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Man Uttered by God: Personalistic Essence of Christian Contemplation According to T. Merton *Človek, ki ga je izreka Bog: personalistično jedro krščanske kontemplacije po T. Mertonu*

Abstract: In search of understanding of a human being throughout the history, from the perspective of Christian spiritual theology contemplation should be especially highlighted. The contemplative capacity (*vita contemplativa*) renders the inmost reality of a man. The analysis of Thomas Merton's work *New Seeds of Contemplation* portrays contemplation as "the highest expression of man's intellectual and spiritual life" (Merton 1961, 1) and wholly personal identity of a human. The aim of this article is to present the personal essence of contemplation. The content, arrived at by use of tools of spiritual theology, shows the interpersonal essence of contemplation, where the concept of the true self (*spiritus*) is especially emphasised. It will be explained by Merton's apprehension of a man as "God's utterance" and as a personal contemplative response to Him. Finally, some correlations between the personal contemplation and contemporary thought (Levinas, Marion, Luckmann, Rosa) will be pointed out to suggest the vital productivity of Christian experience.

Keywords: person, true self, contemplation, God, man, dialogue, phenomenology

Povzetek: Pri iskanju razumevanja človeka skozi zgodovino je treba z vidika krščanske duhovne teologije posebej izpostaviti kontemplacijo. Kontemplativna zmožnost (*vita contemplativa*) izrisuje človekovo najglobljo resničnost. Analiza dela Thomaša Mertona *Nova semena kontemplacije* kontemplacijo prikazuje kot »najvišji izraz človekovega intelektualnega in duhovnega življenja« (Merton 1961, 1) – in osebno identiteto človeka. Namen prispevka je predstaviti osebno bistvo kontemplacije. Vsebina, do katere smo prišli z uporabo orodij duhovne teologije, izpostavlja medosebno bistvo kontemplacije, kjer je še posebej poudarjen pojem pravega jaza (t. i. *spiritus*). To pojasnjujemo z Mertonovim dojemanjem človeka kot ‚Božjega izreka‘ in kot osebnega kontemplativnega odgovora nanj. Na koncu izpostavljamo nekatere korelacije med osebno kontemplacijo in sodobno mislijo (Levinas, Marion, Luckmann, Rosa), da bi nakazali življenjsko rodovitnost krščanske izkušnje.

Ključne besede: oseba, resnični jaz, kontemplacija, Bog, človek, dialog, fenomenologija

1. Introduction

There is some specific trait of Thomas Merton's way of thinking which produces effectivity in spiritual research. His tendency to reach the final point of an issue, not settling for a transient place, makes it possible to perceive the real meaning of contemplation, "the highest expression of man's intellectual and spiritual life" (Merton 1961, 1). In his excellent book, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, Merton insists on regarding contemplation as the supernatural reality produced by the Holy Spirit above all human capacities, as the loving knowledge of God leading to the loving transforming union. Among its numerous aspects the personal dimension seems to be one of greatest importance. The cardinal question is how this kind of prayer refers to a human being, to their self and spirit, to the deepest point in their nature and to their identity as a person. Such a personal approach, extending beyond properties of nature, shows the real perspective of the personal union between a human person and the Persons of the Holy Trinity. Contemplation cannot be understood without the subject's openness to the Other, namely to God (and further to people).

2. Contemplation as Interpersonal Reality

The concept of a person is necessary to grasp the essence of contemplation, therefore the personal identity of man and God must be distinctly exposed. Evoking anthropological teaching, Merton portrays a human being as consisting of three levels: *anima* – *animus* – *spiritus*. *Anima* (*psyche*) is this unconscious realm of instincts and emotions which allows man to exist as a psychophysical organism. In contrast with its passivity, *animus* (*nous*) appears as the active intelligence which governs human activity and commands *anima* (Merton 1961, 139). They both require the third, appearing above an element that is *spiritus* (*pneuma*) which unites and at the same time transcends both *anima* and *animus*. The *spiritus* is "not merely something in man's nature, it is man himself united, vivified, raised above himself and inspired by God" (Merton 1961, 140). Further, Merton uses the English "spirit" (though inconsequently) in order to embrace the wholeness of man as directed to God: "Man is 'spirit' when he is at once *anima*, *animus* and *spiritus*." (Merton 1961, 140)¹ Self-evidently, the union with God properly exists in the spirit, in which human capacities are transcended (Godawa 2015). To this reality body inseparably belongs too (Merton 1961, 27; 280). Thus, human desire for God is fulfilled through the *spiritus* in harmony with *animus*, *anima* and body so that the whole man is the subject of spiritual life (Merton 1961, 140).

From the perspective of Catholic theology Merton's *spiritus* is identical to the notion of the theological *heart* – "the dwelling place where I am" which can be fathomed by the Holy Spirit only, the place of encounter and covenant (CCC no.

¹ *Spiritus*, then, means both a dimension and wholeness of human nature. This is so because it is the most decisive element constituting the whole attitude toward God.

2563; Zatorski 2011, 7–30). The *spiritus* also means a human created ability to possess God – *capax Dei* (Słomkowski 2000, 34–35) which is rendered by the famous Augustine’s statement about the heart unquiet until it rests in God (Augustine, *Confessions* 1.1). In sum, a human as “spirit” means that the whole man is open towards the loving union with God and that this union is realised in his heart (*spiritus*).

The next step is to present the relation of the heart (*spiritus*) to self (“I”). Merton often starts his observation by analysing “false self” which is “self” disordered by reason of sin. This wrong condition of self appears in egoistic will which alienates a man from reality and God, up to idolatry (Merton 1961, 21). A sinful man remains in the state of his false self, of fundamental contradiction, since he attempts to be someone who can never exist. Since the whole real existence comes from the creative power of God, then a false self, as unknown to God, must be nothing but a mortal illusion (Merton 1961, 34). Human nature, though good as such, is prone to keep illusion that is opposed to God’s reality living in it (Merton 1961, 42–43). A false self is an external, superficial “I”, so egoistically concentrated on self that it inhibits the real encounter with God. Merton stresses that this “I” is “not the true ‘I’ that has been united to God in Christ” (Merton 1961, 7), but merely “the disguise” of the spiritual matter. The disorder of a false self consists in lack of harmony between components of human being. It is so when one intends to understand spiritual life through the prism of feelings and reactions but without regarding the heart (Merton 1961, 6). It also occurs when the whole “I” is perceived as identical to “individuality” or “empirical self” only. However, it should be noticed that individuality as such belongs to a good human nature and is a key step towards sanctity (Merton 1961, 31–32). The external self is the same as *ego* – the psychological individuality which, alas, obscures and takes over the functions of the inner self (Merton 1961, 279–280). Obviously, *ego* plays some role in spiritual life but never when exaggerated (Merton 1961, 281). In sum, a false self (the superficial “I”), standing out against God’s plan, constitutes a main obstacle to enjoy the Christian life, especially in contemplation.

Having been purified, a self is given back to the state of “true self”. Its contact with God is absolutely quintessential for the issue. Instead of an external interest, the true self loves God’s will in things rather than things themselves (Merton 1961, 25). But even more important question is its own identity since the true self is “the hidden and mysterious person in whom we subsist before the eyes of God” (Merton 1961, 7). This self is further characterised by the terms of depth, covering, unknowing etc. Merton says: “its very nature is to be hidden, unnamed, unidentified”, “inarticulate and invisible” amongst people talking about themselves (Merton 1961, 7–8). However, this true “I” is also a mystery for itself: “[it] is beyond observation and reflection and is incapable of commenting upon itself.” (Merton 1961, 7) The openness to transcendence makes the true self mysterious even for itself. This set of traits (a point of encountering, hiddenness) allows us to identify the true “I” with the heart—because it can be fathomed by the Holy Spirit only—and the person—because it is “the spiritual and hidden self, united with

God". At this point the true self turns out to be the same as the person (Merton 1961, 279).

The true self is germane to the topic because nothing else may be the subject of spiritual life along with its higher expression – contemplation (Merton 1961, 1). Merton says that the deep transcendent self “awakens only in contemplation” (Merton 1961, 7). He defines contemplation as “the experimental grasp of reality as *subjective*, not so much ‘mine’ (which would signify ‘belonging to the external self’) but ‘myself’ in existential mystery” (Merton 1961, 8–9). The author highlights that contemplation is indeed the business of personal reality, not of consciousness or objective possession. That the contemplation is different from awareness is expressed in the disapprobation of Descartes’ formula *Cogito, ergo sum*. When having been principally perceived through an act of thinking (“*Cogito, ergo...*”), the realities, both human and divine, are imprisoned in concepts, reduced to what may only be thought. Under the circumstances a man “is making it impossible for himself to experience, directly and immediately, the mystery of his own being” and “to have any intuition of the divine reality which is inexpressible” (Merton 1961, 8). However, the experience of contemplation, produced by God with no intermediary in the human self, is even “more than purely subjective” (Merton 1961, 278). As long as a man claims himself to be aware of its contemplation or to have a degree of spirituality, he does not yet reach the essence of the reality (Merton 1961, 279). In this way the contemplation appears as a reality different from and greater than cognitive process with its *objectivisation*, that is treating persons as objects.

The contemplative knowledge of God is, then, deeper than the mere level of intellectual learning. God is known as the mystery symbolised by the cloud (Merton 1961, 276–278) according to Dionysian mystical theology (Merton 2019, 129–133). His presence is recognised, but “for the rest He is hidden in a cloud” (Merton 1961, 278). This reveals the unique character of mystical contemplation which means knowing God not by seeing but love, since He is pure Love. Thus, His personal identity is grasped through spiritual experience: “we know by experience Who and what He is.” (Merton 1961, 268) As a matter of fact, Merton specifies that in contemplation some concepts about God (images, representations) are to be put aside. They are some “things”, some “what” to say about God, but “there is ‘no such thing’ as God because God is neither a ‘what’ nor a ‘thing’ but a pure ‘Who’” (Merton 1961, 13). This means that use of a “what”, proper to earlier periods of spiritual life, must be replaced by the indirect loving knowledge of God as the Three Persons. Furthermore, the contemplation goes “beyond” nature in God and terminates in a Person: “But Christian contemplation is supremely personalistic. Our love and knowledge of Christ do not terminate in His human *nature* or in His *divine* nature but in His *Person*. /.../ We do not love Christ for what He has, but for *Who He is*.” (Merton 1961, 153) The contraposition of “what” (natures) and “who” (a person) underlines that the contemplative is united not only with natural divine properties but with the sheer Persons in one God. Indeed, this

is a person who acts, knows, and loves.² Thus, the notion of contemplation reveals as Trinitarian and personalistic. In this context Christ is recognised as if He was “our superior self” for He has united “our inmost self with Himself” (Merton 1961, 158).

Here is also evident that the personalistic character of contemplation implies the involvement of its partakers as persons. On the one hand, a man must arrive at his true personal life (true self), and on the other hand, God contributes to contemplation in the Three Persons, as “Who” and not merely “what”. Thus, the contemplative knowledge of God does not consist in having some objective notion but in being in Him through love so that it may be said that a man does not have an experience anymore but becomes Experience alone (Merton 1961, 283). Shortly, these two terms “to have” and “to be” mark the difference. The suggestion that in contemplation there is “no division between subject and object” seems to express that objectivity is harmonically included in the personal depth (Merton 1961, 267). That is why Merton concludes: “He IS and this reality absorbs everything else.” (267)³ It means sharing the same substance of God (2005, 202–203). Although such a special union can be in some way experienced, it must remain inexplicable and obscure.

3. Contemplation as Being of Utterance of God

The deepest mutual personalistic involvement continues in and is highlighted by the meaningful presentation of contemplation as human participation in God’s metaphysical utterance. Then a human person becomes an element of God’s self-expression.

Stating that God is silent presence (Merton 1961, 3), Merton says too that He “speaks in everything that is” so that His message goes through metaphysical reality. A man as such takes privileged part in His communication, since “[God], most of all, speaks in the depths of our own being”. Furthermore, a man is the word of God but of special significance: being God’s utterance is concurrently accompanied by being a response given to Him. Merton states: “But we are words that are meant to respond to Him, to answer to Him, to echo Him, and even in some way to contain Him and signify Him. Contemplation is this echo.” Then, contemplation means man’s resonance with God: “it is a deep resonance in the inmost center of our spirit in which our very life loses its separate voice and re-sounds with the majesty and the mercy of the Hidden and Living One.” When a divine life is shared so deeply, then a man in some way contains God and becomes His utterance. God’s utterance as extended to another being (a man) is at the same time an/His

² Here Merton’s apprehension seems to require further reflection on the fact that each divine Person is the same divine nature (Jn 10:30; CCC no. 215; 221). Then the nature appears in its strict connectedness with the personal reality. However, one must remember that Merton is focused on the meaning of a person.

³ Merton reminds that in the personal union the ontological distinction between man and God is always held so that a man is never absorbed in the meaning of losing his human nature (Merton 1961, 282).

answer to Himself, the Source of Speech. The action of answering is attributed to God: “He answers Himself in us,” whereas a man participates in this divine voice: “We ourselves become His echo and His answer.” Spiritual life means that a man joins God’s circulating voice. Merton perceives contemplation as the perfection of this process: “It is as if in creating us God asked a question, and in awakening us to contemplation He answered the question, so that the contemplative is at the same time, question and answer.” (Merton 1961, 3) It can be said that some potency granted to a man in the creation is actualised through his contemplation. The human life is, then, dynamic and remains unfulfilled until real contemplation. But it shows that a man can only gain his fulfilment in the metaphysical reality of his true self, since this true self is the subject of contemplation. The perspective to be a partaker of God’s utterance underlines a contingent status of man and a worth of grace. To some extent, as united by grace, a man lives the subjective life of God. The man is attached not only to properties of God’s infinite nature but to His person(s), when contemplation terminates in a person, as stated above. Since acts are performed by no one but persons, this must be only a (divine) person who metaphysically speaks and answers and a (human) person who freely takes part in this speaking-answering.

The core of contemplative experience is constituted by God’s utterance in a man. The fact that a man is metaphysically spoken (both as question and answer) is focused in speaking the formula “I am”. The human’s “I am”, which reflects his perfect contemplative awareness of himself as united with God (Merton 1961, 4), is rooted in God’s announcement “I am”. The contemplation takes place when God “utters Himself in you, speaks His own name in the center of your soul” (Merton 1961, 39). In this way a man is invited to share God’s inmost reality as much as possible. The metaphysical formula “I am”, so far from Descartes’ cognitive “Cogito, ergo sum”, applies to the revelation of the name of God in *Exodus*. The tetragrammaton YHWH— “I am”—means that a man (Moses) is included into God’s self-awareness and being. The name “I am” expresses the personality of God, *Who* He is (NABRE, Ex 3:14 with the note). It is especially revealed in Jesus in whom the theology of God’s name is fulfilled (Ratzinger 1970, 89). This God’s personal life can be depicted as an ever-circle of self-naming and self-answering that starts from and terminates in Himself—by which His principal existence is exposed (86–88). However, the name is given to establish a relationship rather than reveal the essence (90–91). “I am” means “I am for you”, that is a being in relation. Thus, the holy name circulates in men who share it as a gift of salvation and also the contemplation when “He answers Himself in us” (Merton 1961, 3) and speaks in us His name (Merton 1961, 39). The same idea is present in the petition “Hallowed by Thy Name” showing that the name of God dwells in us and ought to be praised in us (CCC no. 2810; 2813). The contemporary contemplation is the full awareness of this participation, the awareness deepened by the spiritual experience and theological insight throughout ages.

By virtue of this participation in God’s self-proclamation: “I am” a man gains the specific awareness of himself. This is a two-levelled awareness of being both

the question and answer, which then again constitute one and the same reality (Merton 1961, 4). In other words, a man knows God in so far as he is known by Him and sees that he participates in God's contemplation of Himself (Merton 1961, 39). This awareness is reflected in man's utterance: "I am" which concerns himself as a person (the true self) deeply united with God. Merton concludes: "He is the 'Thou' before whom our inmost 'I' springs into awareness. He is the I Am before whom with our own most personal and inalienable voice we echo 'I am'." (Merton 1961, 13) Man's attitude is, then, depicted by the motifs of echoing, resonance, answer and speaking the name. However, this deep awareness terminates, beyond natures, in a subjectivity—first of God and second of man. This does not mean as if the knowledge of natures (divine or human) had no importance, but that the contemplative awareness transcends abstractive apprehensions of nature (Merton 1961, 13; 153). In other words, the term "what" is replaced by "who" as referred to a personal dimension.

Thus, the contemplation can never be thought as merely knowledge which is produced by intellectual work (*animus*). This is the business of experience, not theoretical cognition (Merton 1961, 4). As a matter of fact, the contemplation is quintessentially the knowledge by love. Selected definitions prove this fundamental statement. Contemplation is "a simple and loving awareness of Him Who is really present in our souls by the gift of His personal love and His Divine Mission" (Merton 1961, 155). Here we can find features germane to the contemplation, namely a) this is God's love which precedes human love b) the knowledge of God consists in loving Him c) the love refers to a person. Another definition provides even more elements: "True contemplation is the work of a love that transcends all satisfaction and all experience to rest in the night of pure and naked faith." (Merton 1961, 211) The fundamental role of love is to produce a special knowledge of God so that "we know Him by love" (Merton 1961, 268). As a consequence, a special experience appears. Its essence is to grasp God "as He is, though in darkness" (Merton 1961, 211) that is beyond human capacities. Some feeling of peace is supposed but as an accident of contemplation only so that the true contemplation exists even as a man "feels" nothing; this is the experience of "the dark night" (Merton 1961, 211; 6). From the theological perspective, the meaning of loving contemplation is rendered by the term "sonship" deriving from the New Testament (Merton 1961, 4; Rom 8:14.16; Jn 1:12). To be an adopted son of God underlies the contemplative awareness to be—as Merton prefers to say— "words spoken in His One Word" (Merton 1961, 5). In this context the dwelling of Christ (Ga 2:20) and of the Holy Spirit in a man is evoked too (NSC 5).

The uniqueness of the contemplative union elicits its deeper theological explanation. Underlying that the union means ontological distinction between man and God (Merton 1961, 282), Merton in another, that is moral, sense says about the identification of man and God. He explains the novelty of contemplation as the replacement of a human way of knowing, loving etc. by the divine way in which a man loses his separateness in favour of living God's life: "Lover and Beloved are 'one spirit.'" (Merton 1961, 282) He explains, "Morally speaking he [a man] is an-

nihilated, because the source and agent and term of all his acts is God" (Merton 1961, 286). The role of God as the principle of human acts is expressed too in the following words: "God alone is left. He is the 'I' who acts there. He is the one Who loves and knows and rejoices." (Merton 1961, 287) The same is said when Merton insists on using the singular: "love identified with Love. Not two loves /.../ but Love Loving in Freedom" (Merton 1961, 283) as well as when he tells us about God "identifying a created life with His own Life so that there is nothing left of any significance but God living in God" (Merton 1961, 284). The expressions "[one] Love Loving" and "God living in God" mean this special kind of identification when a man is morally transformed into God. Among numerous motifs (fruition, freedom, joy), used in *New Seeds of Contemplation*, one more could serve as a surprising example of this kind of unity. Namely, this is the fact that God fulfils men's will: "He does their will" (Merton 1961, 288) that seemingly opposes but paradoxically confirms the order of "Thy will be done". It is so, since God is the principle of human acts that means that His and human wills are made one: "His will is their own [men's]. He does all that they want, because He is the One Who desires all their desires." (Merton 1961, 288) This reality is theologically explained as the transforming union or deification (*theosis*) of a soul by its perfect participation in the divine nature (Garrigou-Lagrange 1989, 531). The union is transforming in the sense of moral identification:

"The soul, while keeping its created nature, receives a great increase of sanctifying grace and charity, and /.../ it is characteristic of ardent love to transform us morally into the person loved who is like another self, *alter ego* /.../. If this person is divine, holy souls wish Him to reign ever more profoundly in them, to be closer to them than they are to themselves /.../" (531–532).

Here we can find the essential elements which Merton raises too. They are, namely, the change made by God's gracious intervention, the fundamental role of charity, a moral—not metaphysical—character of the transformation. We can also learn that the union consists in a close loving contact of *persons* and in a free decision of the human person to accept the divine Person as his own principle. This shift from human to divine personal principle is reflected in calling Christ "alter ego" or "our superior self" (Merton 1961, 158). It means that all human acts begin from and terminate in God (2005, 173). This condition is illustrated by St. John of the Cross' picture of the burning wood which takes on the properties of the fire. Similarly, St. Bernard of Clairvaux states: "The [human] substance remains, but in another form, with another glory, another power", like the iron indistinguishable from the fire or the air suffused with the light of the sun (Bernard 2005, 79–80). It should be noticed too that though the transforming union arrives at its perfection in eternity, it has been ushered in the grace possessed in a temporal life (Garrigou-Lagrange 1989, 427). What Merton and Garrigou-Lagrange refer to is the temporal flowering of this life of grace, which is a prelude to life in heaven.

4. Personal Contemplation Against the Background of Contemporary Philosophy

The first benefit of Merton's work is to give a clear and accurate exposition of the issue of contemplation. His view terminates in the heart of a matter showing the greatest importance of personal contemplation. The contemplation, then, appears as the perfection of human personal life allowing us to adequately perceive human subjectivity.

This theological insight has something in common with part of contemporary philosophy. Although their methodological criteria and differences must be taken into account, it is striking how some approaches go together. The exceptional area is phenomenology that stresses the crucial role of otherness for the subject's acts of learning. Levinas' central idea is that the Other is prior to the Self (the subject) and therefore the Other must be recognised and referred to with no reduction (Dirscherl 2019, 326–327). The experience of the Other lies in the presence (approaching, breathing) rather than discussion (330; 332). The irreducible Other, expressed by his own face, determines the Self's transcendent way out from it-Self towards the sense as well as moral responsibility (326–327). In the end, this face of the Other is a go-between the subject's Self and God. Levinas' respect for otherness is to some extent concurrent with Merton's emphasis on the necessity of God for the fulfilment of the human true self as a spirit (a person). In general, the sense of human being cannot be grasped beyond relational openness to the Other. Obviously, Levinas sees here the other man as leading to God while Merton speaks directly of God, though he also insists throughout *New Seeds of Contemplation* that true contemplation is inseparably connected with social relationships and has to be shared with others (Merton 1961, 65). In both cases the openness to the Other, which dominates over the Self, is key to the authentic development of the man. Levinas and Merton are similarly aware of the danger of separated and wrongly estimated self (the false self).

Further, Merton's exposition somehow complies with Marion's idea of a prevalence of mysticism over metaphysics, as reported by Rossner (2019) and Klun (2019). According to this standpoint, saturated phenomena manifest themselves as true (Rossner 2019, 363) and this givenness is prior to a subject's horizon of perception and objectiveness. This, in religious field, is understood as the self-givenness of God in Jesus Christ. As a result, a phenomenological idea of the primacy of the given "may meet mystical theology" (363–364). What was sketched here led to the final point in Merton's work. The apprehension of a man as uttered by God seems to reflect the importance of givenness. God's givenness expresses itself in speaking His name ("I am") in the true self of a man so that it makes a man, through contemplation, a response to God's voice. But it must be clearly underlined that this givenness is love and that the experience of God's givenness consists in *re-loving* Him with His love. The result of the givenness (and the otherness) of God is, then, the mystical union of love in which a man is, in moral sense, totally transformed into the Giver. The phenomenological sensitivity to the prio-

urity of otherness-giveness corresponds with the spiritually understood dominancy of self-giving God. Also, the conviction that a giver must not be reduced by a man's natural ways of perception connects both approaches. It is worth noting that the postulated by St. John Paul II reversion to philosophy of being means the openness, without distortion, to what really exists (Godawa 2010, 30–35). In this perspective, metaphysics is perceived as the full-opened attitude, contrary to phenomenological idea of ontology as *objectivisation* of subjectivity.

Following Marion's thought, Klun points out the meaning of the subject's personal decision—acknowledgement of the priority of the other. To acknowledge the inexhaustible value of the other prevents from the domination of the subject's knowledge over the other and, at the same time, it makes the pure experience of the other possible and fruitful (Klun 2019, 371–372). Klun remarks that “there is the priority of ‘reality’ – understood as everything that gives itself – over the subject” and that “the transcendence of givenness is prior to the immanence of the subject” (376). This dimension corresponds with Merton's insistence on the proper behaviour of a man, who, in contemplation, personally accepts his *answering* position to God as a principle. He knows too that no idea is adequate to God (Merton 1961, 15), otherwise, the man cherishes his false self as the centre of existence. It is important to capture that the true contemplation deletes the insane tension between the subject (a contemplative) and the other (God Himself). Along with some phenomenological and theological ways of learning God's hiddenness (Alvis 2019), the contemplation upholds the experience of God covered and being mystically discovered in the heart. The contemplation is the place of encountering—the place privileged but not separated from the whole reality (Merton 1961, 21–28) which evokes the role of inconspicuous in relation to God (Alvis 2019, 405–407).

The meaning of contemplation interestingly appears in relation to secularization and the position of religion in contemporary times. The broad and multi-sided return to a symbol as a form of share in God (Bahovec 2020) seems to be fulfilled by contemplation where a man's share is even more unmediated. Also, the privatisation of religion, which, according to Luckmann, reflects the need of a contemporary man, can properly be realised through contemplation. In this context, the contemplation perfects the personal, yet not individualistic or solipsistic, openness to God and people (894), as Merton *passim* stresses too. The same function can be recognised in the field of Taylor's reflection on secularization. In the new frame of secular world, where both religious and non-religious interpretations of human life occur (Žalec 2019, 413), the authenticity takes a privileged place. The authentic religion “demands much more of personal praxis, personal reflection, personal experience” (419). These deep personal expectations can be satiated by contemplative experience of God. The whole subjectivity of man (spirit, true self) is, then, a partaker of living spiritual experience. However, this personal attitude is actualised, in accordance with the Revelation, through the Church—Mystical Body of Christ (NSC 70–79). Her indispensable role differs from postmodern view of pure privacy, but all the more presents a challenge. It is evident that the Church should find some (maybe new) ways in order to accurately respond to this human need

for personal resonance in religion (Žalec 2019, 419). It seems to be clear too that she should offer herself more as the mystical Body than institution, the Body whose loving warmth sets a climate congenial to spiritual needs and whose juridical dimension protects and perfectly serves the loving union with God.

As Platovnjak and Svetelj have noticed, Christian contemplation meets expectations included in Rosa's idea of resonance (Platovnjak and Svetelj 2022; Klun 2022). Against the background of its different forms, Merton's apprehension stands out for showing the essence and top of the contemplative experience. Here the contemplation appears as a radical experience of the Other. The contemplative resonance is a reciprocal, not unidirectional, attitude (Platovnjak and Svetelj 2022, 632) which meets the criterion of "non-engineerability" (since a person's freedom cannot be controlled) as well as "affection" (being touched by somebody) and "emotion" (motion towards the Other) (Rosa 2019). This state gains its final explanation in the moral mystical union presented in *New Seeds of Contemplation*.

Concluding, it can be argued that Christian contemplation is indeed a personal reality. It requires the involvement of the deepest human dimension (the heart, true self, *spiritus*). In this way a man participates in God's self-giving which beyond His nature terminates in His person(s). A man is portrayed as God's ontological utterance. That God "answers Himself in us" means that the man is and is aware of being both His question and answer. In contemplation he lives this spiritual reality. This kind of speaking highlights the very special union which is produced by love and leads to moral identification of human and divine persons. Then, this is God who is the principle of human acts and his "alter ego". Through contemplation a man gains his fulfilment in the dimensions of ontology and self-awareness. He discovers himself as a being constituted by relation to God; the relation which expresses his own depth. At this point the Christian contemplation meets some philosophical reflections. Openness to the other has something in common with phenomenological idea of the dependence of the subject and the other in order to achieve true perception of reality as well as the idea of resonance. What should be especially emphasised is the religious meaning of such an approach. In this field a man can find some vital inspirations for his coherent development in the face of contemporary challenges.

Abbreviations

CCC – Catechism of the Catholic Church 1992.

NABRE – Bible Gateway 2023 [New American Bible (Revised Edition)].

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