

Ivan PLATOVNJAK, Tone SVETELJ, *Listening and Dialoguing with the world*. A Philosophical and Theological-Spiritual Vision, Ljubljana, 2024, 207 pp.*

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The monograph *Listening and Dialoguing with the world* introduces new ideas into the world of philosophical and theological-spiritual literature. But how to recognize the one whose words are true? To the potential reader, discerning and suspicious, this book appeals on many levels. The first is visual. On the blue cover, he is greeted by a picture, masterfully done, in the style of childlike simplicity and pastel colors. It shows a man staring into the distance where heaven and earth meet. *Homo viator* who calls for a journey to the point that reason and faith can reach. The second level is the author's reputation, a promise based on their life, expertise, experience and honesty. The third level consists of the title, rich content and extensive reference bibliography.

The reader's journey takes him through eight stations – eight chapters, with lots of questions and answers for believers, non-believers and doubters. Each contains a critical dialogue of philosophical and theological-spiritual attitudes regarding numerous phenomena: silence and listening, atheism, transhumanism, resilience, the search for hope, the contemplative attitude towards the world, technology in search for immortality and integrative approach. All this with the aim of finding points of support for the change from »either-or« to »both-and«. Anyone who feels that his/her knowledge is incomplete, and life is not fully satisfying, is offered an integrated and holistic perception of the reality – a new way of thinking and living by reviving the originality of Christianity.

The authors draw from a rich philosophical and Christian treasury of knowledge and experience, which are the result of the ups and downs of the human mind and spirit, and face the deepest questions of human existence. Their task was simply set: to offer people the message of the Bible with a new integral perception. But simple does not mean easy. In a world that brings unrest to the heart and mind, how to convey the feeling of beauty and meaning of existence, without hindering people's freedom of choice? Growing political, technological and other risks are taking man away from his essence, endangering his communities and his connection with nature. Man is exposed to

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questions: is full life possible without God and are the answers found within human or above human life and nature? How to preserve individuality, beliefs, support and meaning of life in the vortex of information and how to avoid divisions and exclusions? The prerequisite for integration is listening and hearing, in which there is no place for force, persuasion and imposition of opinions, but for respect, humanity and compassion. Such a methodological approach requires the removal of any structural and methodological obstacles that lead to opposition of knowledge.

The need for an integrative approach is visible in the content of each chapter, because they are full of strongly opposed attitudes, boundaries set for centuries, divisions and exclusions. All those forms of non-acceptance, non-support and disrespect of others, despite the emphasized general interdependence of subjects around the world (internet, globalization...), are ubiquitous even today. Starting from that atmosphere of opposition, the authors convey fundamental messages to the reader, based on the *Fratelli Tutti* document, about the necessity to change that. The path of change implies that everyone recognizes, preserves and respects both their own and other people's identity, that people support and accept each other as brothers and sisters and that they build common good and common home with joint efforts. It would be a mistake to understand that this path of rapprochement and support implies erasing differences, unification and uniformity, because in that way everyone would be a loser. They would thereby sacrifice their precious authenticity in the spiritual, family, sexual, national, cultural, social and even human sense. It is necessary to understand the need and freedom of every person to seek answers regarding the fulfillment and meaning of life according to his choice, in philosophy, science, religion or spirituality, and that this choice does not represent an obstacle for coexistence, in acceptance, respect and cooperation. In this way, man, despite the necessity to adapt to the trends and challenges of modern times, preserves the deep, existential and unchanging.

Approaching diversity is a difficult and long process that implies persistence and concrete action. One of the first steps on that path is establishing relationships and active listening. The experience of Christianity is valuable in this, because Christian thought is based on this: on establishing relationships and developing the ability to take seriously, respect and discover other people's attitudes and values. Constructive dialogue begins with the awareness that there is not only one possible way of knowing reality, and that it is not an obstacle to approaching and better understanding other people and the reality that is the co-existence of the oppositions. The freedom to choose between religions, or spirituality without religion, is precisely the basis of an honest dialogue in which everyone has the opportunity to get to know the other, while remaining himself. However, we must understand this freedom only as the right to choose a healthy religion and spirituality. It means the one that manifests itself as a force that builds a solid character and encourages people to respect their own, as well as the faith and spirituality of others. As something precious that makes a person's life

fulfilled, something that manifests itself as love and doing justice. Such spirituality can bring people back to faith with optimism, hope and a new identity.

When we talk about Christianity, it sees its way of finding the true nature of religious truth, in constant learning, modesty and awareness that the transcendental is too rich and deep to be fully understood and that no one has all the answers. The spiritual truth is seen as an endless questioning in which love, justice and mercy must never be rejected. Nevertheless, there remains a serious question of how to preserve all these values and manage in the time of the growing power and influence of artificial intelligence and genetic engineering, whose goal is not only the fundamental change of the material world but also of the entire human being. The authors warn that technological development makes sense only if it does not threaten man's essence and integrity (body, soul and spirit), the connection with himself, nature, other people and the absolute. Without those connections, man would be lost and in a great danger, so he needs a way to preserve them. One of them is contemplation, an old technique known to the philosophers of ancient Greece (*theoria*), just like the Christian Tradition (acquired, affective, mystical, Ignatian, etc.). A technique that overcomes the mind and senses and, by turning away from oneself and the world, one gets to know the fullness and importance of silence (internal and external). Such silence is also a condition for listening carefully to other people, including those who seek spirituality in another religion or only within themselves. Also in silence we find a unique, wonderful and precious space for building love, forgiveness, repentance, respect, compassion, feeling of gratitude, adoration, trust and wholeness. In this way, we establish and strengthen contact with ourselves, other people and the absolute, which is of inestimable importance in times of facing difficulties, injustice and disappointments.

Empowered by what he finds in that kind of silence, one can continue on the challenging path of rapprochement, support and understanding between people. With the awareness that he must not exclude anyone, he has to, like Jesus, persistently seek, listen and react in silence and love. But how to persevere in that uncertain struggle if there is no hope?

That is why the book reveals the importance of hope on the spiritual path, because hope, as a strong emotion, contains the encouraging expectation that something good will happen. Biblical hope is related to the promises of God and the authors lead the reader into the depths of Biblical hope. An important message reaches the careful reader, based on the analysis of the relationship between hope and time: person is not bound by the events of the past, but by the attitude towards them. Events are immutable, but the attitude towards them is changeable. In that change there is liberation and hope for a new life, a new self that expects to benefit from the events that come from the future. That hope frees and changes the individual, which is a condition for accepting oneself and others.

Drawn into the timeless depths of reflection, the reader realizes with surprise that he has already reached his destination-the last chapter called *Integrative Approach from »Either-Or« to »Both-And«*. After all those intellectual

and spiritual challenges, he went through, it's time to face the meaning of his venture. At that last stop, everything becomes crystal clear, until then the scattered »beads« are now gathered in a »necklace«, in the form of unifying, clear and concrete messages. It creates a blueprint of how to rediscover the true nature of Christianity. It concretizes the way to integrate human life on a personal, social, political, ecological and spiritual level. It offers to the world made up of fragmentation, specialization, separation, and secularization, a transition way made of integration, reconciliation and synthesis. It offers a path to overcome the divisions and exclusions that characterize today's times. That path does not lead to imposing one's view of reality as definitive truth, because no one has a monopoly on the truth. Nor does it lead to unification, which would erase healthy divisions. It rests on the preservation of one's own identity and the acceptance and respect of others and their freedom of choice, and on a common journey towards common good, common house and the final truth that we will know in eternity. Such an approach is a condition for a healthy spiritual and ethical balance between affirming, doubting and submitting.

As a method, suitable to achieve that, the authors offer careful listening and consideration of different approaches, recognizing the complementarity of philosophy and theological-spiritual way of thinking. Without diminishing man's need for respect, equality, freedom and justice, it is emphasized that the basis of spirituality is the human experience of the sacred. The spirituality is multi-dimensional and the transcendental dimension of human nature is part of it. Introspection is insufficient and a full life requires a journey outside oneself in search of inspiration, hope and optimism. There is no superior method on the way to the truth, the true nature of the absolute, the meaning and completeness of life. The choice is free.

The new Christianity approach is aimed at finding a truer image of the real and present God with a balance of three dimensions: personal, communal and rational. This means acceptance of faith (rational), personal experience of God's presence (contemplation and experiential discovery of symbols, signs and images), as well as participation in the community (gathering, experiences, support, protection...). The idea is to combine faith and life, while preserving the uniqueness, freedom, conscience and dignity of each individual. This includes listening to others, finding out what is sacred to them and where they find meaning and hope. It is a dialogue in which no one renounces his own, but with an understanding of the tension of differences, creates space for accepting the other – coexistence in spite of differences and enables rising above categorical thinking by synthesizing from »either-or« to »both-and«.

This book, well organized, readable and comprehensible, full of meaningful discussions, and whose subject and content correspond to social circumstances and the »spirit of the times« in which we live, represents a quiet, unobtrusive and sincere interlocutor for anyone who aspires to better understand the world around them and be a better person.