

Does Man Seek More than Himself? Patočka's and Frankl's Concepts of Seeking Meaning and Their Stimuli for Maritain's Integral Humanism at the Beginning of the 21st Century with Regard to Religious and Pedagogical Questions

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Abstract:

The article deals with Maritain's interpretation of integral Christian humanism in confrontation with materialistic humanism, man-centred humanism, with the ideas of the philosopher J. Patočka and the psychotherapist V. E. Frankl. Both had a common experience with the totalitarian regimes that Maritain considered to be the logical outcome of materialistic humanism. The description of their ideas is complemented by qualitative research that concerns the perception of the values of beauty, goodness, and meaning in today's young people. The discussion of its results leads, in the context of these ideas, to the formulation of a new relationship between Christian humanism and the humanism of people without Christian faith.

Key words

Jacques Maritain, integral humanism, anthropocentric humanism, Jan Patočka, Viktor Emanuel Frankl

Introduction

Christians in the Czech Republic do not have a simple position at the beginning of the 21st century. They should testify about their faith through their beliefs and practices. It is a kind of faith that, from the point of view of a majority of society, can be seen as an absurd one – the world that we perceive by our senses, the world whose laws are gradually discovered by the natural sciences (while, at the same time, those sciences allow man to dominate it), the world whose resources can be used for prosperity unimaginable for previous generations, this world is not the only reality that surrounds us. It rises from its source, which is, according to the Christian faith, a personal God. Before Him a person is responsible for life and the world.

Why do we regard this as a 'difficult position'? Simply because – as some philosophers agree – the post-modern and post-Christian majority of society lives in an era where Christianity is no longer a universal lifestyle. In people's minds God either 'died' (as Nietzsche pronounced) or, at the very least, 'left' us (as Patočka formulated it).

At the same time, both in philosophy and in the social sciences, we see the analyses and the theoretical justification which consider this period as critical (or in crisis). People build their lives mainly on their individual interests (which do not have to take into account the good of the larger whole), lose their sense for objective measures, use only their own subjectivity (which relativises every generally valid value), and focus on material values based on the possession of property and pleasant experiences. Society is in crisis; it has problems not only with the continuum of biological life (aging and dying) but also with the continuum of proven traditional values – it solves the complex problems of euthanasia, abortion, genetic engineering, weapons of mass destruction...

Such a situation can be a challenge for a teacher of religion. How do we educate future young Christians when we are in a situation where the truth of the Christian faith is fundamentally questioned – we as educators and children as the generation we are about to raise? Additionally, how can we do this when we find ourselves in a time of experiencing the consequences of social development that many experts perceive as a crisis? If we do not want to separate the younger generation from the rest of the world, to create ghettos in which small groups of Christians create an open-air museum of traditional Christianity without the prospect of spreading the Gospel into the whole world, we have to take seriously the context of the society in which we are living. We have to ask people living with the knowledge of the ‘death’ of God or ‘abandonment’ by God about their experience in regard to transcendence. Are they completely focused on the material world and material values, or are they – faithful to their humanity – seeking more than just themselves, their benefits, and their comfort?

Therefore, the teacher of religion must not only know the theory of Christian and non-Christian philosophies dealing with man, but he must also empirically examine them to verify their validity in practice. In this article, therefore, we want to address the philosophical thinking of J. Maritain, a Christian thinker who philosophically elaborated the relationship between Christianity and humanism. Using this knowledge, he created the appeal for the realisation of a new, integral Christianity that contradicts the humanistic anthropocentrism culminating in the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century. His thinking was based on the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas. Christian humanism and its thinking were, according to him, based mostly on the opposition to the atheism of the totalitarian regimes. In the totalitarian regimes of Fascism and Communism, paradoxically, however, there were developed concepts of humanism by authors who did not originate from Christianity. These authors cannot even be considered supporters of an anthropocentric atheistic system aimed at a totalitarian catastrophe. On the contrary, in the midst of those regimes, they formulated their humanist ideas that fundamentally differed from the totalitarian ones. We chose two very distinctive figures of the 20th century: V. E. Frankl, the founder of Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy, and the Czech thinker J. Patočka. Both were very close to existential philosophy. These thoughts will be followed by the empirical research question: Do young people perceive, in their free time, the value of the meaning of life and the values of good and beauty that go beyond them? If so, can a person, surpassing himself using his inner strength and relating to values beyond himself, be called anthropocentric and thus be wrong? The conclusions of the qualitative research (which we want to mention here) can become the basis for a better understanding of the goals and tasks of the contemporary religious education of young Christians (growing up in the atmosphere of the general diversion of the majority from Christianity and the Christian lifestyle).

1. Maritain's Concept of Humanism as the Aiming of Man towards Absolute Meaning in God¹

Humanism is defined by Maritain as follows: '... Humanism tends to make man truthfully human and reveals his original greatness. It gives him participation in everything (in nature and in history) that can enrich him but also asks man to develop his inner abilities, his creativeness, and intellectual life, and to diligently endeavour to make the forces of the physical world the instrument of his freedom.'² He indicates what the religious dimension of this term is, namely, that there is something in man 'that is going beyond time, some personality or person whose deepest needs exceed the order of the universe'. He quotes Aristotle: 'To give man only human things is like betraying him and wanting his misfortune. For the main part of man, which is the spirit, is called to something greater than to human life only.'³ In other words, according to Maritain, each person creates his own attitude towards life and, in its intentions, he behaves somehow in life, whether or not it is related to any particular religion or to a particular philosophy.

Logically, therefore, Maritain recognises two types of humanism: anthropocentric and theocentric. Through long consideration, he states the key difference as follows. Theistic humanism is, in his view, truly Christian humanism. When he searches for the centre of a person, he comes to God, who (by grace) redeems a free but sinful man. While anthropocentric humanism, according to Maritain, put into the centre of man this man himself. Even here, human freedom is stated but in its naturalistic conception: the freedom comes from man himself, for it is not through God's grace which frees him and redeems his freedom. According to Maritain, this fact precisely – man-centredness – is the fundamental mistake of secular humanism.

Maritain shows it in three aspects – looking at the individual person, culture, and God. Looking at the individual, Maritain first of all shows how (thanks to the rationalism of the 18th century) one began to see himself as a very noble being who gives laws to himself and is essentially good. The victory of Darwinian thoughts (which themselves do not conflict with Christian faith), however, meant in the awareness of the rationalist's mind the non-recognition of 'metaphysical discontinuity'. In such a scheme, there is no place for the moment of the creation of a new spiritual being with a soul created by God, a soul which is thrown into being in order to fulfil the eternal destiny given by God. For example, Freud's conception, saying that human consciousness is nothing more than a plaything of powers (pulsating between the instinctive layer of man and the norms of society that he has internalised within his life), has paradoxically transformed original human greatness into a being that only conceals its dependence on his own instincts.

Something similar, according to Maritain, also took place in European culture as a whole. First, this culture (as a foetus of the Renaissance) separated the earthly world from the world caring for eternity but (as a whole) it remained Christian. In the following centuries, however, these two worlds started separating themselves more and more in people's lives. And man, freed from the 'superstition' of the revealed Christian religion, demanded to dominate nature in his own favour in order to enjoy it enough. And everything insinuated that the success in the development of science, technology, and technology due to the development of human reason should have led

1 Here we describe the basic features of Maritain's humanism. We will not go deeper into the determining principles of his philosophy, which are consistently based on the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition. We will meet some of them. (These are, for example, the question of human nature, the freedom of human will, or the ultimate goal of human life. They can be found, for example, in Jacques MARITAIN, *The Person and the Common Good*, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002, or Jacques MARITAIN, *The Responsibility of the Artist*, Prague: Triáda, 2011) in the part of the text which deals with the discussion of the qualitative empirical study.

2 Jacques MARITAIN, *Integrální humanismus*, Řím: Křesťanská akademie, 1967, p.10 (translated from the Czech version).

3 Ibid., pp. 9–10 (translated from the Czech version).

to such domination. And since man had gradually begun his ultimate goal of investing only into himself, he reached the ideology of materialism and communism in the 20th century, according to which one could only achieve true freedom as a collectivistic person.

The idea of God, according to Maritain, had had also a tragical development. According to him, Descartes (by reflections on geometric human reason) excluded the fact that man could (by means of thought analogies) see God's mystery. Descartes said that even though God was a 'guarantor' of human reason, He was completely unrecognisable. In the following centuries, other philosophers (like Leibnitz) had shown that the perfection of an artist could have been perceived only by the perfection of his works of art (and even the perception of the work of the Divine Artist). But God became an idea only, a human imagination that could not say anything about the real God. And this idea could be easily silenced or killed. According to Maritain, Nietzsche did this in the familiar parable of the madman at the marketplace announcing 'the death of God'.

According to Maritain, humanity had reached a dead end. At the beginning of the Renaissance, man was celebrated for his uniqueness, greatness, and perfection. Then, for several centuries, man was enslaved and dejected, until he came to the way of life in the form of the Soviet communist totality. This type of totality based its cruelty on the assumption that there is no God. And if there is no God, He does not sanctify the hearts and core of man. Man is then called to carry out paradise on earth from his collective power. Maritain believes that the tragic events of the 20th century (which brought an incredible degree of well-being but also an incredible level of human violence, pain, suffering, and death) convince one clearly enough about the tragic disconnection of God as the centre of the human being and this man, as this action was followed by the gradual expulsion of God into the realm of human reason in order to ultimately destroy him as a mere human thought. Anthropocentrism – the man-centredness of humanism seems like a subtle trap in which one can imprison and destroy himself.

Based on this analysis, Maritain offers his concept of integral humanism. He calls it integral because, in this concept, man sees his destiny in an eternity-oriented goal and in God. In this concept, one can see God by analogy (imperfectly, but still see Him) while realising the individual options creatively in God who is 'an absolute possibility of all possibilities'. Historically, these opportunities are offered and opened to man by the moment of the Incarnation, in Christ, and this possibility continues in the Church. The autonomy of the world and man does not exclude God as an absolute being. On the contrary, it presupposes His existence, is born of Him, and returns to Him. And God does not lose His infinity and fullness if He shares His own infinity and fullness with man. Thus, man reaches the unity and peace that go beyond all imagination. Maritain's concept of Christian humanism leads man into harmony between mercy and nature, faith and reason, theology and philosophy, supernatural virtues and natural perfection, the spiritual order and the temporal order of the world, the speculative theoretical level and the dimension of practical activity, mystical contemplation and scientific research, and fidelity to eternal matters and the ability to understand time.⁴

4 MARITAIN, *Integrální...*, pp. 33–39, 292–295. Cf. also Ludmila MUCHOVÁ, Autenticky žitá víra ve svobodné pluralitní společnosti a náboženská výchova, *Autentická sloboda a viera*. Collection of monographical studies, ed., Andrea BLAŠČÍKOVÁ, Peter KONDRILA, Nitra: Univerzita Konštantína Filozofa v Nitre, 2011, pp. 38–54.

2. Patočka's Reflection on Humanism as the Awareness of Human Responsibility for Finding the 'Problematic Meaning'

The logic of Maritain's philosophical reasoning is understandable in the context of the 20th century war events (taking place in a large part of Europe), which resulted in the emergence of Communist ideology and then Nazi ideology. That is why Maritain logically confronts Christianity with this in particular. Years of living within one of these ideologies, however, brought an unexpected answer by the Czech philosopher J. Patočka.

In his *Heretical Essays*, Patočka analyses the communist doctrine of the necessity of constant war for world peace. It is based on the reality of two devastating world wars in the 20th century. In spite of its destructiveness, war can have the power to return man to the question of the meaning of life. Ideology convinces people in the name of 'the forces of the day' that war is cruel but a necessary matter, that war can bring justice and peace to future generations, thus their happiness. That is why one needs to sacrifice himself now – to exchange one's own happiness for the happiness of future generations. However, war contains, according to Patočka, another experience. It can become a challenge to the spiritual growth of man. Patočka describes it as a plot taking place in several stages. In the first stage, man experiences war as an absurd and unbearable matter. It is the experience that shocks people. Thanks to this characteristic of war, one can become an easy victim of propaganda that calls for the persistent 'war for peace'. Society thus becomes an eternal battlefield that allows the use of weapons such as demagoguery, suspicion, defamation. Victims are required for future peace. But the experience of the battlefield or of total power is a definite and absolute experience. One can finally understand that the sacrifice of one's own life is important in itself. It is not understood as a means for the happy future of others but as the gain of one's own absolute freedom that is independent of the intimidation of the powerful. The peak of life lies in 'giving oneself'. It is a life in which man has long before headed towards its peak; the sacrifice is just its logical outcome. This peak is a challenge for one to realise the transformation of all his life, his whole existence. It means a cosmicity and versatility to which man has come to by the absolute sacrifice of himself and of his 'day'. Death is the sacrifice that accompanies the free act of man regardless of the fear of death (the fear which the powerful ones try to arouse in him), for absolute freedom as such. It is because of the fear of death that one is tied to life and thus becomes the most manipulable.⁵

Chvatík points out that the idea of an authentic sacrifice does not have a Christian origin. In the text *Meditations after 33 Years*, Patočka compares the sacrifice of Christ to the death of Socrates. Both of them sacrificed themselves to show that human life is fully human only when one is able to overcome the bond to mere life, when he can live above the level of mere utility, when he can live and grow. They both were perfectly true. And with their uplifting, with their efforts to care for the soul, they attacked everything that ruled a world characterised by worries about life only. Therefore, they are convicted and killed. Both of them could avoid violent death, but they both accepted it voluntarily. In both cases, this life sacrifice is connected with the idea of immortality. This is the meaning of the third movement: that one breaks the level of mere life and opens himself to a dimension that does not belong to the category of being, to a dimension that conditions the world of being.⁶ In another place, Patočka characterises the true sacrifice as 'The act which should show the fact that being is the ruling element. It is something that makes one willing to go

5 Cf. Jan PATOČKA, *Kacířské eseje o filosofii dějin*, Prague: ACADEMIA, 1990, pp. 132–137.

6 Cf. © Ivan CHVATÍK, *Zodpovědnost „otřesených“: Patočkova „péče o duši“ v době „poevropské“*, Centrum pro teoretická studia (online), p. 8, available at: <http://www.cts.cuni.cz/soubory/reporty/CTS-09-05.pdf>, cited 6th June 2018.

to the extreme dictated by the historical situation, the extreme which one accepts.⁷

The result of the attitude of readiness to sacrifice one's own life for one's own freedom is the fact that the enemy is no longer an absolute obstacle on the way to peace. He is not the one to be removed in the name of progress. He is the co-actor of the same shock – the shock caused by reaching the same peak of absolute freedom in the absolute giving of oneself. Man is experiencing 'the solidarity of the shocked ones' who are able to pray for the enemy and love those who hate them.⁸ 'The deepest discovery of the warzone is this divergence of life into night, struggle and death. There is the indelible nature of this item in life which seems to be, in the circumstances of the day, a mere non-existence.'⁹ The transformation of that absolute meaning of life which strikes *nothing* here (namely, the discovery that God does not exist or has left man)¹⁰ causes a horror and shock in man, and then man crosses the insurmountable boundary by which everything changes.¹¹ The history of mankind is a conflict of mere sustenance (care for bare survival and paralysation due to worrying about mere life) and life at its peak, where one does not plan for future days but knows that today, one's life, and 'peace', have their end. Only one who understands this is capable of turning, of metanoia, and can be considered as a spiritual person.¹²

As Chvatík emphasises, history (according to Patočka) takes place when a person seeks to rise. It is 'rising' above the level of mere subsistence, even though such subsistence would mean enjoying all the perfect technical and technological improvements. They take place where a person is heading to the peak of his own life, where partially uncovers the mystery of being, that is, what he only suspects, what he cannot touch, what (in fact) conditions the world with its laws. Man no longer has the absolute meaning of God, he has just the meaning. The challenge of man is to prove his responsibility for good things which can be done in such a situation in order to find or reveal the meaning. He should try that even if he risks repeated and more or less successful attempts. Responsibility for this uncertain search for meaning (aiming at the highest point and containing the ability of sacrificing one's own life) is carried by a person living without faith in God (who gives man the absolute meaning) before himself and before other people.¹³

One probably understands that such a task of a person living in the world can hardly be called 'anthropocentric'. It is more of a challenge. One should be aware of and accept the secret hidden behind the existence of man and the world. While it cannot be called a loving God in the face of suffering and evil, it still puts a person (with greater urgency) before the issue of the responsibility for fulfilling life with meaning (even in the face of nothingness that opens before him when he finds himself face to face with the mystery of being).

3. Frankl's Conception of Humanism as a Moral Search for a Unique Meaning in a Unique Situation

The second chosen author – V. E. Frankl – formulated his basic ideas about man (in relation to the

7 Jan PATOČKA, Příloha II. Přednášky a semináře, *Péče o duši III*, Prague: OIKOYMENH, 2002, p. 421.

8 Cf. PATOČKA, *Kacířské eseje...*, p. 138. (Cf. © Zuzana SVOBODOVÁ, Pojetí bratrství u Jana Patočky, *Envigogika: Charles University E-journal for Environmental Education* 2017/XII/2, p. 2, (online) available at: <https://doi.org/10.14712/18023061.556>, cited 16th June 2018.)

9 Ibid., p. 138.

10 Cf. also PATOČKA, *Péče o duši...*, p. 413. Patočka in this place gives the example of true sacrifice which is Christ's sacrifice. He associates this sacrifice with Jesus' cry on the cross: 'My God, my God, why did you abandon me?' The true sacrifice, according to him, is the one in which the loss of life is not only understood as an 'exchange of beings' but as a meeting with being itself.

11 Cf. PATOČKA, *Kacířské eseje...*, p. 138.

12 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 141.

13 Cf. © CHVATÍK, *Zodpovědnost...*, pp. 7–10.

essence of humanity) in a dialogue with two psychotherapeutic schools: Freud's psychoanalysis and Adler's individual psychology. Frankl also formulated the basic ideas of his theory in the midst of a brutal totalitarian regime – as a Jew in concentration camps created by the German National Socialist Party. He described the human will to fulfil one's life with meaning as a basic factor that had a fundamental influence on prisoners' lives and their will to live. In the midst of the misery, described by Maritain (besides Soviet communism) as the second example of the tragic outcome of the loss of God in the minds of the people of the late 19th century, he articulated that a healthy man does not strive in his life for his own happiness, but for fulfilling his own life with sense, meaning. He recognises three levels of this fulfilment:

1. the unique meaning of a unique situation in human life,
2. the meaning of life,
3. the meaning of the world as a whole.

The challenge of fulfilling life with meaning comes, according to Frankl, simply from the fact of human existence, from the fact that one is able to think through individual problematic moments of life and to choose from the options that are offered for their solution. This is the result of the consideration that one makes within oneself and then implements it. Thus, meaning in life is not given by any human faith; it is given by the way how one shapes his life, especially in every unique situation. If man sought his own mental balance or homeostasis only, he would lose something essential from his humanity.

The meaning of life as a whole is then revealed in its very end, just as when one thinks of the meaning of a film after watching it. But, to understand it, one must also uncover the meaning of individual images, that is, of individual life situations. One's life, one's whole existence, says Frankl, must be perceived as a question. This life asks how one will behave in particular situations. The answer is a matter of one's responsibility. It is the answer in the form of a specific act (even if it is, for example, in the face of pain and suffering, an internal act of acceptance or non-acceptance). He refers to Yehuda Bacon, who said that (for the tortured ones) suffering and evil in Auschwitz had had purpose only if it changed them, if it led to their spiritual growth and maturation.¹⁴

By contrast, understanding the meaning of the world as a whole comes only through an act of a decision for faith, in recognising the existence and authority of God as the source and ultimate guarantor of meaning, not by one's own actions. In an interview with the Jewish thinker Lapide, Frankl develops Lapide's warning. This idea says that the act of a person, which gives meaning to the situation, is actually turning to the future: one is doing what will enlighten this situation in the future as meaningful. He explains that the statement of Jesus, 'My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?' was interpreted inaccurately by the generations of theologians as an expression of doubts about the existence of God (also, in the case of Patočka). In the Hebrew original it means not a simple 'why,' but 'for what.' Jesus expressed this question as the expression of desire to understand the meaning of his suffering. God, on the other hand, is accepted, and the certain meaning of suffering is assumed. The suffering one asks for the reason of such a task.¹⁵

Frankl regards the relationship of these three different levels (at which one seeks to fulfil life with

14 Given the scope of this study, we can only refer to Czech secondary literature that develops Frankl's ideas: Martina KOSOVÁ et al., *Logoterapie: existenciální analýza jako hledání cest*, Prague: Grada, 2014; Peter TAVEL, *Smysl života podle V. E. Frankla: potřeba smyslu života, přínos V. E. Frankla k otázce smyslu života*, Prague: Triton, 2007; Miloš RABAN, *Duchovní smysl člověka dnes: od objektivního k existenciálnímu a věčnému*, Prague: Vyšehrad, 2008.

15 Cf. Viktor Emanuel FRANKL and Pinchas LAPIDE, *Hľadanie Boha a otázka zmyslu*, Bratislava: LÚČ, 2009, pp. 34–35, 108–114.

meaning) to the Christian understanding of the meaning of the world as an inclusive relationship. According to him, the religious dimension of life goes beyond the anthropological dimension. The religious dimension is wider and includes the anthropological dimension as a narrower one. So, these two dimensions are not mutually exclusive, but one is contained in the other; it is included. Those, then, who consider conscience to be the last guarantor of the correctness of their acts are not in direct opposition to those who see it as the highest instance of God. God's authority standing behind the principles of good and evil (the principles a person can accomplish) rather goes far beyond conscience. A man deciding which action is the most meaningful in a particular situation conducts an interview with his conscience. A believer believes that the interview with God takes place in his conscience. Frankl does not therefore perceive relations between believing Christians as exclusively as Patočka. For Patočka, conscience becomes the highest instance of moral judgment when one feels abandoned by God. Between conscience and God's authority, according to Frankl, there is a relation of inclusion: conscience can be seen as the highest human instance of meaning but also, in deeper engagement, as the expression of principles guaranteed by God himself.¹⁶

Both Patočka's and Frankl's humanistic ideas have common features. They represent a response to the deep crisis of humanity brought by two totalitarian regimes in 20th century Europe. Maritain explains this situation through the diversion of man from the spiritual sources of his own existence – from his Creator who revealed Himself to man in Jesus Christ and who supports human life through the power of the Holy Spirit. Patočka is an example of a man who feels abandoned by God yet did not let himself be fooled by the pressure of totalitarian power. He is fearless, experiencing himself in freedom. The climax of such freedom is the ability to sacrifice his life as the culmination of his solidarity with suffering people, without the vision of human communion with God. Frankl – a pious Jew himself – perceives the spiritual search of other people, namely, those who do not have religious beliefs. In spite of that, they are able to fulfil their lives with meaning in the process of focusing on values that lie beyond their egocentric needs or interests. Such spiritual efforts can have religious content and can come from deep faith, or they do not have to. It seems that these authors described the spiritual level of human existence that man discovers 'at the bottom of his own strength'. It is not a man-centred effort to reach one's own happiness; it is a troubling, patient, but deeply true search. A person who enters such a journey integrates into his spiritual search a category of the meaning of life that is always fulfilled when one encounters values beyond himself (these were, for Frankl, besides pain and suffering, also values of creativity, and values of love or beauty). If we then call Maritain's concept of humanism integral Christian humanism, we could call Frankl's or Patočka's concepts integral spiritual humanism. In the latter, a person opens himself to the search for values beyond him. So, he starts out a journey that has its peak in their absolute expression in God (God the Creator, God-Beauty, God-Love, God suffering with man in Jesus Christ).

The question remains whether a person living in European society at the beginning of the 21st century is able to perceive values that would fulfil the criteria of the meaning of life. The values that would help him to start out the journey leading beyond one's own man-centredness. In 2018, we conducted qualitative research in order to gain an indication of the answer. We chose the values of perception of beauty, goodness, and the very meaning of life.

16 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 46.

4. Qualitative Research into the Perception of the Values of Beauty, Goodness, and Higher Meaning in Young Adulthood¹⁷

The aim of the research was to find out whether young adults (from 20 to 30 years of age) are able to perceive in their free time the values of good, beauty, or higher meaning, and, further, where they see these values, and how would they describe them. We divided free time into daily, weekly, yearly, and lifelong leisure. (The research was carried out within Leisure Education and with respect to its subject.)

A basic research question emerged from the research objective: Do young people perceive, in their free time, the values of good, beauty, and the meaning of life that go beyond them?

The following research sub-questions emerged from the basic question.

1. Do the experiences of young adults with the values of beauty, goodness, or higher meaning vary in different times?
2. What categories do young adults describe as the embodiment of the values of beauty, goodness, or meaning?
3. Are there any categories that are common to all types of the surveyed values?

We used a questionnaire containing only open questions about either beauty, goodness, or meaning of life during a regular day, in the previous week, in the previous year, and throughout their lives so that the respondents could really express the full range of their personal experiences. Three respondents answered open questions about their experience with beauty, another three to questions related to the values of good, and the last group of three to questions about the search for meaning in life.

We examined the responses of the total of nine respondents, mostly TF JU graduates in Leisure Education. One male respondent graduated from a vocational school and another graduated from a secondary school of business. At least one man and at least one woman were represented in each group of three.

We used open, axial, and selective coding to analyse the respondents' answers.

Analysis of the responses was done by using encoding. In the cases of individual respondents, we first identified the individual codes. Then we assigned those to the two categories in the form of concepts: *the causes of the experience* and *the criterion of the experience*. Subsequently, we searched for other parent categories. For the purposes of this article, we only present the parent categories found in the answers of individual respondents.

Respondent 1

She perceives her experience of beauty in the category of *positive mutual interpersonal relations*, which is evident in weekly, yearly, and lifelong leisure. Spending leisure time with loved ones is very important to her. This experience increases from inner well-being through the atmosphere in the family circle and love to giving thanks for the gift of beauty in the form of family and friends. Another experience of beauty is a fascination with nature which is evident from daily, yearly, and lifelong leisure. These moments are related to harmony with nature and its gracefulness at any time of the year. The respondent also reflects the content of her job. It is a meeting with beauty in relationships with children.

As an important criterion for perceiving beauty, there is a strong feeling of giving (that is, beauty is given, it is a gift), both in specific moments and in her own ability to perceive beauty.

17 Cf. © Petra HOŘEJŠÍ, Volný čas jako důležitý aspekt života pro hledání vyšších hodnot (dobro, krása, smysl) v 21. století, diploma thesis, supervisor: Ludmila Muchová, České Budějovice: TF JU (online), available at: file:///C:/Users/Ludmila%20M/Desktop/Diplomova_prace_2018_Petra_Horejsi.pdf, pp. 62–95, cited 18th June 2018.

Respondent 2

He perceives his experiences of beauty in a category that we might call harmony. It is, in fact, a certain escalation of the category of *positive interpersonal relations* (with additional emphasising of unity, intimacy, harmony), also in relation to an animal. He also describes feelings that can be combined into the category of *fascination* or *capture*. As a result, these feelings bring joy to him. Considering daily, weekly, yearly, and lifelong leisure, we can see that joy and tranquillity deepen in yearly and lifelong time-frames (from the characteristic feelings of joy to fascination and capture). In a longer time horizon, he remembers what fascinated and captured him while the daily experience of beauty he associates with less intense feelings, such as joy and tranquillity.

Respondent 3

She perceives her experience of beauty in a category that we could call *the power of an experience*. It is characterised by pride in one's own nationality and by fascination with nature (with a certain power of an experience). Among the causes of beauty perception, the respondent includes (with varying degrees of intensity) the experiences of positive interpersonal relations (relationship to a new-born) and the perception of nature.

Respondent 4

In all cases, her encounter with good and its perception can be included in a category that we can call *mutual positive interpersonal relations*. In daily and weekly experience, these are rather episodic stories (help of a friend, the atmosphere of family celebrations during which people show love and sympathy). The yearly experience is a deeper reflection in which the respondent contrasts two elements – the anonymous and effect-oriented media referring to man as bad and people living in deep intimate relationships of love. During her life, the respondent reflects meetings with good at the level that can be called contemplation associated with beauty, but also with the observation of a new-born as a symbol of moral purity. The category of *mutual positive interpersonal relations* is at this level enriched by the category of *inwardness*.

These two categories – *mutual positive interpersonal relations* and *inwardness* – are decisive for the respondent and for her ability to perceive good. She perceives it as either outer well-being in relation to people, or rather inner well-being in relation to people, but also to nature and to the universe.

Respondent 5

In his daily experience he perceives his encounter with good in the category of his *own well-being* and in *mutual positive interpersonal relations*. The latter is perceived as the goodness performed by people who are close to him.

The two criteria – the *personal shift* (whether towards better performance or towards strengthening the relations which are important for integration into society) and *mutual positive interpersonal relations* – are important factors for the respondent in the process of perceiving good in his life (either as part of his life or work development). The category of *mutual positive interpersonal relations* has manifested itself in the daily, yearly, and lifetime – in relation to his girlfriend, sister, and society but always as a good that others did for him.

Respondent 6

In her daily and weekly experience, she perceives her encounter with good in a category that we can call *well-being* (whether external or internal) including the perception of contrast between bad events and their good consequences.

All the responses relate to the perception of good as *mutual positive interpersonal relations* directed from other people to the respondent. Its consequences are perceived as *bliss*.

These two categories – *mutual positive interpersonal relations* and *bliss* – are important for the respondent and her ability to perceive good (whether in relation to people and their care for her or as a feeling of bliss towards people, things, and nature).

Respondent 7

The respondent perceives her experience of the meaning of life as a part of *mutual positive interpersonal relations*, that is, as a category of *relation* but always in connection with some other value: with her own individuality, inwardness, truth, with the magnificence of death. She finds the unique experience with a higher meaning of life especially in a wholly exclusive relationship: a marriage vow, a dying father. Thus, we can see that the intensity of the experience with the meaning of life is growing in memories of yearlong and lifelong events.

Respondent 8

He sees his experience with the meaning of life in the category of *mutual positive interpersonal relations*, especially in connection with his nuclear family. This sphere is found in all areas of leisure – daily, weekly, yearly, and lifelong ones. On a daily basis, it is important for him to have a happy family who spends time together. Regarding weeks, one can see his deep feeling of amazement related to his new-born and its development. For years, there is a shift to the area of *inner well-being* and the atmosphere of love in the family circle. During life, the respondent sees the meaning of his life as the consciousness of a life mission.

Thus, we can see that the intensity of family love is growing in memories throughout the years and through life, from the description of unique events to the clear expression of the awareness of life mission.

Respondent 9

She perceives her experience with the meaning of life in relation to her new life roles – wife, future mother. The category of *mutual positive interpersonal relations* is evident in all times. On a daily basis, it is important for the respondent that her baby develops well. With weeks, there is a sense of necessity that arises from a meeting with a former colleague. Throughout the year, the most important matter is the shift to new life roles and stages that include events such as moving, marriage, child conception, and household care. Throughout her life, she reflects on her life and good and bad experience as a challenge for personal growth.

We responded to the research questions asked at the beginning of the research as follows.

1. Considering the question whether the experience of young adulthood with the values of beauty, goodness, or meaning of life differs within daily, weekly, yearly, and lifelong leisure:

in terms of beauty and goodness, the intensity of the described experience increases with regard to daily, weekly, yearly, and lifelong leisure. The reflection of the meaning of life goes from life experience to the clear formulation of principles that make life meaningful.

2. Considering the categories which are described as the embodiment of the values of beauty, goodness, or meaning, we can compile the following list:

Categories related to the beauty experience:

- in the face of the transience of beauty,
- inner wellbeing,
- feeling the gift of a moment,
- being detached from reality,
- mutual positive interpersonal relations (the joy of others),
- solidarity,
- harmony with nature and the city,
- atmosphere of a moment,
- fascination – astonishment,
- fulfilling a career,
- feeling of happiness,
- awareness of the ability to perceive beauty,
- the most beautiful gift,
- own joy and peace,
- feeling of capture,
- feeling of harmony,
- power of the moment,
- patriotism.

Due to the experiences with beauty, categories like fascination, capture, or fulfilment come to the fore – they are connected with the atmosphere or transience of the moment. Besides nature, the experiences of positive interpersonal relations play an important role in this. The second type of categories is created by the expression of inwardness, happiness or inner well-being.

Categories related to the experience of good:

- well-being (both internal and external),
- mutual positive interpersonal relations (the good that others do for me, doing everything for one's own children, passing on 'traces of good', mutual trust and love, solicitude, care, honesty),
- inner purity (a new-born),
- personal shift towards better performance,
- material values,
- life shift towards better society inclusion,
- gift of time,
- bliss.

The encounter with good is primarily associated with the categories of positive interpersonal relations and perceived as a gift coming from others, experienced as an inner purity, bliss, or wellbeing, but also as personal spiritual growth.

Categories related to the meaning of life:

- inwardness,
- mutual positive interpersonal relations,

- uniqueness of personality,
- discovery of the truth of life,
- confirmation of a unique interpersonal relationship,
- magnificence of death,
- mutual positive interpersonal relations (expressed as a willingness to share peace; the ability to live independently and to create a home for others),
- love that leads to satisfaction,
- inner feeling,
- happiness,
- joy,
- awareness of life mission towards love for wife and children,
- understanding the uniqueness of emerging life,
- sense of need,
- to feel needed,
- harmony,
- personal shift.

The encounter with the meaning of life is once again perceived in connection to mutual positive interpersonal relations, but also to spiritual growth (which is seen as inwardness, the discovery of the truth of life, or as the discovery of one's own life mission).

3. Taking into account the question of whether there are any categories that are common to each of the three values surveyed in the respondents' lives, we can say that there is a line describing **positive interpersonal relations** on the one hand, and **inwardness**, the **spiritual world of man** on the other hand. In the spiritual human world, one feels fascination, astonishment, and happiness (considering beauty), feeling that something was given to him, bliss, but also spiritual growth or shift (towards good), and one's own spiritual growth towards the truth of life or towards life's mission (in relation to the meaning of life).

5. Discussion

The conclusions of qualitative research should not be generalised too quickly. Their meaning lies rather in a differentiated description of how certain phenomena can be perceived, felt, and interpreted by people. This does not rule out the possibility that other people may perceive, feel, and interpret them differently. In our case, the described categories gave more specific and differentiated form to the philosophical and psychotherapeutic considerations of Patočka or Frankl. We have drawn up categories in which contemporary young people describe their encounter with the existential values of beauty, goodness, and meaning (that is, the categories named by Frankl and partly by Patočka). Namely, this is the perception of their inner spiritual world in relation to the impulses perceived in the surrounding world.

For teachers of religion, however, it is also important to discuss the importance of such findings for education in general and religious education in particular. First of all, we should confront these results with Maritain and his thoughts. While in *Integral Humanism* Maritain came to the implacability of the various concepts of humanism (anthropocentric, atheistic, and integral theistic humanism, that is, the Christian one), in *The Responsibility of the Artist* one can find a somewhat different approach which appears to be much more consistent with our research.¹⁸ It is the nature of man, Maritain says,

18 Cf. Jacques MARITAIN, *Odpovědnost umělce*, Prague: Triáda, 2011, pp. 18–19.

to act freely and to look for happiness. He therefore determines the highest form of good, which will be his happiness. He may choose to do good not for his own benefit, but for the love of good as such (for example, our respondents experienced interpersonal relations as a gift). He can sacrifice his to it. Whether one knows it or not, one connects oneself at that moment to the absolute highest, infinitely transcendent good which is God. Maritain says literally: 'Everyone who decides to do good out of love for good (in the first act of freedom which is deep down his whole personality) chooses God as his highest good (knowingly or unconsciously). He loves God more than himself even though he has no conceptual knowledge of God.'¹⁹ The fact that we long for the state of bliss and that we can experience it in its natural form, it is a sign that we do not exist in the state of mere nature.²⁰ Similarly, he speaks (in other places of the same work) about the experience of beauty: 'I have said many times that beauty and poetry are such an absolute matter that requires complete self-giving with no exception. Considering God, one can only give himself two times. Firstly, one can give himself to his God, and secondly, to something that reflects his God.'²¹ In the light of these statements of Maritain, we can perceive the search of contemporary man in the area of existential values such as beauty, goodness, or meaning above all as – possibly unspoken – a part of one's search for God. We can understand the process which is characterised (in religious education) mainly by opening oneself to the inner world. This world (perhaps 'buried' in the totalitarian ideology of communism) is a space where one enters the path of fulfilling one's desire for happiness in the face of the secrets of one's existence in the world. The fact that the contemporary young person is also able to go on a journey like this, and even describe it, showed in our research. Only after such an opening of the spiritual path of man can one try to deepen such a process, that is, to lead one to the awareness that God's grace calls us to find beauty, goodness, and meaning in their absolute expression – in God and through our participation in God's life. Indeed, such concepts of the path to God of contemporary man are also described by some fundamental theologians as tensions 'between immanently human and transcendently God'. They see values like beauty, good, or meaning as keys to understanding man and God, that is, as keys that unlock the sacred space for man. Then God, who creates the world as an artist (God's word is creative, good, and beautiful), gives to human history a meaning in Christ. This is because through Christ, with Him, and in Him, all creation will reach its meaning. These theologians see beauty, good, and meaning as the paths where God and people will meet each other.²²

Conclusion

As the analysis of the thoughts of J. Patočka and V. E. Frankl have shown, even in the life of contemporary man there are values that go beyond his focus upon the mere satisfaction of his own needs. Patočka focused primarily on the value of sacrifice, and Frankl on the values of creativity and experience – beauty or love, and on the value of attitudes – the acceptance of pain and suffering during the situation of the inability to change one's own destiny. Thus, the individual expression of certain values is perceived and reflected by man within his inner life. He opens himself to those values and their existence; he considers them as a new, spiritual quality of life. He then takes responsibility for his own contribution to their development in the form of his own spiritual reaction to those values and their existence. Thanks to his own action, he gives meaning

19 MARITAIN, *Odповědnost...*, p. 18 (translated from the Czech version).

20 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 19.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 94 (translated from the Czech version).

22 Cf. Ludmila MUCHOVÁ, František ŠTĚCH, *Mezi lidským a Božím. Udržitelnost křesťanské práce s mládeží v postsekulární Evropě*, *Studia theologica* 2/ 2012, pp. 1–12.

to his life in a spiritual form. Christian faith appears to be very significant in man's life when man himself expresses his belief in the existence of the meaning of the world as a whole and considers it as the highest meaning given to him by God (revealed to man in Christ and in the Holy Spirit). Religious experience is a serious phenomenon in a person's life. It is inaccessible, though, to both philosophical reasoning and psychotherapeutic considerations. What connects the understanding of humanism from the point of view of Christianity and from the point of view of a person without Christian faith is their search for the meaning of one's own life based on the encounter with spiritual values, such as the beauty or love (that is, the values that man connects with the path to the fulfilment of the meaning of life). For Christians, there is a significant guarantee of this path to meaning beyond the limits of life itself, namely God. God, however, does not take away human responsibility for the moral quality of responsibility for oneself and for the world.

Our research has shown concrete forms in which the contemporary person experiences the values of beauty, good, and meaning without a Christian faith. Two major areas are considered important categories: the first concerns the perception of different manifestations of positive interpersonal relations, and the second concerns the opening of the inner, spiritual world of man in which he perceives the values of beauty, good, and meaning (in connection with fascination, astonishment, happiness, the feeling of being given something, bliss, one's own spiritual growth, and the discovery of the truth of life or life's mission). In this way, the way to God (in whom he does not believe) is opened even to him through his life values, beyond the limits of his own bare 'utility'.

Thus, there is a way for the Christian education of children and young people in which Christians do not have to perceive themselves as the sole owners of truth in the face of those who have succumbed to the erroneous temptation of atheism (Maritain's comparison of Christian theistic and atheistic man-centred humanism could lead to this thought), but as common pilgrims on the path leading to the uncovering of the meaning of life and the world. This is the path which they can discuss together, even with presenting their own – Christian – path of belief. On the other hand, unbelieving people, who manifest the great openness of their spiritual world to the values of beauty and good, and great responsibility to that 'problematic meaning' (Patočka), can be a challenge for the truth and bravery of believing Christians experiencing God (on their way to the 'meaning of the absolute') as the source of beauty and good, as strength and company on the path leading to meaning. Upon the ruins of a world destroyed by totalitarian regimes (resulting from anthropocentric humanism as Maritain described it) one can perceive people and their attempts to create a new spiritual humanism – the humanism of the way towards meaning.

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