

## *The Meaning of Meeting as an Existential Event in the Perspective of the Unity Paradigm*

### ABSTRACT

The article discusses the key meaning of meeting, understood as an existential event and considered in the perspective of the paradigm of unity. The two mentioned categories: meeting and paradigm of unity are not presented in the literature in the context of their direct relation to each other. Therefore, the main problem presented in the paper is: how far they are cognitively relevant. The starting point for reflections is the recognition of a meeting situation in the perspective of human spiritual development which happens through turning towards the other. This development is experienced in overcoming the tension between the declarative attitude towards the mutual love and the real act expressing the actual openness to this gift. According to Chiara Lubich, the gift of love is the central category of the paradigm of unity. If we follow Thomas Kuhn and define the paradigm as a worldview that unites a community in their holistic vision of the world, then it is the meeting that is an integral and necessary element of this paradigm. Experiencing a meeting, in this context, is the condition for reaching the spiritual unity in a community of people who are led by mutual love and out of that love bear with one another in their otherness.

*KEYWORDS: paradigm of unity, meeting, existential event, gift.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Modern reality of socio-cultural life imposes diverse visions of man and the world, relation of man to the world as well as dynamics and depth of existence happening in situations of meeting. Men, guided by their inner imperative and led by their free will, want to become *something more that they are* in life (Tatarkiewicz, 1999, p. 352). However, this strive reveals the drama of human existence connected with the understanding of the nature of the inner world and one's own relation thereto. According to the existentialists, the visions of a man existing in the world of *Nihilism* and the world of *Eternity* are found on the opposite poles (Heidegger 2010; Sartre 1956; Jaspers 1991; Kierkegaard 2008; May, 1995).

Viewing one's own existence in the world of *Nihilism* locks men in their own world where they become creators and source of all values and meanings. Relation of men to the world of *Nihilism* is the drama of existential void connected with multitude, diverse, relative, finite and fragile nature of life. This situation corresponds with the simplified understanding of human existence and boils down to reducing the dimensional concept of a man – by removing the spiritual dimension – to its lower dimensions identified by Viktor Frankl with the so called *psychophysical factuality* (Frankl, 2012, p.47). Viewing one's own existence in the world of *Eternity* shapes the sense of having support, both, in the objectively existing values as well as in the *Suprasense* – the source of these values. The drama of existence identified with experiencing existential void that cancels the meaning of life is replaced by the drama of existence connected with the quality of affirmation of life, oriented towards becoming a human being (Binswanger, 1958, pp. 237-364). This process takes place through transcending oneself towards other human being and the *Suprasense*. This means an individual attitude towards the world of objective values and meanings that is different and unique for each person but there

is a common awareness of the spiritual connection; the awareness generated by the *Suprasense*. The affirmation of life understood this way assumes the spiritual growth of humans into the depth of personal *logos* (Levinas, 1998, pp. 38-44).

Different perspective of relating to world and, in this context, subjective self-identification are viewed in the paradigm category. According to Thomas Kuhn, a paradigm can be transferred not only to the science world but also to the area of social reality, that is, “the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of a given community” (Kuhn, 2001, p. 303). This other context of understanding a paradigm is identified with the holistic vision of the world, the *matrix* of the holistic perception of it. In this perspective, there is taking place the process of orientation in the world and, to a great extent, explaining the reality (Szwabowski, 2014, p. 113). Moreover, this other context is of great social significance, because – as stated by Adam Biela – it entails the mental transformation of individuals and social groups, change of the vision of the world or intellectual revolution in understanding the world (Biela, 2006, pp. 167-177; Biela, 2013, pp. 207-227; Grochmal, 2014, pp. 105-134).

The tension revealed along the “psychophysical factuality”–existentiality (spirituality) line translates into a different understanding of one’s own humanity and the quality of experiencing the relation with other person. Exclusively reductionist view of the human existence also limits the possibility to experience meeting and dialogue in their full sense. Reaching beyond this reductionism in approaching the nature of human existence, opens the multidimensional character of personal meeting and dialogue – as pointed out by M. Buber (1992, pp. 59-60) and J. Tischner (2012, pp. 100-105). Thus, the way one approaches this existential dilemma translates into the way one understands oneself and the meaning of his life in the perspective of another human being.

## THE NATURE OF THE PARADIGM OF UNITY

The outlined dichotomic vision of human existence in relation to the world is expressed in the content structure of the division and disintegration paradigm as well as the paradigm of unity (Biela, 2006, pp. 167-177). The first of the mentioned above, involves the logic of exposing the differences in human relationships as a criterion that generates the mechanisms of social priority and disability (Turowski, 1999, 118-121). In general, there is the dominant logic of division occurring along at least three layers of constructing one's identity:

- a) personal: *I* of the subject in relation to another human being (the other);
- b) group: every person the subject identifies with in relation to others treated as strangers;
- c) emotional: every person the subject befriends and loves in relation to others that are objects of his aversion, distrust or hatred.

The logic of division shapes the attitude of opposed evaluation. According to the latter, the subject evaluates positively himself and those he identifies or /and has a strong emotional bond with. Every person is then seen as valuable, worthy of something, e.g. trust, respect, acceptance, love. The negative evaluation is given to the persons who differ the most. The subject keeps them at a distance and does not form an emotional bond with them. Then, each of those persons is seen in the opposed categories: as somehow worse, less valuable and even unworthy of something e.g. respect, acceptance, love. The logic of division corresponds with the strategy of traditional thinking in the theory of Edward de Bono. Its key element is the lack of possibility to enter into the real dialogue and to cooperate due to being mentally trapped in certain thinking contexts and frameworks (de Bono, 2001).

The paradigm of unity refers to human relationships in a completely different manner. It does not show differences in the

dichotomic categories that positively and negatively evaluate people who form relations, but in the categories of the holistic perception of every human being (Lubich, 1986). It cancels the logic of division which generates such a sharp and lasting divisions into socially *privileged* and *disabled* (see: Turowski, 1999, pp. 118-121). And it introduces the logic of unity which exposes the significance of searching for the common layer above the existing divisions. It does not eliminate the latter but it strengthens the existential meaning of each *between* the evaluation extremes. This gives the grounds for transcending towards someone and something one is not and what has a sense in the lifelong perspective. The paradigm of unity seems to outline a different image of humans in their socio-cultural reality. The logic of unity is of the key meaning here, as it withdraws from valuing people in the categories of e.g. holiness/sinfulness, moral good/evil and generates the change of perspective one sees and relates to the existing differences. This logic fosters recognition that there are no completely good or bad people. Similar, there are no such a great sinners who could not become saints and there are no such a great saints who could not be condemned. There are saints and sinners at the same time, morally *good* and *bad*, who, in various periods of their lives, show the dominant more or less leaning towards one of the poles. Such approach realistically reveals men as individuals with a range of virtues and flaws. This, on one hand, forces us to take them off the pedestal and, on the other hand, to anticipate their potential for spiritual development. This entails their possible personal self-creation that affirms the spiritual dimension of their existence (Wojtyła, 2000, pp. 482-487).

#### MEETING AS AN EXISTENTIAL EVENT

Meeting is a special manifestation of the presence of other human being and is “the main source of all axiological experiences,

including the experience of thinking” (Tischner, 2000, 482). It is an event from which the drama begins, with unpredictable course and results. In a situation of meeting “good and evil, value and anti-value, joy and despair enter our inner reality in such a way that we do not run away from them” (Ibidem). Thus, meeting is of special existential significance and prompts us to follow J. Tischner and adopt his thesis that nothing “makes us think that much as meeting with other human person. (...) Meeting is an event and as such is *a posteriori*: it begins with experience. However, it is at the same time possible only thanks to some ideal *a priori* that, remaining hidden, guides its course and precedes it. The presence of *a priori* causes us, among others, to repeat the meetings” (Ibidem, p. 491).

Situation of a meeting releases the situation of a dialogue, in which the experience of the presence of another human being is created. This other person remains in this relation voluntarily and with the intention to selflessly share their own experience. And this experience expresses the individual understanding of self in relation to the world. It is shaped on the basis of mutual turning towards each other (Węgrzecki, 1992, pp. 91-93). According to K. Wojtyła this happens through the affirmation of *You* of another man and, to a certain extent, “choosing them inside myself” (Wojtyła, 2000, pp. 396-402). In this sense, another man is a gift that awakes the spiritual dimension of human existence.

Such dialogue occurs during a meeting viewed as a significant existential event in a person’s life. Mieczysław A. Krąpiec notices that meeting has a fundamental meaning for men in terms of reaching the fullness of their own, personal development (Krąpiec, 2002, pp. 144-148). He links meeting with the necessity of inner struggle to open towards another *You* in relation with *I*, and this may happen through recognizing this other *You*. Only in the meeting the subject is able to transcend beyond experiencing his or her own acts and feelings towards “foreign” experiences of act and feelings revealed by other humans – the Others. The

situation of the meeting is the event that shapes human experience because *I* of the subject and *You* of another person exist in a mutual relation towards each other. The process of shaping the relations of the subject with the world takes place in the context of relations with the *You* of another human. In this approach, dialogue is based on the intentional focus on another human being and in the awareness of maintaining full mutuality.

Constitutive features of a meeting – understood as an event in an existential meaning – are the motives of freedom of its participants and authenticity in openness to each other. These features determine the readiness to enter into a dialogue (Buber, 1993, pp. 126-129). The dialogue itself is based on the message of mutuality, subjectivity and freedom shared by meeting participants. Martin Buber exposes the aspect of mutuality and subjectivity. He points out that: “The You confronts me. But I enter into a direct relationship to it. Thus, the relationship is at once being chosen and choosing, passive and active” (Buber, 1992, p. 45). Józef Tischner, in turn, exposes the aspect of freedom in a very meaningful words: “What can I? I don’t know. What am I supposed to want? I don’t know that either. I do know that I may want and not want. Nothing here happens out of necessity. The other can always say: *you’ve come here because you wanted*. Whatever happens, will happen in freedom which will believe, till the end, that it could do otherwise” (Tischner, 2000, p. 483).

Thus, the motive of freedom of persons entering into a dialogue is revealed in the sphere of values. In a situation of meeting, each of the persons seems to express their own understanding of the external world (objective-subjective) and self in relation to this world in the perspective of individual reference and recognition of values. By turning to each other in the meeting reality, they open mutually to the message of freedom in thinking about values and in shaping their own attitudes towards these values. The statement: “whatever happens, will happen in freedom” is actually a confirmation of the fact of existential loneliness, isola-

tion of man in transcending towards the world of values. Based on thought and experience exchange, the reality of meeting fosters the mutual awakening from an intellectual "lethargy", inspires, stimulates curiosity, encourages to reflections and creative searching. Mutually experienced presence does not release anyone from action but it opens to the significance of attributing a meaning to one's own life (Węgrzecki, 2014, pp. 35-38).

According to R. May the core of the dialogue – defined as *dia-logos* – is formed by *logos*, the world of meanings and senses, which demands an authentic openness to relation with another human person (May, 1978, p. 196). Thus, dialogue assumes something more than mutuality in learning from one another in our daily social encounters. It assumes the mutuality in exchanging the subjective meanings and senses; the mutuality that can take place only in the noetic dimension of personal existence.

Turning to other human discloses the sense of existential becoming. It is then understood as being *towards something* – the love of neighbour made real in the relationship with the other, and being *for something* – another human who, by the fact of his existence, demands love and acceptance. Being *for something* and *towards something* is not a self-destructive act, it seemingly marginalizes the significance of being *for self*. In fact, the existential fulfilment seen by R. May as being *for self* becomes possible only in the perspective of another human, that is, in the moment of opening to Scheler's category of value of a person.

Meeting fits into the known Frankl's regularity: becoming and fulfilment is more intensive the more subject forgets himself and focuses on the other (Frankl, 1978, p. 106). However, this *forgetting* about self has its limits which are set by the reflexive function of consciousness. According to K. Wojtyła, this function identifies the experience "of self as the subject of own acts and experiences" (Wojtyła, 2000, p. 93). However, it is not about superficial awareness of the act itself (moral good or evil). Reflexiveness is what enables men to experience their causal abilities *inward* – both, the



act itself and moral good or evil it involves. Reflexiveness leads to spiritual experiencing the relationships with other humans.

MEETING IN THE CONTEXT OF THE UNITY CHARISMA  
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In this context, meeting fits into the charisma of unity by Chiara Lubich, which today seems to be not an invitation but rather bold and loud call to be open to everything that the *culture of unity* brings along and what is, by its very nature, opponent to the *culture of divisions and dispersion*. Unity in the context of a meeting is not what deprives of individuality and diversity, what unifies and makes humans inauthentic. The charisma of unity is something that increases the awareness of subjective distinctness and uniqueness, cultural and religious rootedness with concurrent affirmative openness to the meeting with the other.

At first, this charisma reveals the meaning of human nature in the perspective of another human, relation to him and the quality of the process of building a relationship with him. It prepares to a real relationship with God as impenetrable source of life giving meaning to human existence. Another side of the charisma of unity involves removing what is needless for the existential becoming in one's humanity. It is a spiritual journey of the Roman centurion described in Luke's Gospel, who amazed Jesus with his great faith, trust, charity and, at the same time, humility. Faith in the power of God's Word and continuous trust in its causal nature originates from loving another man. According to human measures, the latter did not mean much, could not do much, want not able to repay with anything valuable. However, his presence, his joy of life and requited love were priceless for him.

The key to the message of Chiara Lubich's charisma: *May they all be one*, is Jesus Crucified and Forsaken (Lubich, 2007, p. 55-72). Continuing in God's presence cannot, in this context, be done

otherwise than under the commandment of mutual love – modelled by Jesus who bestows it on every man (cf. J 15,12). Thus, this is what leads everyone, who remains in the presence of God, to the unity with other people in the spiritual community. Through love and in love they become brothers who mutually open to the spiritual relationship with God. Thus, mutuality is revealed in the charity (love of neighbour), quality of mutual attitude towards other human in every life situation. After all, *whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me* (Matthew 25:40, NIV). Mutual love understood in such way results in the gift of unity of man and God as well as unity between men for whom God is the centre of thoughts and deeds.

According to the message of Chiara Lubich's charisma, unity cannot be reached in a spiritual separation from God as its direct result is the lack of faith and hope in the real presence of the living God in each man's life, and lack of trust in God's love. Similarly, one cannot awake love in himself without putting God in the centre of his life. Love, as noticed by Ch. Lubich: "strives to mutuality, to *communion*, to make real the supernatural unity that makes us one body – the Body of Christ" (Lubich, 1986, p. 109). This unity is revealed not only in the *unity of hearts* but also in the *unity of thoughts*, that is, unanimity of people focused on Christ, and mutual *bearing with* one another in love – all this overcomes the differences and divisions between people.

The gift of unity flows from the mutual relationships between people, based on love of neighbour. It is worth to notice that this love, according to Kierkegaard, is expressed in three moments that make free will real in the acts of duty, moral acts and existential acts. The fullness of love is reached in love of neighbour when it is made real in an act of duty: *thou shall love*; in a moral act: *shall love your neighbour* and in the existential act: *Thou shall love your neighbour* (Kierkegaard, 2008, 54). Love is, both, a call to fulfil in certain acts that what is the heart of humanity, and a life challenge of individual self-determination in the context of choosing one's

own way of existential becoming. Kierkegaard seems to encourage to reflection upon the nature of values that are existentially important and interconnecting in love for another human. It is there where one can find the value and the meaning of one's own existence and life path in the perspective of one's presence in God. Then it is possible to reach unity in a community that is one in setting the main goal in human life. This goal is not expressed in the question: *Where is it worth to go?* but rather: *To Whom and with Whose help is it worth to go in life?*

The meaning of the message of the charisma of unity seems to be even more significant and relevant in the reality of today's migration processes than several dozen years ago (that is, at the beginning of the "Copernican revolution in social sciences" caused by the works of Chiara Lubich). In this perspective, the dialogue is not seen in the psychological or communication categories, but it refers to a much deeper layer of human existence – the spiritual connection revealed in gift and mutuality. The experience of meeting with other human in love is a gift directing toward God.

Mutuality connected to the existential necessity of *bearing with* another human in his *otherness* determined by the specifics of social, cultural and religious identity coexists with the gift of love (see: Figure 1).

Experiencing different aspects of this gift becomes possible in relational experiencing of self and interpersonal accompanying self in daily events that goes beyond the qualities of life identified with Frankl's category of *psychophysical factuality*. Thus, mutuality is something incomparably more significant in terms of existence than just repayment for different goods inscribed in the pragmatics of life. It happens in the noetic dimension of human existence as an act of initiating and establishing the spiritual connection between the aware participants. Thus, it leads to discovering a truly life-giving Gift.

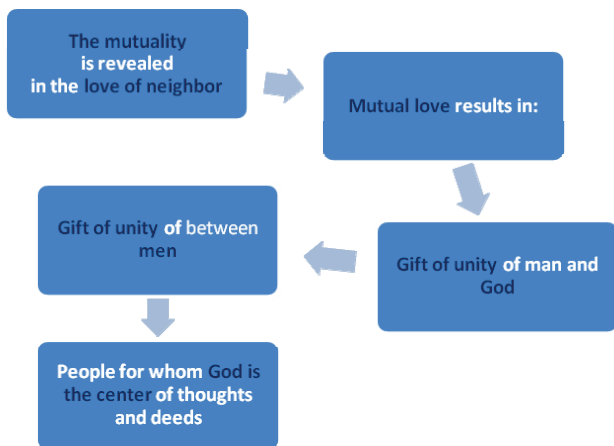


Figure 1. The Model of Gift as the Unity between Men for whom God is center of Thoughts and Deeds.

## CONCLUSIONS

The paradigm of unity describes the existence in social relationships, which does not aim for identity-related uniformisation of people but for existential fulfilment while keeping their individual uniqueness and differences. The authenticity of human existence is crucial in this context. Turning towards another human being assumes the tension that arises between *I* and *You* due to their distinctness, uniqueness and *otherness*. At the heart of this tension is the experience of meeting with the other; an event that has personality-forming character. Out of this *dia-logos* of meeting participants, the *logos* of each of them is not remain the same anymore, yet it does not loses its specifics expressing their different life experience and individual identity. In this context, the dialogue is not the answer to the question about the truth and values but the form of participation therein where the willingness to give and receive becomes more important than to convince, win

or explore. The dialogue also postulates the universal character and unity (*logos*) (Górzna, 2012, p. 59). Meeting with the other is an event in such sense that it leaves a mark in the participants' life experience. It translates into the way they perceive and understand different values as immanent components of the universe humans have access to.

The paradigm of unity does not provide easy solutions and life visions. One will not find ready-made projects of successful life in it. But it creates a space for corporate co-existence based on mutual love. And it is not about some form of social idyll but an inner readiness of the participants to overcome themselves, their own limitations and mental barriers, to resign from setting thresholds of acceptance and respect of others. It is a mental shift towards the other out of one's will and love. The essence of this turn is, thus, expressed in the attitude of dialogue initiated in order to understand others and reconcile with them. The essence of the unity culture that arises from the paradigm of unity is:

- a) mental forming of a man acting according to the logic of the gift of love and mutuality as opposed to the logic of division and disintegration;
- b) authentic meeting with another human, that is seen and experienced as a *dia-logos* event which, in turn, shapes the *logos* of each meeting participant;
- c) subjective character of participation in the community life, expressed in the call: *go and admonish him* along with *reconcile with your brother*; the sense of this call is revealed in the existential necessity to live one's own life as in the saying: *No one can do it for you*;
- d) openness to personal values in relationship with another human and love experienced at *philia* and *agape* level.

Thus, the postulate and objective of the paradigm of unity: *May they all be one* means readiness to open mentally to mutual love. This category includes every man who is guided by this mutual love, both, at the level of brotherhood (*philia*) and the highest form

of unconditional love (*agape*). This openness to mutual love refers to every human, regardless of conscious differences or social, cultural and religious divisions. Every human, if he only wants to, may find in himself the ability to turn towards the other in love; and in this turning men can find the inner readiness to bear with one another in their differences and even divisions. Thus, meeting is an event that happens in the mutual love. In this sense, it is an openness to *be one* in various forms of human communities formed in local micro-communities, identified with family, neighbour, school, work or informal environment. This *being one* does not remove the differences between people but it overcomes and refines them. It is at this level of building interpersonal relations that one can say that they differ beautifully and co-exist in harmony.

Thus, the unity culture is an inclusive and, at the same time, egalitarian culture. The change of perspective in viewing and understanding the external world does not require previous abandoning of one's own identity, rejecting the "*previous*" self in aiming at the *perfect I* that is impossible to achieve in the social life practice. Moreover, it even nourishes these differences which inspire to constant actions focused on others in the community and oneself in the perspective of the other. It is based on the attitude saying: *I can be better* – not better than others by competing with them but rather than myself. This attitude is the answer to the inner imperative of human nature, that is, of existential becoming and fulfilment. This, however, is impossible to achieve without meeting with another man. The culture of unity postulated on the basis of the paradigm of unity in the social sciences is not some form of utopian altruism but a real strive that can be fulfilled in practice.

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