KS. KAROL JASIŃSKI
UNIWERSYTET WARMIŃSKO-MAZURSKI W OLSZTYNIE
KAROL.JASINSKI@UWM.EDU.PL
ORCID: 0000-0002-7695-499X

ENCOUNTER AS A PARADIGM OF FAITH

Abstract. The author of the paper attempts to reflect critically on the encounter paradigm of faith. In his opinion, faith cannot be understood as an encounter, because man never meets a personal God directly, instead only having some experience of Him through another being. The two main reasons for this view stem from a reflection on the nature of encounter and of religious experience. The article consists of two main parts. The first part presents the concept of faith as an encounter against the background of the main ways of understanding faith (propositional and non-propositional). In the second part, the author offers a critique of the encounter paradigm of faith based on a reflection on the nature of encounter and of religious experience. Particular attention is paid to the essential features of encounter and religious experience.

Keywords: faith, truth, trust, encounter, religious experience.

Streszczenie. Spotkanie jako paradygmat wiary. Autor artykułu podejmuje próbę krytycznej refleksji nad paradygmatem wiary, którym jest spotkanie. Wiary nie można w jego mniemaniu rozumieć jako spotkania, ponieważ człowiek nigdy nie spotyka bezpośrednio Boga osobowego, a jedynie doświadcza Go poprzez inne byty. Przyjęcie takiego stanowiska jest wynikiem refleksji nad naturą spotkania i doświadczenia religijnego. Artykuł składa się z dwóch głównych części. Pierwsza część przedstawia koncepcję wiary jako spotkania na tle głównych sposobów rozumienia wiary (propozycjonalnego i niepropozycjonalnego). W drugiej części autor krytykuje paradygmat spotkania, dokonując refleksji nad naturą spotkania i doświadczenia religijnego. Zwraca szczególną uwagę na istotne cechy spotkania oraz doświadczenia religijnego.

Słowa kluczowe: wiara, prawda, zaufanie, spotkanie, doświadczenie religijne.

INTRODUCTION

Religion is usually understood as a system of beliefs and practices resulting from relations between the sphere of *sacrum*, variously understood, and an individual. They manifest themselves in a specific doctrine, rituals, community and spirituality. Faith is also an essential element of religion. According to philosophical and theological thought, there are several concepts of faith (intellectualistic, voluntaristic, emotive, interpretative). The 20th century brought some change in a narrative on the faith, which is considered primarily as an encounter.

The purpose of the following analyses, performed mainly from the philosophical perspective, is an attempt of a critical reflection on the paradigm of faith, which is the encounter. Faith, however, cannot be understood in the opinion of their author as an encounter, because the man never meets a personal God directly, but has only some experience of Transcendence through another being. In this context, the subject of my interest will be, above all, act of faith, understood as a relationship between man and the religious object. However, I will not deal widely, although I am aware of it, with the epistemological problem concerning the possibility of man's direct knowledge of God in the temporal existence.

The article consists of two main parts. The first part presents the concept of faith as an encounter against the background of main ways of faith understanding, which dominated until the 20th century. In the second part, the author will take a critical attitude towards the encounter paradigm of faith based on reflection on the nature of encounter and religious experience. The point of reference for these considerations will be the publications of selected authors who take up the issue of faith and belong to the important currents of philosophical thought (Thomism, analytic philosophy, existentialism).

1.   MAIN CONCEPTS OF FAITH

There is undoubtedly a connection between understanding the faith and a specific concepts of religion and revelation. They can be objective and subjective, propositional and non-propositional.

Religion can be considered in an objective and subjective sense. It is understood in an objective sense as a set of truths, norms and rituals, which shape the man's reference to God. Religion in a subjective meaning consists of individual and personal experiencing of this reference, which takes a form of relation.[1] Religion, in a subjective sense, is also called religiosity. However, this term is increasingly often used to describe quasi-religious phenomena or surrogates of religion.

Revelation is regarded as a source of every religion. Two types of revelation are usually mentioned: natural (nature) and supernatural (history). Therefore, God manifests His presence through created beings and events.

The British philosopher of religion and theologian John Hick identifies propositional and non-propositional revelation. The former takes the form of a set of truths expressed in propositions that should be accepted on the strength of the divine authority. The latter takes the form of a sort of human experience, which is interpreted as a relationship with a personal God.[2] More precise characteristics of non-propositional revelation are provided, *inter alia*, by the Jewish thinker Martin Buber. In his opinion, revelation is mainly existential, which is why it can give direction to the whole human life. The man does not receive the contents but an experience of the presence of the supernatural sphere. This has three aspects. Firstly, the man experiences being in the relation. Secondly, he receives a sense of life. Thirdly, he receives the obligation to fulfil the sense in the world by the uniqueness of his existence.[3] By accenting the existen-

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[1] Jerzy Szymołon, "Psychologia religii," w *Filozofia religii,* ed. Stanisław Janeczek (Lublin: KUL, 2012), 60.

[2] John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion* (Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 61, 70.

[3] Martin Buber, "Ich und Du," w *Werke. Erster Band. Schriften zur Philosophie,* ed. Martin Buber (München und Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1962), 152–153, 157; idem, *On Judaism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), 216.

tial dimension of revelation, Buber rejects its noethic nature.[4] It should also be stressed that the revealed sense is not predefined specifically, but it happens. It is guaranteed by the Stranger. It is given to him who enters the dialogue with the Stranger. This dialogue constitutes the man and allows him to fulfil his unique task.[5]

The philosopher of religion, Piotr Moskal, stresses that the nature of faith is associated with the nature of revelation. If the revelation is propositional in character, then the faith is a belief. However, if the revelation does not have such a character, then faith is an act of trust.[6]

The propositional character of revelation was recognised by Thomas Aquinas and thus the propositional character of faith. It consisted in accepting a given belief as true. It was the work of the intellect, which was moved by the will.[7]

Buber points out that the propositional faith is associated with the fact that – not being able to justify it properly – one regards a certain set of facts as true. It has a form of beliefs in which the man regards a set of facts as true without being able to justify it properly. The relation of recognition involves an act of the man accepting all that is regarded as true. The non-propositional faith involves trusting someone, which also cannot be properly justified. There is also no proper proof in this case. Both forms of faith are marked by the absence of sufficient proof, which is not a result of the weakness of human thinking, but the specificity of the relation to whom I trust or what I regard as true. The reason-related arguments are not decisive in either of the cases, although they are an element of an act of faith, along with the man's other powers. A trust-based contact also leads to the acceptance of the contents coming from someone I trust.[8] However,

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[4] Buber, "Ich und Du," 152–153, 157; idem, *Nachlese* (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1966), 125–126; idem, "Zwei Glaubensweisen," w *Werke. Erster Band. Schriften zur Philosophie,* ed. Martin Buber (München und Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1962), 656.

[5] Sławomir Szczyrba, "W kierunku doświadczenia relacji z Bogiem. Podmiotowa interpretacja doświadczenia religijnego (spotkania) w propozycji Martina Bubera," *Łódzkie Studia Teologiczne* 17 (2008): 343–363, 359–360.

[6] Piotr Moskal, *Religia i prawda* (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 2008), 156–157.

[7] Tomasz z Akwinu, *Suma teologiczna. Wiara i nadzieja.* vol. 15, trans. Pius Bełch (Londyn: Veritas, 1966), 5–10, 20–22.

[8] Buber, "Zwei Glaubensweisen," 653, 654.

in Buber's opinion, the decisive role in human life is played not by faith, understood as regarding a statement as true, but by faith as a act of trust.

Joseph Ratzinger expressed similar opinions. He stressed that faith is not primarily a set of numerous statements on the supernatural world but entrusting oneself to God. Faith cannot be compared to knowledge as it is a form of trust. What is more, propositions often hinder one's faith. Meanwhile, it is supposed to touch and move the man.[9] Therefore, faith manifests itself not only in the act of believing in something but rather in the act of trust. Faith is a rational act and a mystical one, assuming a wish for uniting with the Being whom one trusts.[10] What moves the man is another person to whom he entrusts his fate. He also finds support in that person.

It seems that at least from the time of the Council of Trident (1545––1563) to the mid-20th century, ecclesial thinking was dominated by the objective concept of religion and a propositional concept of revelation and faith.

Faith understood as an act of the intellect, which regards something as God's truth not through the power of objective obviousness but by an act of will moved by grace, was thought to result from propositional revelation.[11] Therefore, faith was propositional in character, manifesting itself as a set of beliefs.[12] It is a cognitive act and the work of the intellect. Man regarded a specific belief as true under the influence of his will, directed by various motives, which included satisfying the need for sense, explaining human experience or a response to internal expectations. However,

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[9] Joseph Ratzinger/Benedykt XVI, *Wiara i przyszłość,* trans. Jarosław Merecki (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Salwator, 2007), 16–17, 20–22. Ratzinger thus argued with the propositional concept of revelation, the author of which was Francis Suarez. According to the German intellectual, the propositional concept of revelation and faith was a distortion of Aquinas's thoughts. They cannot be reduced to a set of statements, but rather emphasize the action of God, interpersonal relationship, participation in divine life, dialogue and transforming the human person, cf. Tracey Rowland, *Wiara Ratzingera. Teologia Benedykta XVI,* trans. Aleksander Gomola (Kraków: WAM, 2010), 87–93.

[10] Jarosław Sobkowiak, "Duchowość bez Boga a życie *jakby Bóg był*," *Teologia i Moralność* 1 (2013): 103–115, 105.

[11] Sławomir Szczyrba, "Wiara religijna a sąd egzystencjalny," *Studia Philosophiae Christianae* 2 (2011): 123–134, 124.

[12] Jan Woleński, *Granice niewiary* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2004), 78, 81–83.

trusting God as an epistemic authority was the most important motive.[13] Faith was tantamount to recognising a statement as true when its justification goes beyond the current standards of resolving (especially scientific) disputes.[14] The motive of such recognition was God as an epistemic authority. Those entitled to it usually include individuals who know the subject better than others and are competent in it. However, one should note that epistemic authority has only a specific range. Undoubtedly, God is such an authority in the area of man's faith. Owing to Him, man can have access to the redemptive truth.

The 20th century brought a change in understanding faith. It is often understood not as a act of cognition or trust but rather as a act of man's encounter with the personal Absolute.

Józef Życiński, the Polish philosopher and theologian, stresses that the religious faith embraces not only a set of rational arguments, but the whole human personality. Therefore, the narrative on God makes us experience the need to direct ourselves towards the personal encounter.[15]

Similar is the opinion of Tomáš Halík, the Czech intellectualist – faith is the encounter of man with God. The essence of the encounter is that God and man become the question.[16]

The Polish theologian, Dariusz Kowalczyk, believes that the essence of faith lies not in a set of propositions or subjective acts of the person but in man's encounter with God. The truth of faith is the truth of encounter.[17] In his opinion, the encounter is the entering a relation of mutual cognition and love, which is deeper than seeing, hearing and feeling the

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[13] Moskal, *Religia i prawda,* 165–166. However, one must agree with the philosopher of religion, Piotr Sikora, who believes that faith is not a simple recognition of the truthfulness of a specific content, but also a personal commitment and a way of life, cf. Piotr Sikora, *Drogi Jednego. Chrześcijaństwo otwarte* (Kraków: WAM, 2016), 31.

[14] Piotr Gutowski, "O epistemicznym wymiarze religii," *Nauka* 4 (2017): 19–33, 21.

[15] Józef Życiński, *Wiara wątpiących* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2003), 21–25.

[16] Tomáš Halík, *Co nie jest chwiejne, jest nietrwałe. Labiryntem świata z wiarą i wątpliwościami,* trans. Juliusz Zychowicz (Kraków: WAM, 2004), 23; Tomáš Halík and Tomasz Dostatni, *Różnorodność pojednana. Rozmowy,* trans. Andrzej Babuchowski (Kraków: ZNAK, 2013), 24–25.

[17] Dariusz Kowalczyk, "Polemiki z profesorem Woleńskim ciąg dalszy," w *Co nas łączy? Dialog z niewierzącymi,* ed. Maria Wolańczyk (Kraków: WAM, 2002), 62.

presence. The encounter with God differs, however, from the encounter with man.[18]

The category of "encounter" is present not only in considerations of various thinkers on the faith, but it increasingly often infiltrates official papal statements. This happens especially now, at the time of the crisis in the Church and draws attention to the significant dimension of human and Christian life.[19] Pope Francis points out that the personal encounter with the living God is the beginning and essence of the faith. It extends the horizon of life and discovers the truth.[20] His predecessor, Benedict XVI, stressed that there is no ethical decision or any great idea at the beginning of being a Christian, but there is an encounter with the Person, who gives one's life a new perspective and, in consequence, a new direction.[21] During his pilgrimages around the world, he taught that Christianity is not an intellectual system, a set of dogmas or morality, but an encounter and a love story.[22]

It seems that the category of the "encounter" is important in Christianity as it is a type of "personalistic theism", in which the reference to God as a person plays a significant role.

However, some Christian thinkers refuse the feature of personality to God. For example, to the German Protestant theologian Paul Tillich, a personal God is only a symbol. It is needed to express an existential relation of the man with God. Strictly speaking, God is not a person, but He is primarily the base for the personal being.[23] In this situation, the man experiences not a person, but the mystery of being, which appears to be – in its nature – unknowable. He experiences the incomprehensibility and

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[18] Idem, "Pomiędzy niebem a hakiem w łazience. Z prof. Janem Woleńskim sporu ciąg dalszy…," w *Co nas łączy? Dialog z niewierzącymi,* ed. Maria Wolańczyk (Kraków: WAM, 2002), 240–241.

[19] Sławomir Szczyrba, "Wiara ze spotkania? Ku ożywieniu starego paradygmatu. Zamyślenia w związku z *Encykliką dwóch papieży*," w *Chrześcijańska kultura, myśl i edukacja,* eds. Barbara Bogołębska and Monika Worsowicz (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2016), 17–19, 29–30.

[20] Franciszek, *Lumen Fidei* (Kraków: WAM, 2013), 8, 18–19, 42, 54, 64, 72, 74.

[21] Benedykt XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Księży Sercanów DEHON, 2006), 3.

[22] Rowland, *Wiara Ratzingera*, 115.

[23] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology.* Vol. 1 (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1951), 244–245.

incredibility of existence. As a result, he loses a sense of safety, which leads him to seek a permanent foundation for his existence.

The encounter takes place therefore in the face of the mystery of the Absolute, owing to which he regains the metaphysical dimension. It refers to something that calls for an active response. There is something mysterious revealed in the encounter, which one can only sense. The man encounters a mystery, which can be God himself.[24] Man recognises and accepts a mystery present in an event. As the existence of a mystery is confirmed, it becomes possible to penetrate its contents.[25] However, this mystery has a personal nature in the Judeo-Christian tradition and a relationship with it seems to take a form of an encounter between two persons: human and divine, who establish contact with each other and start a living dialogue.

It is worth noting, however, that the mentioned thinkers do not specify exactly what this encounter would consist of. Their statements about faith as a encounter are therefore mainly postulative. Therefore, it is worthwhile to reflect on the nature of the encounter itself and the related nature of the religious experience, which deny a encounter paradigm of faith.

2. ENCOUNTER AND RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE AND THE NATURE OF FAITH

It should be borne in mind that both the words "encounter" and "religious experience" are used in various contexts.

According to the philosopher of religion, Bernhard Welte, an encounter is a form of a personal relationship. It cannot be fully objectivised, but rather it demands experiencing. Persons are present for each other directly. It has a form of bilateral and mutual "being for", which leads to mutual moving, interest, response, involvement and a change of the way of life.[26]

The Polish anthropologist Adam Węgrzecki notes, however, that "the encounter" denotes not only direct contact with a person ("some-

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[24] Jerzy Bukowski, *Zarys filozofii spotkania* (Kraków: ZNAK, 1987), 150–152, 168–171.

[25] Szczyrba, "Wiara religijna a sąd egzystencjalny," 125–128, 130–133.

[26] Bernhard Welte, *Czym jest wiara? Rozważania o filozofii religii,* trans. Wojciech Patyna (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, 2000)*,* 51–56.

one") but also with a thing ("something"). It is characterized by direct-ness, two-sidedness, intensity, temporality and participation.[27] Therefo-re, in his opinion, the encounter may be not only subjective-subjective, but also subjective-objective. It seems, however, that an encounter with a thing can only be talked about in a figurative sense, because it lacks mu-tuality, commitment, response and dedication.

The Polish expert in the issue of encounter, Jerzy Bukowski, stres-ses that it is a sudden, non-reducible, reciprocal, emotional, non-discursi-ve and direct opening of two people to each other. One cannot objectivise them, but the uniqueness and identity of each of them must be affirmed. They are a gift for each other and want to remain in personal unity for as long as is possible. They feel the connection with each other, manifesting itself in the feeling of uniqueness and non-replaceability. They discover each other in the atmosphere of trust. According to Bukowski, an enco-unter is a sudden event. Therefore, it cannot be planned or learned. It can-not be reduced to simpler forms. It is co-constituted by two equal entities, which interact and enrich each other. Owing to emotions, an encounter is associated with the values that the partners wish to fulfill and develop. The contents of the encounter cannot be passed on to other people with words, especially since gestures, not only words, matter in it.[28]

Therefore, an encounter is an existential experience that involves establishing a direct interpersonal axiological relation, affirmation, explo-ring, and engaging the depth of one's personality, resulting in human transformation.

Therefore, as Jan Pietraszko pointed out in slightly poetic language, we have dual-type interhuman encounters. Some of them occur on two close but parallel roads. Their reach is rather limited and peaceful. A trace of such an encounter in the life of a person may be more or less distinct. However, the encounter may take place on two intersecting roads. It is a situation when the man goes through the centre of the other man's soul. The consequences of such encounters can lead to enlightenment and re-freshing, but also apathy and destruction.[29]

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[27] Adam Węgrzecki, *Wokół filozofii spotkania* (Kraków: WAM, 2014), 13, 25–26.
[28] Bukowski, *Zarys filozofii spotkania,* 144–146, 154–168.
[29] Jan Pietraszko, *Spotkania* (Kraków: ZNAK, 1997), 6.

Bearing in mind the above characteristics of the nature of the encounter, one may have justified doubts as to understanding faith in this way. In faith, there is a lack of direct presence of the person and reference to it. Therefore, such essential elements of the encounter as uniqueness of person, reciprocal openness, interpersonal interaction, commitment, mutual response, „being for each other" and bilateral dialogue become impossible.

Another reason against understanding faith as encounter is the nature of the religious experience. The question of this experience is problematic in scientific reflection.

The difficulties multiply especially in the case of his direct form, and the encounter with God is often understood precisely as experiencing Him directly.[30] Therefore, it is worth taking a closer look at the nature of this experience.

The Polish logician Józef Bocheński was one of those who initially questioned the possibility of a religious experience. Ultimately, he acknowledged its existence but distinguished it from the religious interpretation of the lay experience, the experience of sanctity in the world, and the Transcendence encounter. Initially, he accepted only a religious interpretation of lay experiences. Subsequently, he allowed for the possibility of experiencing sanctity in nature or in specific individuals, but he did not settle its existential status. According to Bocheński, such an experience did not need to be identical to the encounter with the Transcendence, as people do not experience a direct encounter with God, and the word "encounter" is often understood wrongly in the religious context.[31] Therefore, Bocheński not only criticises but questions understanding the faith as a form of the encounter. The direct encounter with the personal God is impossible for man in the conditions of his existence.

Bocheński claims that there are two theories of the religious experience. According to first, man encounters God every day in religious acts. According to the second, there are no such encounters, and the man has

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30 Szczyrba, "W kierunku doświadczenia relacji z Bogiem," 343.

31 Józef Maria Bocheński, "Ponownie o hipotezie religijnej," w *Religia. Dzieła zebrane*, ed. Józef Bocheński (Kraków: Philed, 1995), 125–127.

to live without direct contact with God.[32] It seems that the second experience is closer to a majority of the faithful.

Bocheński adds that the direct experience is not possible for every faithful, as such a person does not encounter God personally and is not in dialogue with Him. Moreover, the concept of dialogue has no sense on the grounds of faith. There is no exchange of words and thoughts between two partners. Therefore, there is an error in an interpretation of man's experience, in which he deals only with natural objects and phenomena. One can only come to the conviction about the existence of the Absolute through reasoning. However, Bocheński points out that the deduced Absolute does not always correspond to the God of a religion.[33]

In this context, Piotr Gutowski stresses that one should distinguish between two issues: the experience of the Divine presence and the "face to face" experience of God. The first one is only a sense of a different world, while the second is impossible.[34] Gutowski questions the direct encounter with God, and he only allows for a possibility of experiencing His presence through the direct experience of an object and only a certain intuition of a supernatural being.

Therefore, as Buber points out, the experience of God is not direct in nature, but it happens through finite beings.[35] In Buber's opinion, only a finite being is truly present, whereas the eternal Being is only sensed. He is, so to speak, the horizon of experiencing another being. Therefore, God is not one of many objects of our experience, but one cannot establish a relationship with Him by giving them up.[36] Therefore, a relationship with God would be one aspect of relations with the world, and the absolute bond would need a relative one.[37] Therefore, man enters a rela-

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[32] Idem, *Logika religii,* trans. Sławomir Magala (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, 1990), 54–55.

[33] Idem, *Ku filozoficznemu myśleniu. Wprowadzenie do podstawowych pojęć filozoficznych,* trans. Bernard Białecki (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, 1986), 77; idem, *Sens życia i inne eseje* (Kraków: Philed, 1993), 154–161.

[34] Piotr Gutowski, "O możliwości doświadczenia obecności Boga," w *Filozofia religii. Kontrowersje,* eds. Jacek Hołówka and Bogdan Dziobkowski (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2019), 135–136.

[35] Buber, "Ich und Du," 128.

[36] Idem, "Die Frage an den Einzelnen," w *Werke. Erster Band. Schriften zur Philosophie*, ed. Martin Buber (München und Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1962), 236.

[37] Idem, "Ich und Du," 157.

tionship with God through intensive contact with finite beings, which include people, nature, spiritual beings, events.[38] It should be noted that this experience takes place in the situation that the relation is not a monologous relationship, whose features include keeping one's distance, domination of the reason, knowing and using the being, but a dialogous relationship, which involves directness, exclusiveness, strangeness, and presence.

Halík expresses similar opinions. He thinks that the faith dialogue are conducted with a present, though hidden, Partner. Man cannot understand until after some time that God spoke to him in his own thoughts, through other people, in books, in life events, through his surroundings and various pains of the world.[39] Therefore, the man should overcome the focus on himself and become open to reality[40], which is a manifestation of God's presence.

Welte stresses additionally the role of a witness. In his opinion, religious faith is based on a specific historical figure (e.g. Jesus of Nazareth). However, it depends on the faith in words and attitudes of other people from the past and present who are its witness. Therefore, interpersonal faith is the first form of faith, through which a person passes on the faith to another person. It happens through words. The man utters a word through which he bears witness to his thoughts and desires. Therefore, it has a personal trait. When uttered, a word contains information elements, but its main role is to raise interest and solemnity in the listener.[41] The beginnings of faith are associated with testimony and confession.[42] Therefore, the man first experiences directly another person who is a witness of faith to him, and not a personal God.

There is therefore a fundamental difference between common experience and the religious experience. Experience in the first sense is usually understood according to Stanisław Głaz, the psychologist and philosopher,

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[38] Idem, *On Judaism*, 86.

[39] Halík, *Co nie jest chwiejne, jest nietrwałe,* 37, 40; idem, *Dotknij ran. Duchowość nieobojętności,* trans. Andrzej Babuchowski (Kraków: ZNAK, 2010), 18, 21; idem, *Hurra, nie jestem Bogiem*, trans. Andrzej Babuchowski, Tomasz Dostatni and Juliusz Zychowicz (Warszawa: Agora SA, 2013), 104–105, 108.

[40] Idem, *Co nie jest chwiejne, jest nietrwałe,* 174–175; idem, *Hurra, nie jestem Bogiem*, 13–15.

[41] Welte, *Czym jest wiara?*, 46–48, 58–63, 71, 74–75.

[42] Szczyrba, "Wiara ze spotkania?," 22.

as a form of direct sensory perception of a different being. As a result, man gets information on a specific object and specific experiences.[43]

Thomas Aquinas emphasised the singularity and concreteness of the object in every kind of experience. He also stressed that not only external, but also internal experience is possible.[44] In this context a religious experience, as neo-Thomist Piotr Moskal believes, takes a different character. It may often be regarded as a way of direct knowing the divine, but in reality, one needs an intermediary. What is this intermediary? Firstly, the subjective states of mind, e.g. convictions. Secondly, the intellectual-cognitive states, e.g. understanding something. Thirdly, the organic-affective states and experiences as a manifestation of God's acts, e.g. heart beating. Fourthly, cognitive sensory, imaginative, and intellectual forms are elements of God's revelation, e.g. dreams. Fifthly, experiences of non-transparent signs are interpreted as places and ways of God's presence, e.g. books and icons. Sixthly, experiencing ordinary and extraordinary things and natural and human events is interpreted as a manifestation of God's acts, e.g. an earthquake, a miracle. Seventhly, experiencing one's own religious activities, with God as its intentional correlate, e.g. sacrifice, prayer. Eighthly, experiencing openness to what is absolute, e.g. the desire of the eternal, yearning for the sense. Ninthly, experiencing internal moving and inspirations. Moskal stresses ultimately that none of these experiences is an experience of God as an object of direct cognition, because He is a transcendent being[45] The American philosopher and theologian Brian Davies stresses that God is not a direct object of a sensory experience. He is not material, with no specific location, and he is not testable.[46]

The British philosopher Richard Swinburne also stresses that the religious experience has five main forms. It happens through ordinary, public objects, perceived through senses (e.g. nature); through non-ordinary, public objects, perceived through senses (e.g. revelations); through private impressions which can be described in everyday language

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[43] Stanisław Głaz, *Doświadczenie religijne* (Kraków: WAM, 1998), 17.

[44] Tomasz z Akwinu, *Suma teologiczna. O człowieku,* vol. 6, trans. Pius Bełch (Londyn: Veritas, 1980), 19–22, 29–34, 39–77.

[45] Moskal, *Religia i prawda,* 135–149.

[46] Brian Davies, *Wprowadzenie do filozofii religii,* trans. Wacław Popowski (Warszawa: Prószyński i S-ka, 1993), 136, 139–141.

(e.g. dreams); through private impressions which cannot be described in everyday language (e.g. visions, feelings); experiences without senses participating (e.g. states of mind).[47] Mediation of the experience of supernatural reality through specific material objects, sensory impressions or mental states are a common element in all these cases.

In this context, important attention is paid to Hick, who emphasizes that religious experience has an interpretative element. Faith is treated by him as a form of indirect experience ("experience-as"). Man perceives a specific object, and his mind interprets it with the help of human concepts. It defines the meaning of an object in terms that emerge in a specific cultural context. Giving meaning also has a practical sense, because a person begins to behave appropriately in relation to the perceived reality. Religious experience is thus an act of interpretation by which things, events and processes acquire a religious character and mediate the revealing of the transcendent dimension. Man has freedom in the way of interpretation.[48]

Religious experience is therefore possible through objects, individuals, phenomena, states, interpreted as the place of God's presence, revelation and a means of establishing a relationship with Him. However, it would not have the character of a direct encounter with God.

CONCLUSIONS

These analyses were an attempt of a critical reflection on the encounter paradigm of faith. Faith, however, cannot be understood in the opinion of their author as an act of encounter, because the man never meets a personal God directly. Two main reasons for this position arise from reflection on the nature of encounter and religious experience.

An encounter understood in the strict sense characterized by the above-mentioned features, cannot take place between God and man in the conditions of his present existence. First of all, because God is not an

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[47] Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 249–252.

[48] John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion. Human Responses to the Transcendent* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 129–131, 140, 153–154, 160.

experiential being that can be experienced through the senses and with whom one can dialogue, understood as an exchange of words and thoughts. The word "encounter" is therefore misunderstood or understood in a different sense in this context. So some new semantics would be needed. Thanks to faith, assuming the existence of God, man can only come to an encounter with Him at the end of his earthly existence. In the present situation, it is impossible to discover God's presence directly, because experience of transcendent reality is always mediated through different objects and interpretative.

Consequently, there would be three essential ways of speaking about faith. Firstly, faith would be regarded as an act of trust to "something" or "someone" beyond the man (*sacrum,* God). Secondly, faith would be an act of cognition. Therefore, it would be propositional in character, i.e. it would involve adopting and accepting a set of beliefs by means of intellect recognising a proposition as true, not on the strength of the objective obviousness, but under the influence of the will and based on authority. One must remember that such cognition would often be phrased in a metaphorical language, which demands translation. Adopting a definite way of life and involvement in its implementation would be a consequence of cognition. Thirdly, faith would be experience- and interpretation-related in character. Religion involves experiences of certain people, objects, internal states, impressions, cognitive forms, events and acts, but they are symbolic in character. A symbol plays an important role in religious life. It is a type of sign with a sensory (material) element and meaning layers (depth). A man discovers these deeper layers by entering relations with various beings, directing him to a reality beyond the natural dimension. However, he does not experience it directly but only senses it. Therefore, a specific material element is the direct object of experience and religious interpretation. In this context, one can talk about the mediated religious experience but not about the direct encounter.

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