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*Ivan Platovnjak and Tone Svetelj*

## **Ancient Greek and Christian Understanding of Contemplation in Terms of a Resonant Attitude Towards the World**

*Starogrško in krščansko razumevanje kontemplacije v smislu resonančne drže do sveta*

*Abstract:* In line with the German sociologist Hartmut Rosa, it is prayer in religion that enables man to establish a resonant attitude towards the world. Since Christianity knows different forms of prayer, the authors limit themselves to contemplation since it is the listening/seeing and answering that is the key to a resonant attitude. In order to better understand contemplation, the authors first present its meaning in the ancient Greek context and then in the Christian tradition, where they highlight three forms in particular: contemplative reading, Ignatian contemplation and contemplation of the presence of God. Both resonance and contemplation have in common a response/resonance with the other (the Other), which transcends the human being and enables him/her to see and live a new wholeness and to find the meaning of life.

*Keywords:* Resonance, Hartmut Rosa, Contemplation, Plato, Aristotle, Christianity, resonant attitude towards the world

*Povzetek:* Kot trdi nemški sociolog Hartmut Rosa, je v religiji prav molitev tista, ki človeku omogoča vzpostavljane resonančne drže do sveta. Krščanstvo pozna različne oblike molitve, zato se avtorja omejujeta zlasti na kontemplacijo, saj je pri njej v ospredju poslušanje/gledanje in odgovarjanje – to pa je za resonančno držo ključno. Za boljše razumevanje kontemplacije avtorja najprej predstavi njen pomen v grškem antičnem kontekstu, nato pa še v krščanski tradiciji, kjer izpostavljata predvsem tri njene oblike: kontemplativno branje, ignacijansko kontemplacijo in kontemplacijo Božje navzočnosti. Tako resonanci kot kontemplaciji je skupno odzivanje/resoniranje z drugim (Drugim), ki človeka pre-sega, a mu omogoča videti in zaživeti novo celoto ter najti smisel življenja.

*Ključne besede:* resonanca, Hartmut Rosa, kontemplacija, Platon, Aristotel, krščanstvo, resonančna drža do sveta

## 1. Introduction

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In his analysis of the development of modernity, contemporary society and man in it, the German sociologist Hartmut Rosa (2013) has shown how everything is driven by the imperative of acceleration. In this society, man wants to make all things available, i.e., to have them always under his control and at his disposal. According to Rosa (2019), man can overcome this aggressive attitude towards the world, an attitude which alienates him from the world and also from himself, by adopting a resonant attitude, which is an alternative attitude towards the world. On the one hand, it allows him to be in relation with the other who addresses him and remains uncontrollable and unavailable to him, while on the other hand, he can respond to him and open up a dynamic of interaction and “resonance” (Klun 2020, 287–289). When one allows the other (both person and thing) to speak to one through oneself and one’s own initiative, and is truly touched by it (Žalec 2021, 827; 829; 832), this will transform one’s life and enable one to be resilient (2020, 275).

Klun (2020, 290), who in dialogue with Rosa describes a resonant attitude towards the world, also shows the resonance of religion in a very illustrative way. Life is given to man, the most important things in life happen to him and as such he cannot control them, but he can respond to them, especially through religion. In religion, the transcendent reality addresses man, and religious life develops in response to this revelation of transcendence. To respond to the address is to seek attunement, ‘resonance’ with the transcendent (which is another name for the spiritual life). Religion presupposes a decentering of the self because the center becomes the transcendent, which is usually called God. Religion enables man to establish a resonant relation to the world because through it he “feels himself in relation to something or someone that is before and above him, and believes in a meaning that he himself cannot dispose of” (191). Rosa attributes to religion the positive capacity of facilitating man’s resonating attitude. Among the various religious activities, prayer enables man to establish a resonating attitude towards the world (Fritz 2020).

The search for such a resonating attitude towards the world is not something new and original in modernity. Both the Bible and Greek philosophy are based on man’s deep longing to contact and resonate with that which transcends him. This act can best be summed up in the concept of contemplation.

The word *contemplation* refers in our daily religious as well as more secular conversations to a myriad of meanings, sometimes more covering than seeing through its original etymological meaning of the word. The Ancient Greek equivalent for contemplation is the noun *theōria* (θεωρία) and the verb *theorein* (θεωρεῖν), 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. The meaning of the word depends on its intellectual and cultural context, which are continuously changing in the course of history. Despite these

changes, the intention and intuition of authors using this word remains identical: how to describe and express a connection with the world we are part of, how to find in it a higher meaning and resonate with the transcendental.

To better understand the concept of contemplation, this article first introduces the meaning of contemplation in the ancient context, and then presents three forms of contemplation in the Christian spiritual tradition. What is common to all these forms of contemplation is the human desire (Skralovnik and Matjaž 2020, 507) to create a resonant attitude towards the world. In agreement with Rosa's argument, it is a prayer that enables man to establish such an attitude. 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.

## 2. Understanding of Contemplation in the Ancient World

Why contemplate, practice *theôria*, or look for a higher meaning? Aristotle provides a concise answer by introducing human wonder as the foundation of these activities. When experiencing perplexity about things with greater matters, the human mind wonders, stays perplexed and wants to escape ignorance by practising philosophy (Aristotle 1994, 1554). Once in a situation without a path, a 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 perplexed (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/herself and his/her own interpretations of *theôria*. The Cartesian dualism in terms of the separation of mind and body, with its overemphasis on 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/she can stay at a distance from the object of his/her gaze, which should allow him/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/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 a result of pragmatic contestations and dialogue between traditional ideologies and practices in an ongoing search of a cultural capital (Nightingale 2009, 14–15). Our investigation will be limited to the pre-philoso-

sophic and philosophic period (Plato and Aristotle), introducing diverse interpretations of *theôria*.

## 2.1 Contemplation in the Pre-Platonic period

This is the period before Plato, when there was no separation and 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 man – *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 at that time, the community did not put emphasis on the division of specialities, but on the power of a given theory and counter-theory. Whether *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).<sup>1</sup>

1) A journey abroad: the *theoros* travelled outside of his territory to extra-urban religious sanctuaries or festivals, taking place geographically distant from his/her 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 the 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 because the *theoros*

<sup>1</sup> 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).

viewed other worshippers from the point of view of the divine, he viewed the divinity among the worshipers, worshipping 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 *theoros* 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 by his new ideas; this journey might have either transformative or corruptive results, and consequently either positive or negative effects on 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. The 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.

## 2.2 Contemplation in Plato's and Aristotle's writing

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 a 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 centers 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-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*.

### 2.2.1 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 to enjoy 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 sciences that enable 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 in 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 the 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 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 transform 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 action. This provides him with 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 and 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 behaviour 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 sociopolitical environment because of his philosophical activities: his disembodiment 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 unchaining 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 the 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).

### 2.2.2 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 of 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 leisured life because they are able to practice leisured 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 man (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 Christianity.

### 3. Understanding 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. In contemplation, *caritas* unites the gnostic with God, his friend. 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 man 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, man unites himself with the persons of God in an intense exchange of knowledge and love (Priatelj 2018, 448). In this way, here and now, he tastes 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 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." (John of the Cross 1987, II, 18,5)

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 the prayer of the heart, are particularly close to the mystical states. Affective prayer belongs to 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 a 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 man 'receives'. At the same time, he also stresses that all contemplation is 'acquired' (*acquisita*) because 'reception' always presupposes the participation of man and depends "in its intensity and colouring 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 confirm Rosa's claim that prayer can enable a person to have a resonant attitude towards the world.

### 3.1 Contemplative Reading

When we speak of contemplation in Christianity, we cannot ignore *lectio divina*, which is the ancient prayerful reading of the Bible and represents the summit of contemplation (Guigo II. 2021). 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" (Waaïjman 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" (Waaïjman 2020, 438).

### 3.2 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 man through His capacity for inner imagination, through his thoughts, memories and experiences. This contemplation enables man to encounter the triune God personally through the Bible and in all things, to discover the ways in which He seeks and finds him, speaks to him in the depths of his heart, and reveals to him His loving and active presence and will (Platovnjak 2018, 1040–1045). It happens when man, 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 is invited to determine and relocate the place where the story takes place (Exx 91; 112; 138; 192) and to ask for the grace he wishes to receive. In this way, he becomes a participant in the story. When he finishes reading it, it continues interiorly: in his heart, mind, spirit, imagination and sensibility. It is necessary for him to surrender himself completely to the Holy Spirit, to be guided by Him in his contemplation. Through interior looking, listening, and meditating, the Holy Spirit presents to him the mystery of the life of Jesus in a way that is relevant to him at that very moment and enables him to share in the graces he needs (Exx 2; Godawa 2015, 528–531). He must not force himself to make anything happen. In all freedom and non-attachment (Exx 23), he allows whatever will happen to happen in him and with him and around him, and accepts it all as His gratuitous gift.

Ignatian contemplation enables man 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 (Exx 234–237). Through it, a man 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 (104). He also becomes open to and able to respond to His addresses and calls (91).

The contemplation to attain the love of God (230–237), which in a certain way sums up the whole dynamic of the entire spiritual exercises and 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 the 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 my entire will, all that I have and possess. You have given all to me. To You, O Lord, I return it. All is Your, dispose of it wholly according to Your will. Give me Your love and Your grace, for this is sufficient for me.” (Exx 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 sharing of goods, for example, the lover gives and shares with the beloved what he possesses, or something of that which he has or is able to give; and vice versa, the beloved shares with the lover." (231) Through contemplation, the triune God can gradually transform man so that he is open to Him, so that He can find him everywhere and in everything, forming him as His interlocutor and collaborator, able to act in His Spirit and in His way wherever he is and in the time in which he is.

### 3.3 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 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 favourite." (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 tranquillity, 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 man to be constantly in His presence, especially in his interior, and in everything to serve Him with love where he is and in what is given to him. It does not distance him from the world but enables him to be present in it in an integral way, with all respect for the other and the capacity to be with him in God's way. It enables him to resonate in a sense of consonance with the Triune God and, in Him, with every human being and all creation.

## 4. Conclusion

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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 as 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.'" (1974, 286) This Nietzsche's statement, in alliance with other advocates of Existentialism, are calling us to rediscover the cosmos and the complexity of human existence in a meaningful way. "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 man 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 nowadays 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 Existentialist and modern thinkers. These Furies are creating a new aporia in the modern world, which despite its unprecedented power of technological advancement, 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 by being given their just and due respect (Kraner 2018).

Understanding the essence of human life in all its dimensions remains inaccessible insofar as a man puts his 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 otherness. As an alternative, the sociologist Rosa 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 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 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 incompre-

hensible 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 man through the whole of creation. Contemplation in the Christian context, however, is an expression of man's opening to the other and responding to his otherness, which reminds him of God and radiates him. In such a relationship, listening comes first, based on the desire to hear the other and, through him, the voice of God and to be endowed by him to whom he 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 is, to receive him as a gift.

In this response, it also enables the triune God to be who He truly is for him, to fulfil His redemptive and salvific mission in and through him, 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, man is free to unite himself with the Triune God in his love and to enter into the flow through which all things came into existence and all things exist. In this way, he becomes able to see how all things are in relation to one another, a gift to one another. It enables him to admire the many bonds of life for the other that exist between created beings, and also to discover the key to his own realization. He comes to know experientially that the self-giving love of the Triune God, 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 responding/resonating with something that transcends us and enables us to see and live a new wholeness and find meaning in life. This attitude also enables us to live spirituality in an integral way.

Modern man is certainly more receptive to the language of resonance than contemplation. In both cases, it is about creating a new wholeness or connection with the world and the transcendent. When modern science and philosophy reflect on resonance and its attitude towards the world, they are actually encouraging theology to translate its theological language into terms that are more comprehensible to today's world.

## Abreviation

Exx – Ignatius of Loyola 2020 [*The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*].

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