on human effort, human will and the faithful implementation of the Church's rules and structures, we are often not even aware of it.

"Once we believe that everything depends on human effort as channelled by ecclesial rules and structures, we unconsciously complicate the Gospel and become enslaved to a blueprint that leaves few openings for the working of grace. Saint Thomas Aquinas reminded us that the precepts added to the Gospel by the Church should be imposed with moderation "lest the conduct of the faithful become burdensome', for then our religion would become a form of servitude." (no. 59)

At all times, attention must be paid not to neglect the uniqueness and dignity of the individual person, his or her freedom of conscience and decision-making, and the importance of his or her personal experience, at the cost of the community, the institution and the tradition, and vice versa. It is easy to fall from one extreme to the other, which is why it is always necessary to integrate a third dimension of spirituality, that of reflective-rational and studious, which helps us to understand this dynamic of tension that will always exist, and to make rational decisions that take into account the wisdom of integration. When both dimensions are integrated, it is a healthy tension that enables spiritual life to be lived in fullness, both for individual persons and for communities, and communions.

4.3 Rational-Reflective and Studious Dimension of Spirituality

When a human being tries to reflect on, understand and express his or her spiritual experience and to share it with others, he or she quickly becomes aware of a problem: it is difficult to find appropriate expressions for the experience. Every expression is limited. How, then, to express the unlimited, the absolute, which is in its essence God. For every spiritual experience is transcendent, transcategorial and indeterminate (Truhlar 1974, 527–530). It cannot be expressed in clear and distinct terms. "This perception is accessible only to the 'attentive openness' of the spirit, and it eludes any 'desire to imprison it in concepts'." (Truhlar 2004, 31) The absolute God remains always a mystery, unattainable, incomprehensible. We cannot approach Him with concepts, but only through a personal relationship, through experience, and by accepting His revelation in faith. The experience of God can only be adequately communicated by symbols, signs and images, because they are closer to the content of experience than concepts.

Symbols do not define, determine or clearly explain, but only illuminate, bring closer the incomprehensible, invite to a deeper understanding and open to integration, encounter, relationship and integral cognition.[26] Symbols remain open by their very nature and point beyond their boundaries to the other. They are expressions of experience and make it possible again and

26 In their study, Krajnc and Brumec (2023) presented a tangible depiction of the role of symbols in transcendent experiences by drawing insights from the personal confessions of pilgrims along the Camino de Santiago route. Their findings, derived from the pilgrims' narratives, propose that transcendent encounters transcend immediate accessibility within the everyday world. These experiences aren't directly experiential but attain such status through symbols. According to the researchers, symbols are perceived as both directly given and experienced, functioning as pointers to something beyond immediate encounter—an element associated with a transcendent and, perhaps, ineffable reality. Through analysis of pilgrims' confessions, they argued that symbols neither define, determine, nor offer clear explanations; instead, they illuminate, bring the incomprehensible closer, encourage deeper understanding, and pave the way for integration, encounter, relationship, and holistic cognition.

again. Of course, it is not only the personal experience of the individual, but the experience of the community, of the Church.

Symbolic language brings one closer to apophatic theology (the word apophatic comes from the Greek *apophásko*, "I deny"). Its aim is to preserve the mystery of God, which is beyond any affirmation, since it is only a "symbol" of a truth that remains hidden from rational knowledge (Williams 1999). It invites us to approach the mystery not merely intellectually or empirically, but with love and reverence, and to accept the gradualness of discovering the truth. We are only on the way to it, we never possess it.

Within this dimension and the first, there is a danger of Gnosticism in Christian spirituality, of which Pope Francis (2018, no. 36) warns: "Gnosticism presumes a purely subjective faith whose only interest is a certain experience or a set of ideas and bits of information which are meant to console and enlighten, but which ultimately keep one imprisoned in his or her own thoughts and feelings." It is their characteristic to absolutize their own theories of faith and of living by it and to demand that others accept them. It is necessary to distinguish between a healthy and humble use of reason with regard to the theological and moral reflection of the Gospel, and the demand "to reduce Jesus' teaching to a cold and harsh logic that seeks to dominate everything" (no. 39).

In any case, rational reflection and the study of spirituality are always necessary. After the Second Vatican Council, theology also underwent a radical turn towards the interiority of the human being, towards experience, and many theologians have tried to show the existential, life-giving and experiential significance of theological doctrine. Bernard J. F. Lonergan implemented a shift of paradigm in theology from objectivity to intersubjectivity, because, in his view, theological method also needs a spiritual component based on spiritual experience (Barry and Connolly 2006, 40). After the Council, many spiritual theologians paid more attention to the topic of spiritual experience and its central role in the spiritual life of every Christian (Berry 2007). According to Truhlar, all the clarifications of

dogmatic and moral theology concerning the human person in his or her relationship to the world, to self and to God should be condensed to the last concreteness and practicality in a spiritual theology that should be more and more an introduction to the experience of faith (Truhlar 2004, 20–21).

Of course, the study of spirituality is not limited to understanding the dynamics of spiritual life and spiritual experience, but also assumes a critical and stimulating, integrative and formative role by being actively present in the formation of one's spiritual identity and path. Its task is also to transform spirituality and to give it new emphases and orientations. "The understanding of spirituality arrived at by the spiritual theologian through the study of the spiritual life, which is the 'first act', can become the 'self-awareness of the spiritual man himself' and stimulate in him a new orientation." (Rizzi 1987, 19) A lived spirituality can never be clarified by pure direct experience, for it is always marked and mediated through pre-existing ideas and models, interpretations and beliefs. When we explain the spiritual life, there is always the hope that at least someone who is striving to walk in the Spirit will consciously integrate this into his or her understanding of spirituality and allow it to shape his or her spiritual life.

5. Conclusion

Premodernity, modernity, and postmodernity offer dynamic explanations of the universe and the place of humans in this universe, with all human weaknesses and limits (e.g. Svetelj 2023, 52). Each explanation appeals to human trust and responsibility, and strengthens human hope for a better future of harmony. At the same time, each explanation remains only a partial comprehension of the entire reality. The same can be claimed for scientific interpretations of the micro or macro cosmos, which are human narratives or attempts to reach a deeper comprehension of the universe.

What about religious narratives in general, or the Christian theological claims in particular? Even though religion is the path to universal truth, it does not mean that our religious and theological reflections already contain all answers to it. Even though based on the Bible and Divine revelation, our theological reflections remain human narratives of the universal truth or God's nature. As human, these narratives only partially grasp the true nature of God, or vice versa, God's nature, God's presence in the universe as well as God's acting in His creation always transcends our human comprehension.

As long as we embark on the path of integrative behavior and inquiry as presented in this chapter, our intellectual and spiritual history can become classrooms for new insights. Since we are immersed in the process of globalization, it is difficult to expect to follow only one all-clarifying narrative. The alternative is to accept the fact that, as humans, we are limited in our search for a non-exclusive synthesis. To accept this fact, a lot of intellectual and spiritual humility is needed.

The same Western intellectual and spiritual history teaches us that any kind of imposition of big narratives, including the Christian narrative, does not bring desired results. Unfortunately, as history teaches us, religious narratives can also become the tools of political power, and, consequently, lose their religious and spiritual purpose. An integrative approach can be taken as a blueprint of how to rediscover the true nature of Christianity.

Chesterton explains that Christianity came to the world to assure humans that they are not left with their inner groundlessness but invited to look outwards, to behold with astonishment and enthusiasm a divine company and a divine captain (Chesterton 2016, 71–72). There is a God Creator, who left the creation to humans. As a measurement of all, this God can be found neither in humans nor in the creation; this God is opposed to humans and the entire creation as a transcending instance, continuously calling to be rediscovered. Through this discovery and reinterpretation of the ideal, human appeases his or her immanent need to the participation

creativity. What matters is not how exact human interpretations are, but the need not to change their ideal. This ideal, like values, has to remain stable and unchanging; otherwise, human efforts to understand and accomplish them will become futile (102–103).

An integrative approach encourages us to rediscover and reconnect what has been proven good and right by past experience. It also invites us to look in an integral way at the challenges we face with critical distance and sensitivity of heart. In this sense, our traditions and different cultures are a classroom of new and unheard options and past experiences, from which we can learn something new. In this classroom, we can learn about the integration of our lives on a personal, social, political, environmental, and spiritual level. Awareness of the inevitable interconnectedness at all levels leaves little room for a fragmented approach or for facing a reality that sees the trees but not the forest.

On the path of transforming spirituality in the spirit of the Gospel and of the early Church Fathers, the philosophical direction of anatheism can also help us, inviting us to discover and enter more integrally into the mysteries of God's and human existence, which does not allow itself to be enveloped by rational structures. It encourages us to walk even more on the path of discipleship, for only in this way will we be able to discover in a new way the revelation of God in the Old and New Testaments and the great story of salvation, and to allow Him to form us as He did those to whom He revealed Himself at that time, and also many others in the spiritually rich history of the Church.

Conclusion

In this monograph, we have focused on the art of dialogue with a secular world that both yearns for and rejects the transcendent. The unique challenges of the present age, shaped by social, political, cultural, and religious circumstances, call for new ways of thinking. Living in a globalized world requires greater cooperation and awareness of interdependence. In addition, the impact of technological developments continues to shape our thinking while offering new opportunities for cooperation.

In our time, it is important to balance adaptation to a secular mindset with the preservation of the originality of Christianity. Exploring the human quest for the fullness of life reveals the common longing of all people, believers and non-believers alike. Each chapter in this book begins with a philosophical framework for thinking about a particular challenge and then presents a Christian perspective. In this way, we have emphasized the need for a complementary relationship between philosophical and theological-spiritual ways of thinking and the integrative perception of reality through critical dialogue. We hope we have succeeded in showing how important it is for the future of the world that we develop a deep and respectful dialogue with each other based on a more

integrated listening and a going beyond categorical thinking by synthesizing and integrating from "either-or" to "both-and". In this spirit, which is open to religious spirituality, we will be able to find integrative responses to the challenges of our time and build fraternity, care for the common good, and a common home.

As mentioned in the introduction of this book, there are many more challenges and open questions in our time than the eight chapters covered in this book. We hope that our reflections contribute something new to Christian dialogue with the world and society. Effective dialogue can only be established if it is based on integrative listening to the one who is communicating with us, whether another human being, the universe, or God.

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Summary and About Authors

Listening and Dialoguing with the World: A Philosophical and Theological-Spiritual Vision

Summary: In the monograph *Listening and Dialoguing with the World: A Philosophical and Theological-Spiritual Vision*, the authors reflect on the challenges and the opportunities facing believers and doubters of the transcendent today: the importance of silence; listening and dialogue; anatheism or rediscovering the true image of God; accepting or rejecting human physical limitations; confronting the human desire for immortality; contemplative attitudes towards the world and towards God; resilience as a challenge for the spirituality of our time; the chronological and kairological aspect of hope; the integrative approach. These themes are presented from a philosophical and theological-spiritual point of view in a critical and dialogical way, with the desire to lead to a more integrative perception of reality. The positive side of each challenge is that it forces us to integrate and transcend past patterns of thinking and acting. History

and the process of globalization are increasingly becoming a laboratory of uncharted new options for becoming more and more human and closer to every human being. The challenges listed here are thus also valuable opportunities for Christian thinkers to communicate the newness and freshness of the Gospel message in a life-giving way.

Keywords: anatheism, *chronos*, Christianity, contemplation, dialogue, discipleship, hope, immortality, integration, *kairos*, listening, relationship, resilience, resonance, spirituality, stillness, transhumanism.

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Poslušanje in dialog s svetom: filozofska in teološko-duhovna vizija

Povzetek: V znanstveni monografiji *Poslušanje in dialog s svetom: filozofska in teološko-duhovna vizija* avtorja razmišljata o izzivih in priložnostih, s katerimi se dandanes soočajo tako verujoči kot tudi dvomljivci o presežnem. Monografija predstavlja pomene tišine, poslušanja in dialoga; anateizem oziroma ponovno odkrivanje prave podobe Boga; sprejemanje ali zavračanje človekove telesne omejenosti; soočanje s človekovo željo po nesmrtnosti; kontemplativni odnos do sveta in Boga; rezilienca kot izziv za duhovnost našega časa; kronološki in kairološki vidik upanja; integrativni pristop. Te teme predstavljata s filozofsko in teološko-duhovnega zornega kota na kritičen in dialoški način z željo, da bi vodila v bolj integrativno dojemanje stvarnosti. Pozitivna plat vsakega izziva je, da nas sili v vključevanje ter tudi preseganje preteklih vzorcev razmišljanja in delovanja. Zgodovinski čas in proces globalizacije vedno bolj postajata učilnica z nepredstavljivimi novimi možnostmi, kako postajati bolj človek in bližnji vsakemu človeku. Omenjeni izzivi so tudi dragocena priložnost

za krščanske mislece, kako na življenjski način posredovati novost in svežino evangeljska sporočila.

Ključne besede: anateizem, dialog, duhovnost, integracija, *kairos*, kontemplacija, *kronos*, krščanstvo, nesmrtnost, odnos, poslušanje, odpornost, resonanca, tišina, transhumanizem, učenčestvo, upanje

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Reviews

From the Monograph review of *Listening and Dialoguing with the World: A Philosophical and Theological-Spiritual Vision* (by Prof. Dr. Piotr Roszak)

Dialogue with the secular world and attempts to convey the beauty of the Good News in these cultural settings are challenges for contemporary Christianity, especially theology as a thinking faith. It cannot be practiced in isolation, but only along the realities of life on which the Gospel sheds light. For this to happen, a specific type of dialogue is needed, one that is neither uncritical assimilation nor closure, but a critical recognition of the signs of the times. This task is undertaken by Ivan Platovnjak and Tone Svetelj in their latest book, which is, in a sense, a modern version of Maimonides famous *The Guide for the Perplexed*. This is because they do not so much "diagnose" as they propose something, a way of dealing with challenges that is both creative engagement and discrimination.

From a methodological point of view, it is a great choice that their considerations begin with establishing first an intellectual framework. Within it, the starting point for them are the same questions of believers and non-believers regarding well-being or the fullness of life. Besides, when describing contemporary situations, they do not rely on intuitions or impressions, but on scientific diagnoses made by the most important thinkers, such as Charles Taylor and his *A Secular Age*. If we look through their final bibliography, we see that they have reviewed the most representative literature. However, this is not a simple query—I think that the main feature of this book is the author's proposal of spirituality, which is not meant to be an "escape" from what is new, but an accurate judgment and a wise ordering of different human attitudes. They try to answer the question: how to find ourselves in this challenging time.

Among many important topics of the book, I would highlight *contemplation*, a somewhat vague term for many people today, mixed sometimes with Oriental theological doctrines. The authors try to show the broad meaning of Christian contemplation, which is a form of relationship to the Trinity that provides a real discovery of the meaning of the world. No doubt, the very concept of contemplation should be reintroduced into theological circulation today because the image of contemplation as a form of escape from the world, devoid of sensitivity to the weaknesses of others, is still (unfortunately) alive. The book tries to show that the contemplative approach is not an "additional option", but a way of being in the world, of standing in the presence of God.

A strength of the book is in its erudition, as expressed by referencing the classics of philosophy and theology, and by etymology that delights and inspires, e.g., when they explain *legein* and thus justify listening, carried out "according to the Logos". The postulate is to create space for listening to gain the true meaning of things. The authors believe that the world is wider than scientific methodologies can describe. Illuminated by Ivan Platovnjak and

Tone Svetelj's approach, it is clear that spirituality is not a luxury product but a necessary resource to live life to the fullest. It is not about burdening us with additional responsibilities or depriving us of something but instead about giving us another perspective of interpretation.

This book is a fresh approach to theology, seen as a rational discipline, capable of reading the meaning of the world and necessary to achieve fullness. The erudition of the authors gives the reader the impression of walking through modern times accompanied by two excellent guides. They explain the complex reality, but they do not think in place of the reader.

This book, a scientific study of important contemporary problems, is a positive bid to break the dilemma of theology in its doomed attempt to defend itself against the intrusion. There is no sense of a besieged fortress here, but rather, as in von Balthasar's work, reaching out into the world, a patient dialogue (not *duologue*), the fruit of which is not disorientation and relativism but a specific form of spirituality.

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From the Monograph review of *Listening and Dialoguing with the World: A Philosophical and Theological-Spiritual Vision* (by Prof. Dr. Ivan Šestak SJ)

This monograph is an original and authentic scientific work that approaches today's pressing issues from interdisciplinary perspectives. In its essence, it offers an answer to the question about the meaning of human life in a time of increasing scientific knowledge, the development of unimagined technologies, the internet, and globalization. The question of meaning has always troubled man in all eras, especially in times when one's life was threatened. Man is a being that cannot live without meaning, according to Viktor Frankl. "How to reach the fullness of life?" remains the challenging question. The authors of this work, as Christian thinkers, and in accordance with the entire Christian tradition, insist that they should and can offer the truth and beauty of the Gospel message as an offer of meaning or fullness of life to the people of modern time. The authors of the book are convinced that in an atmosphere of listening, respect, and dialogue with the people of our time, it is possible to respond meaningfully to the challenges of today's time: atheism, secularism, transhumanism, fear of death, the question of hope, resilience, etc.

The monograph is primarily intended for those who are convinced that philosophy, theology, and spirituality, as man's activities, can not only cooperate with each other but also enrich each other. As such, this monograph is useful to contemporary man facing many problems that point to transcendence, the only place of their final solution, which is offered as a gift. In addition, some parts of this work will undoubtedly also serve as valuable literature in higher education.

The methodology of this work is very precise and exemplary in every aspect, fully appropriate for scientific work in the field of humanities. I would

especially like to point out the well-worded summaries at the end of each chapter, which help follow the red thread of the book.

The language in this monograph is wholly appropriate, and the style contributes to the comprehensibility and readability of the text. The relative brevity of the text on complex and difficult topics will surely attract many readers. It is just a sign that the authors are experts in their field! The excellent introduction, with its synoptic overview of each chapter, makes the book easier to read. The bibliography, both the perennial one and the most recent one, has been made with great care.

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"This book is a fresh approach to theology, seen as a rational discipline, capable of reading the meaning of the world and necessary to achieve fullness. The erudition of the authors gives the reader the impression of walking through modern times accompanied by two excellent guides. They explain the complex reality, but they do not think in place of the reader."

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