

„PHILOSOPHICAL FAITH“ OF KARL JASPERS AND ITS THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFANCE IN BERNHARD WELTE'S PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

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Summary

This paper sought to demonstrate whether and how philosophy can be regarded as a reflective affirmation of the human ascent toward God, primarily through the lens of the concept of the „philosophical faith“. The objective was to elucidate the significance of Karl Jaspers' philosophical thought for Bernhard Welte and to explore how the concept of the „philosophical faith“ complements that of the „religious faith.“ It has become evident that both concepts find their origin in the „Nameless“, as thought and faith ultimately emerge from and return to the same transcendent source. Through this perspective, we have identified the theological significance of Jaspers' „philosophical faith“ for Bernhard Welte and its foundational role within his theological framework.

Keywords: philosophical faith, theological significance, religious faith, Bernhard Welte, Karl Jaspers

INTRODUCTION

This German philosopher of religion extensively studied Karl Jaspers and, in 1946., completed his habilitation thesis on the topic of philosophical faith according to Karl Jaspers and the possibility of interpreting it through Thomistic philosophy. Consequently, the concept of philosophical faith will be the central focus of this paper. It is essential to note that Jaspers was born more than two decades earlier and was already widely recognized by the time Bernhard Welte began engaging with Jaspers's outline of philosophical faith in preparation for his habilitation thesis.¹

¹ From the author Stjepan Kušar, we learn that Welte, in the post-war period, particularly engaged with the works and philosophical interpretations of Thomas

In the introduction to his habilitation thesis, Welte notes that his work took place during the final year of World War II. and in the first months following the post war period, in a time marked by existential boundary situations.²

Furthermore, the paper addresses the relationship between philosophical faith and religious faith, particularly in the context of Christian Revelation. It is commonly perceived that philosophical faith is in tension with religious faith, but Welte presents an opposing perspective – philosophical faith can enrich and deepen the understanding of what religious faith seeks to know. In this way, philosophical faith can serve as a „bridge“ between the philosophical contemplation and theological understanding, thus leading to a deeper insight into God.

Through the analysis of this relationship, we will explore how Jaspers's philosophical faith can significantly enrich theological reflection, especially in the context of contemporary existential issues faced by individuals in a world full of crises and uncertainty. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate that Jaspers's concept of philosophical faith holds profound theological significance for Bernhard Welte, as Jaspers's reflections guide Welte towards the Unconditional and the Nameless, and ultimately towards God. Additionally, we wish to emphasize that the philosophical faith is not merely in tension with religious faith and the Christian Revelation, but rather, quite the opposite – it can lead to a deeper understanding of what is sought in the religious faith, which is, in the end, God.

1. THE CONCEPT OF PHILOSOPHICAL FAITH IN KARL JASPERS' PHILOSOPHY

In the introduction to his habilitation thesis titled „Karl Jaspers's Philosophical Faith and the Possibilities of Its Interpretation through Thomistic Philosophy“, published in 1949., Bernhard Wel-

Aquinas, Karl Jaspers, and Martin Heidegger. These were the works available at the Freiburg theological faculty, where Welte served as a lecturer throughout the entire war period. Cf. Stjepan Kušar, *Spoznaja Boga u filozofiji religije. B. Welte i božanski Bog*, Zagreb, 1996., 66.

² Cf. Markus Enders, Bernhard Welte zu Karl Jaspers' Konzept des philosophischen Glaubens. Zur Rezeption von und zur Replika auf Karl Jaspers' Konzept des philosophischen Glaubens in der christlichen Religionsphilosophie Bernhard Weltes, u: *Philosophischer Glaube und christlicher Offenbarungsglaube. Das Konzept des philosophischen Glaubens bei Karl Jaspers und dessen Rezeption und Replik im christlichen Denken insbesondere bei Bernhard Welte*, Nordhausen, 2022., 43-79.; here 44.

te explains the aim, approach, and method of his research.³ Welte, in fact, aims to „illuminate the prerequisites of Christian faith that lie within human nature through philosophical examination of the human nature“.⁴ He seeks to develop this illumination of the natural foundations of Christian faith in human nature through two phases.

First, he will argue that it is necessary to make visible the relationship to transcendence that is rooted in human nature, from which, as a second step, „existential philosophical faith“ can emerge as humanity’s natural assurance in God.⁵

In the first part of his research, Welte dedicates himself to this task through the philosophical appropriation or transformation of Jaspers’s philosophical faith, whereby, as he himself states, he follows and develops this faith from its original roots.⁶ To achieve our goal, it is essential to first understand how Jaspers perceives philosophical faith and what exactly philosophical faith entails in the thought of this German philosopher and psychiatrist.

„Philosophical faith, the faith of the thinking man, has always this distinguishing feature: it is allied with knowledge. It wants to know what is knowable, and to be conscious of its own premises. Unlimited cognition, science, is the basic element of philosophy. There must be nothing that is not questioned, no secret that is withheld from inquiry, nothing that is permitted to veil itself. It is through critique that the purity and meaning of knowledge are acquired, and the realization of its limits. Anyone who engages in philosophical activity can protect himself against the encroachments of a sham knowledge, against the aberrations of the sciences. Philosophical faith must also elucidate itself. When I philosophize, I accept nothing as it comes to me, without seeking to penetrate it.

³ An interesting fact is that in 1949, Welte renamed what he had previously called the philosophy of religion as the phenomenology of religion. Welte’s phenomenology of religion encompasses everything essential to religion, which includes theory and practice on one side, and mind and action on the other. According to Welte, it is particularly suited for describing the very essence of religion, where a person encounters and communicates with the personal Christian God through prayer, faith, and cult. Cf. Bernhard Welte, *Filozofija religije*, S. Kušar (translator), Zagreb, 2016., 11.

⁴ Cf. Markus Enders, *Idem*, 44-45.

⁵ Cf. Bernhard Welte, *Der philosophische Glaube bei Karl Jaspers und die Möglichkeiten seiner Deutung durch die thomistische Philosophie* (1949.), u: Bernhard Welte, *Denken in Begegnung mit den Denkern III. Jaspers* (Gesammelte Schriften II/3), K. Kienzler (ed.), Freiburg-Basel-Wien, 2008., 23.

⁶ Cf. Markus Enders, *Idem*, 44-45.

Faith cannot, to be sure, become universally valid knowledge, but it should become clearly present to me by self-conviction. It should become unceasingly clearer and more conscious, and by becoming conscious unfold more and more of its inner meaning.⁷

Thus, in philosophical faith, the faith by which we believe in something and the content of that faith we accept are inseparable. This refers to the faith we practice and the faith we adopt through practice, known as „fides qua creditur“ and „fides quae creditur“.⁸ This means that within the framework of philosophical faith, two aspects are inseparable: the faith by which we believe (fides qua creditur) and the content of the faith in which we believe (fides quae creditur). The first aspect, „fides qua creditur“, refers to the act of believing, or the personal faith or trust that an individual has. The second aspect, „fides quae creditur“, refers to the content of that faith, or the doctrines, teachings, or truths that are the object of that faith.

In essence, faith is not just a subjective act (the faith by which we believe) but also includes an objective content (the content of the faith in which we believe). These two aspects work together: the act of believing is directed towards a specific content, and the content of faith gains meaning through the act of believing.

Faith always means to have faith in something, but it is not merely content nor solely the act of the subject. Its foundation lies in what enables its emergence and can be expressed only through that which is neither object nor subject, but both simultaneously, acting decisively in the split between subject and object. The being that is not exclusively subject or object, but exists on both sides of this divide, is called the encompassing. Accordingly, faith appears as immediacy that stands in contrast to everything mediated by reason. Faith would be the experience of the encompassing, which is either granted to me or not.⁹

This means that faith is always directed towards something, but it cannot be reduced to just the subjective act of believing nor merely the objective content of faith. The foundation of faith lies in something that enables reality to appear, and this can be understood only as a unity of subject and object. The being that is neither subject nor object, but emerges through the divide between them,

⁷ Karl Jaspers, What is Philosophical Faith?, u: *The Perennial Scope of Philosophy*, R. Manheim (translator), Routledge&Kegan Paul LTD, London, 1950., 12-13.

⁸ Cf. Karl Jaspers, *Idem*, 13-14.

⁹ Cf. Karl Jaspers, *Idem*, 13-14.

is called the encompassing. Therefore, faith appears as an immediate experience, in contrast to everything mediated by reason. Faith would be the experience of the encompassing being, which can be either given to us or withheld, without the mediation of rational thinking.

Therefore, Jaspers will go on to say that „the one who philosophizes stands freely in opposition to their thoughts“.¹⁰ This leads us to the understanding that philosophical faith has a negative characteristic. Namely, it cannot become a creed, nor can its thought become dogma. It does not transition into dogma nor rely on anything objectively final in the world, as it only uses its own positions, concepts, and methods without being subordinated to them. This means that its essence is historical and lies in historicity. The philosophical faith does not find rest in any existing state, but always manifests through thinking and reasoning.¹¹

Furthermore, if we want to understand the concept of the encompassing, we must first illuminate what „the encompassing“ is. The encompassing, according to the German philosopher of existence, is either being itself, which encompasses us, or it is the being that we ourselves are. The being that encompasses us is consciousness and transcendence. The being that we are represents our existence, while consciousness in general, the spirit, is referred to as existence.¹² The being that encompasses us is that which exists independently of our existence; it is the world as a whole, which includes what is not „us“. Additionally, there is transcendence, which will never become the world, but in some way expresses itself through being in the world. When we say that we are consciousness in general, it means that we are an encompassing consciousness capable of comprehending everything that is thought and made aware in the forms of objectivity. Through our surrounding world, we arrive at the idea of the world to which all surrounding worlds belong, and we can make it vanish in thought, as if it does not exist. When we speak of being spirit, according to Jaspers, it means that the spiritual life is actually an idea, an impetus within us, a trace of the totality of meaning that lies within us. These three modes of the encompassing – existence, consciousness in general, and spirit – are the ways in which we are the world.

¹⁰ Karl Jaspers, *Idem*.

¹¹ Cf. *Idem*.

¹² Cf. *Idem*, 14-15.

This means that our relationship to the world is complex and multidimensional. There are three main ways in which we are connected to the world, or three aspects of our being: 1. First, the being that encompasses us refers to the world as a whole, which exists independently of us. This includes everything that is not „us“, meaning the objective world. It also encompasses transcendence – something that transcends the world and cannot be fully understood or become part of the world, but is expressed through our experience of being in the world; 2. Second, consciousness in general refers to our capacity for knowledge and awareness. We are an encompassing consciousness capable of understanding and consciously perceiving everything that is thought and presented in forms of objectivity. Our consciousness can grasp the idea of the world and surrounding worlds and, in thought, negate or make them disappear as if they do not exist; 3. Spirit, according to Jaspers, represents the idea that is an impetus within us, the source of the totality of meaning that lies within us. The spirit is the inner aspect of our being that seeks meaning and purpose, transcending ordinary existence.¹³

These three aspects – existence (our being in the world), consciousness in general (our knowledge), and spirit (our spiritual life) – together constitute the ways in which we exist and are connected to the world.

Furthermore, faith is the life from the „encompassing“, a leading and the fulfillment by the encompassing. Faith from the encompassing is free because it is not fixed in something absolutely final. It has the character of being floating (in terms of expressibility) – I do not know whether or in what I believe – and at the same time, it is unconditional (in the practice of activity and rest that arise from decision). To speak of it, a fundamental philosophical operation is required, through which we gain certainty about the „encompassing“ by transcending all objectivity in thought, which inevitably always remains objective. According to Jaspers, this means that within the „prison“ of our being, which appears in the split between subject and object, we break out of that prison, even though we cannot truly step into the space beyond it.¹⁴

This further means that faith, in this context, is understood as an experience that is derived „from something“ wider than concrete or fixed forms and definitions. Here's what it implies:

¹³ Cf. Markus Enders, *Idem*, 45-50.

¹⁴ Cf. Karl Jaspers, *Idem*, 17-21.

1. First, faith as life from the encompassing, where faith is connected to something that surpasses concrete forms and contents. It is dynamic and flexible, not confined to absolute or final definitions; 2. Freedom of faith, where Jaspers indicates that faith is free because it is not bound by final, absolute truths or dogmas. Instead, it has a flexible and open character, meaning that we may not always clearly define what or why we believe, and faith can be intangible; 3. Unconditionality - faith is expressed through activities and states of rest that arise from personal decisions, rather than from external conditions or limitations; 4. Philosophical operation - to understand this type of faith, a philosophical analysis is necessary to gain clarity about the encompassing. This means we must transcend the boundaries of concrete objects and concepts in our thinking. Although we may attempt to understand and convey this experience, we will always be limited by our subjective perspectives and cannot completely escape these frameworks.¹⁵

In summary: this process involves an attempt to transcend the boundaries of our subjective experience and the objective world, but without the possibility of completely leaving those boundaries behind. We are confined within the framework of our being and perception, even though we strive to break through these limits. Faith, in this sense, is a process that encompasses flexibility, freedom, and continuous seeking, without the possibility of complete knowledge beyond our subjective limits.

The philosophical faith, which resists superstition and faith in concrete objects, cannot be expressed in simple assertions. Objectivity must remain in constant flux and, in a certain sense, disappear, so that through this process of vanishing, a clear awareness of being is formed. Therefore, the philosophical faith is always situated within a process of merging and dissolving dialectics.

Dialectics has various meanings: it can refer to the logical movement through antitheses towards syntheses, or to the actual occurrence of opposites transforming, merging, and reappearing.¹⁶ It can also denote the dissection of oppositions into antinomies without resolution, leading to the irreconcilable and contradictory. This means that we approach the boundaries where being appears completely divided, where my true being becomes faith, and this faith encompasses what seems apparently absurd. Thus, the phil-

¹⁵ Cf. Markus Enders, *Idem*, 45-50.

¹⁶ Cf. Dialectics. *Hrvatska enciklopedija, mrežno izdanje*. Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 2013.-2024. Accessed: 13.8.2024. <https://www.enciklopedija.hr/clanak/dijalektika>

osophical faith inherently involves such dialectics within itself.¹⁷ It is a process that involves complex and continuous changes and conflicts, and cannot be easily defined or reduced to simple assertions. It is dynamic and entails a deep understanding through various forms of dialectics.

From the experience of that „nothing“, through which the philosophical faith passes (even though it does not directly emerge from it), and in the context of boundary experience, I again believe and surrender to the breadth of discovering all aspects of the encompassing in which I find myself and of which I am a part of. Philosophical faith thus manifests through the act of surrender, and its present presence arises from the experience of self-understanding through this act. For this reason, philosophy is shaped by its history, and the history of philosophy is always formed through philosophizing that takes place in the present moment. Regarding history, Jaspers will say the following: „The movement of reason passes through the historical into the non-historical“¹⁸.

This sentence suggests that reason or consciousness develops through historical context and experiences, but ultimately aims towards something that transcends history, towards universal or timeless truths. In other words, the rational process begins within historical circumstances specific to a particular time and place, but continues towards more abstract, general principles that are not tied to specific historical events.¹⁹ This can imply a striving to achieve universal truth or understanding that is valid regardless of historical context.

In all situations, reason seeks to return what is from the dispersion of indifferent elements into a movement of mutual belonging.²⁰ This sentence expresses the idea that reason, in all situations, seeks integration and connection. Reason aims to overcome a state where things are indifferent and disconnected, bringing them into a state of mutual connection and belonging. Reason attempts to

¹⁷ Cf. Karl Jaspers, *Idem*, 23.

¹⁸ Cf. Karl Jaspers, *Von der Wahrheit (Philosophische Logik, Bd. I)*, München, 1991., 114.

¹⁹ Cf. Laura Bonvicini, Katholizität und Vernunft. Zu Bernhard Weltes kritischer Rezeption des existenziellen Transzendierens und des philosophischen Glaubens bei Karl Jaspers, in: *Philosophischer Glaube und christlicher Offenbarungsglaube. Das Konzept des philosophischen Glaubens bei Karl Jaspers und dessen Rezeption und Replik im christlichen Denken insbesondere bei Bernhard Welte*, Nordhausen, 2022., 79-99.

²⁰ Cf. Karl Jaspers, *Von der Wahrheit (Philosophische Logik, Bd. I)*, 114.

establish harmony and unity where there was previously division and discord.

This further means that only with the aid of the philosophical faith, which is always original and capable of recognizing itself in others, through the myriad historical missteps in philosophy, can a path to the truth that is revealed within it be found.²¹ This statement by Jaspers suggests that the philosophical faith, which is original and capable of mutual recognition, helps in discovering truth through the complex process of philosophical inquiry and historical errors.

By applying original philosophical faith, it is possible to navigate through the complex and often confusing aspects of philosophical history and arrive at a deeper understanding of the truth that is gradually revealed.

2. THE THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF JASPERS' PHILOSOPHICAL FAITH ACCORDING TO WELTE'S UNDERSTANDING

Welte deliberately chooses Jaspers' philosophy, or rather his way of philosophizing, as a starting point because, in his words, Jaspers can be considered one of the most prominent figures in intellectual history. On the other hand, Jaspers questions religious-philosophical and fundamental theological debates in a way that is unique among contemporary thinkers, with a highly developed philosophical consciousness. More than any other thinker of his time, Jaspers constantly observes the boundary with Christianity, which he considers to be intrinsically linked to philosophical thought, and with the greatest conscientiousness maintains a separation from it.²² His work, perhaps more than any other, provides an opportunity to explore the depth of human existence and the possibilities for philosophical faith it contains.

Thus, the German philosopher of religion undertakes this study with the aim of uncovering the theological significance of the philosophical faith. To achieve this goal, it was necessary to bridge the gap between contemporary philosophy and theological

²¹ Cf. Karl Jaspers, Contents of Philosophical Faith, in: *The Perennial Scope of Philosophy*, R. Manheim (translator), Routledge&Kegan Paul LTD, London, 1950., 28-50.

²² Cf. Markus Enders, *Idem*, 45.

thought by establishing a dialogue between two intellectual circles of different historical backgrounds.

Welte believed that the concept of existential philosophical faith requires a certain kind of translation before it can demonstrate its specific strength and unique challenges in the theological domain.²³

If we consider the theological significance of the concept of philosophical faith, we find it in the following points, which we will present below²⁴:

1. First, Jaspers' philosophical faith touches upon concepts of transcendence and ultimate reality, which are crucial in both philosophical and theological contexts. He explores how human existence and understanding of the world lead to something beyond everyday experience, which is closely related to theological investigations of God and the sacred;

2. Second, Jaspers emphasizes that philosophical thinking cannot ignore Christianity and other religions, but he also argues that philosophy must separate itself from them to maintain its autonomy. Thus, in this second point, we see that there is a boundary between philosophy and religion. This raises the question of how philosophy and theology can communicate and complement each other;

3. Third, Jaspers' philosophical faith includes the concept of boundary situations, which lead individuals to realize their own limitations. Such situations often prompt deeper religious or theological reflection, as they open up questions about the meaning of life, suffering, and death;

4. Fourth, his (Jaspers') conception of philosophical faith includes dialogue with historical philosophical and religious traditions. This allows for theological reflection on the continuity and changes in the understanding of faith and human existence;

5. Fifth, Jaspers' work can serve as a „bridge“ between contemporary philosophy and theology. His philosophical faith provides a conceptual framework that theologians can use to interpret faith in the context of modern existential issues.²⁵

After a brief introduction to the theological significance of the concept of philosophical faith, we might ask: What was Welte's interest in studying Jaspers' philosophy and the concept of „philosophical faith“? We continue simply: Welte's goal in studying Jaspers'

²³ Cf. *Idem*, 45-46.

²⁴ Cf. *Idem*, 45-50.

²⁵ Cf. *Idem*, 45-50.

concept of the philosophical faith was precisely to uncover its theological significance, attempting to bridge the gap between philosophy and theology. In this way, Jaspers' philosophical faith holds significant theological potential, allowing for a deeper understanding of faith in the context of modern philosophical reflection.

Welte seeks to achieve this „transition“ in the second part of his habilitation thesis by analyzing the concept of transcendence within the anthropology of Thomas Aquinas. According to Welte, what is essentially the same as Jaspers' philosophical faith evolves into a form that is more comprehensible to Christian theology. By comparing the profound thoughts of these historically distant thinkers, Welte hopes to contribute to the „philosophia perennis“, which he considers the shared foundation or hidden soul of Western thought.²⁶

Welte's attempt to connect the two thinkers (Thomas Aquinas and Karl Jaspers) in a fruitful dialogue, but also beyond that, is observed by S. Kušar in the following way:

„In such a dialogue between Thomas Aquinas and Karl Jaspers, Welte hopes to uncover new possibilities and paths for Christian thought. He seeks to salvage the phenomena of existential philosophical faith starting from Thomas's ideas, reading Thomas's texts in an unusually phenomenological manner. Therefore, it is both possible and justified to compare Jaspers and Thomas without imposing violence on their ideas; it is necessary to listen to each in his own language, while carefully observing whether there exists the same primordial origin in both cases, despite their differences in the structure of thought“²⁷.

In the first part of his habilitation thesis, Welte gradually elaborates on the concept of transcendence according to Karl Jaspers' philosophy over six paragraphs. Although transcendence always occurs as the fulfillment (Vollzug) of the very essence of human being, it happens in secrecy, and therefore it is necessary to illuminate this process through thought.²⁸

What Jaspers calls philosophical faith is not a system or a systematic doctrine but a description of human transcendence that encourages active participation in this process. In this transcendence, a person surpasses the immanence of the world to reach a transcendent goal inherent in the very act of transcending. Here we understand why this topic is so important to Welte and how he managed to connect Karl Jaspers' existentialist thought with the theology of Thomas Aquinas. Transcendence is, in this context, a philosophical term for the mystery that religious tradition calls God.

²⁶ Cf. *Idem*, 48-49.

²⁷ Cf. Stjepan Kušar, *Spoznaja Boga u filozofiji religije. B. Welte i božanski Bog*, 67-86.

²⁸ Cf. *Idem*.

Therefore, this process or movement begins in the immanence of human existence, passes through its awakening into existence, and is directed toward transcendence, reaching its full form in philosophical faith.²⁹

Among these passages, only the sixth is relevant to our topic, as Welte focuses on Jaspers' concept of the philosophical faith. In his approach to this concept, Welte does not consider Jaspers' writings on the philosophical faith that were first published in 1948., which were not yet included in his habilitation thesis, as we learn from his bibliography. Instead, he relies on volumes 2 and 3 of „Karl Jaspers' Philosophy“ and his books on existential philosophy. Furthermore, Welte assumes that, in Jaspers' understanding, faith represents a form of transcending existence.³⁰ And since (philosophical) conviction is the culmination of philosophizing and transcending according to Jaspers, Welte will address this aspect at the end of his reflections on transcendence in the philosophy of Karl Jaspers.

3. THREE LEVELS OF UNDERSTANDING PHILOSOPHICAL FAITH AND POTENTIAL MISUNDERSTANDING ALONG THE WAY

Welte then elaborates on Jaspers' understanding of faith in three stages. In the first stage, existence develops from being through a movement of fear that is uncertain of its goal. In the second stage, from this uncertainty, the „certainty of existence“ of faith can emerge, which in the third and final stage preserves fear within faith.³¹

In his comments on the first phase of (philosophical) faith, which he calls „fear as a movement toward faith“, Welte uses vivid language to describe the „journey of existence toward itself“ as it confronts the abyss and the unsupported depth of its own powerlessness and uncertainty. According to Jaspers, the existential meaning of this fear is to keep existence open to its transcendence. The intensity of this existential fear arises from its relation to freedom, which, due to possible but never fully understood guilt, threatens to lose its substance in the dark abyss of being.

The fear of the possible reality of one's own guilt and its self-destructive consequences for existence gives this fear the character

²⁹ *Idem.*

³⁰ *Idem.*

³¹ Cf. Markus Enders, *Idem*, 49.

of a movement or journey whose destination remains in mysterious, irreducible darkness, beyond anything that can be called *something*.

The attempt to objectify fear can „never (...) reduce or overcome it“, as it keeps the transcendent abyss open to existence and is therefore crucial for genuine questions about being. However, the impartial reader of these reflections might question whether the fear of human existence is too expected, or rather, inappropriate, if existential certainty of philosophical conviction is possible only in and through it.

The courage to confront fear and overcome it, as invoked by Jaspers and later by Welte, leads to the second stage of (philosophical) faith according to Jaspers' understanding – faith as the „certainty of existence“³². This would mean that philosophical faith represents the way in which existence, and thus being itself in its transcendence, becomes certain. It is the philosophical fulfillment of transcendence.

Welte explicitly postpones his question about the possibility of such a definition of faith in order to first examine Jaspers' comments on three possible misunderstandings regarding the reasons for faith. The first of these misunderstandings is the assumption that faith is knowledge, to which Jaspers responds that faith is not knowledge. Since knowledge is tied to something specific and thus finite, faith, which arises from the transcending movement of existential fear toward an unobjectifiable abyss, can never be knowledge. Faith, therefore, can only emerge in darkness or infinite uncertainty of ignorance, „which can only be preserved in that darkness“³³. Since faith is not connected to anything objective, it cannot be understood as a preliminary stage of knowledge, given that faith always and primarily relates to itself, while the sense of „I am“ does not appear in knowledge. This awareness transcends the boundaries of knowledge.

The second misunderstanding arises from the assumption that faith can be justified, to which Jaspers responds by asserting that faith is ungrounded. (Philosophical) conviction is ungrounded because the rational reasons for believing can only be finite contents, from which infinite content of existential faith related to being as a whole can basically never arise. Additionally, „it is part of the nature of the transcendent abyss that opens up in fear that every-

³² Cf. *Idem*, 49-51.

³³ Cf. *Idem*, 51-52.

thing is called into question³⁴. Therefore, all possible reasons for believing are questionable if the fundamental issue is whether anything has meaning, existence, and actual truth.

Since philosophical faith itself grounds everything, it can no longer be justified but only self-grounded. Here, an impartial reader might have questions. The issue with this thesis, which claims that philosophical conviction is absolutely unjustifiable, lies in the fact that no rational reasons can be provided for this conviction. Therefore, strictly speaking, this conviction should not be called "philosophical faith," but could rather have a purely existential and hermetic character, and should not be considered a reasoned faith. According to Jaspers, (philosophical) faith has incomparable existential importance for existence but is not absolute in itself, like transcendence itself.³⁵

Finally, in his understanding of Jaspers, Welte also rejects the third misunderstanding, which is the notion that faith can be desired as an objective goal, even if existence considers itself responsible for its (philosophical) conviction. According to Jaspers, faith does not have control or power over the infinity of the transcendent abyss in which it moves; rather, faith has control over existence and its own faith only to the extent that these are their source. Therefore, faith, as the awareness of the ground of being in transcendence, never has the character of willing, but rather willing something – that is, every intentional act of will precedes and underlies it. At this point, an impartial reader might raise a critical question. Even if philosophical faith has a fundamental character of a gift from transcendence – which would necessarily have a personal nature – and this gift must be accepted by existence, it implies that willing is necessary to even come to existence and for it to be effective.³⁶

Namely, the gift does not negate the recipient's freedom. Therefore, the act of willing and the freedom of existence do not need to be eliminated in order to receive the gift of the philosophical faith. Although (philosophical) conviction does not arise from an intentional act of will and thus cannot be willed, it must be received as a gift from transcendence. Jaspers and, subsequently, Welte likely consider this assumption to be justified. However, if philosophical conviction cannot be known, justified, or willed, the question arises

³⁴ Cf. *Idem*.

³⁵ Cf. *Idem*, 52.

³⁶ Cf. *Idem*, 52-53.

as to how it can be possible at all – this is the question that Welte has attempted to address.

He responds that the root and source of that conviction can only be found in the „non-objective openness or inscrutability of transcendence“. It requires a „first leap toward truth“ or „courage of transcendence“ to uncover the brilliance of original, godless light and to recognize that it is „not a void nothing“, but rather being from which all emerges. Welte refers to this foundation and standpoint of the self in the dark and daunting transcendence of being as the „ascent of faith as trust in the foundation of existence“³⁷.

According to both authors, „trust in the foundation of being“ represents an existential alternative to human despair. This „ascent to truth“ has the character of a gift but also demands „absolute and utmost dedication, and thus responsibility“³⁸.

However, Welte emphasizes that the three stages of philosophical faith - 1. fear of existence as an impetus for faith, 2. faith as the certainty of existence, and 3. (existential) ascent to the truth of transcendence - should not be understood as empirical stages, even though they have an empirical – psychological form. The substance of these stages does not lie in this form or in the immanent but in the transcending essential structure of philosophical faith. Welte adds that Jaspers did not explicitly describe this sequence of stages in this form, but everything contained in this sequence becomes visible to Jaspers, and we will discuss this further.

2.1. Fear of ascent, fear of the code, and fear as the final thing in faith

Welte explains how, according to Jaspers, in achieving the philosophical faith and its certainty of existence, as well as in the existential ascent to the truth of transcendence, existence does not find a final rest or state in which to repose. Fear of existence does not disappear in faith but is preserved. Welte elaborates on this idea in three parts: „Fear of Ascent“, „Fear of the Code“ and „Fear as the Final Thing in Faith“³⁹.

Under the term „fear of ascent“, Welte denotes the feeling and awareness of one’s own insecurity and the possible fall or loss inherent in philosophical faith and its ascent toward transcendence. For

³⁷ Cf. *Idem*, 53.

³⁸ Cf. *Idem*, 54.

³⁹ Cf. *Idem*, 55.

Welte, this fear is insurmountable and represents an act of human freedom in existence, which is characteristic of human existence in time.

While the „fear of ascent“ is associated with the philosophical faith and its relationship to disbelief or its negation, the philosophical faith also experiences fear regarding its own positivity, which Welte refers to as „fear of the code“⁴⁰.

According to Jaspers, the essential infinity of transcendence can only be reflected through the infinite forms of existence in the process of existential transcendence. However, none of these forms of existence, which Jaspers refers to as the „codes of transcendence“, possesses „exclusive infinity“ because, as finite figures, they are merely forms of the infinite.⁴¹ Despite their indeterminacy, these codes are not indifferent; there exists a hierarchy among them based on the degree of proximity or distance from transcendence that each possesses.

In the infinity of the codes, there is neither exclusivity nor indifference, but rather a historical „responsibility toward every possible form of existence of the philosophical faith“⁴². It can never be proven which form is the „only correct“ one, as all forms are possible codes and therefore „correct“, while all (as codes) are insignificant in relation to transcendence.

For this reason, we all bear a certain responsibility because, amidst the infinite diversity of possible paths in the face of transcendence, we are confronted with our own existence and experience a profound and never fully resolved confusion at our core. Welte attributes this existential uncertainty, which arises from the different degrees of codes, to deeper differences in existential proximity and distance from transcendence, and to varying ways of existing or transcending oneself. Since existential transcendence and philosophical faith are always in a „tension between defiance and devotion“, which denotes the tension between the perceived unconditional desire to be what one is (transcendent self-affirmation), close to indignation (resentment due to unjust treatment), and self-forgetting, unconditional devotion.⁴³

⁴⁰ Cf. *Idem*, 55-56.

⁴¹ Cf. Karl Jaspers, *Šifre transcendencije*, M. Živanović (translator), Banja Luka, 2018., 72-86.

⁴² Cf. Markus Enders, *Idem*, 55-56.

⁴³ Cf. *Idem*, 56.

Precisely between these two mentioned realities (defiance and devotion) lies transcendent, the philosophical faith, which can represent both a „profound light in existence“ bringing everything that exists into clarity, consistency, and fidelity, as well as the „unconditionality of my dark path“, in which I ultimately break apart consistency and devotion as forms of existence in order to remain faithful only to my transcendence in deep darkness.⁴⁴ Due to this internal tension, the philosophical faith is not a „clear and definitive form“, but rather remains „in a state of balance (limbo, on the edge) of fear over the depth of its own possibilities“.

Finally, in his deep interpretation of Jaspers' philosophical faith, Welte focuses on the second, ultimate dimension of fear, which he refers to as „fear as the final thing in faith“⁴⁵. This fear, as manifest in the philosophical faith, relates to the „fear of ascent“ in its relationship to disbelief, i.e., the potential for decline and loss, as well as the „fear of the code“ in the context of one's own positivity and ambiguity. This ultimate dimension of fear belongs to the positive core or the deepest essence of faith itself, as fear preserves faith, i.e., „the full breadth of its openness“ to transcendence.⁴⁶ Thus, with Jaspers and following him, faith can be defined as a positive way of „being afraid“. Nonetheless, considering this intriguing thesis, the question arises of how fear, despite its restrictive and confining psychological effect, can contribute something positive for people?

This fear might stem from the philosophical faith, which, as Welte speculates, could come *perhaps from being itself*. If this were the case, it could undermine human existential transcendence and thus the philosophical faith, implying that the faith itself could fail because its direction or the path toward which transcendence calls would no longer be clear. However, it can be critically observed that this fear cannot originate from being itself but should rather arise as a fear of one's own failure within faith itself.

Nevertheless, as Welte continues, „faith also bears its own failure by transitioning into its 'quiet and final form of tolerance'“⁴⁷. For, according to Welte's citation of Jaspers, tolerance still relies on being, despite the failure of faith, since it lacks its code: „Only the certainty of this transcendence, which could manifest itself without the language of transcendence at the darkest turning point,

⁴⁴ Cf. *Idem*, 57.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Idem*, 58.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Idem*.

⁴⁷ *Idem*.

becomes a support in existence, providing a peace that is no longer deceptive⁴⁸.

At this „extreme point of the philosophical movement, to which Karl Jaspers calls through his work“, faith is reduced to „almost complete submission to fear“, becoming one with being and existence „without the protection of illusion“⁴⁹. This faith encompasses all fear, and fear, in turn, encompasses all faith. Only in this ultimate fear can faith be completely sincere, true, whole, and ultimate.

However, this apotheosis of faith, imbued with fear and uncertainty, is not only counterintuitive but also unconvincing. While it may be true that the philosophical faith, like the religious faith, can never be completely free from fear, faith as trust in existence or transcendence represents a diametrical opposite to fear and thus works against it, reducing its impact on existence.⁵⁰ Therefore, fear cannot be the ultimate foundation of faith.

INSTEAD OF A CONCLUSION

In the final paragraph of his habilitation thesis, Bernhard Welte examines the relationship between the philosophical faith and the Christian faith in revelation. He emphasizes that philosophical faith, as a central and high aspect of the „*philosophia perennis*“, not only encompasses Jaspers' concept but also represents a general notion of the philosophical ascent of thought towards the transcendence of human depth.⁵¹ This includes both the existential transcendence of Karl Jaspers and the metaphysical reflection on being by Thomas Aquinas. Then, the philosophical illumination of transcendence in Karl Jaspers and „*Ipsum esse*“⁵². We will not delve into the metaphysical reflections of Thomas Aquinas in this context.⁵³

⁴⁸ Cf. *Idem*, 58.

⁴⁹ Cf. *Idem*, 59.

⁵⁰ Cf. *Idem*.

⁵¹ *Idem*.

⁵² This term is associated with Christian ontotheology, in which God is defined as the absolute. Thomas Aquinas describes Him as the subsisting being (*ipsum esse per se subsistens*), which means that all beings do not derive their origin from themselves but from God, who has his foundation solely in himself and is therefore absolute. As such, He escapes our cognitive faculties and can only be known through faith. Regarding this: Cf. Bernhard Welte, *Gesammelte Schriften III/2. Kleinere Schriften zur Philosophie der Religion*, Markus Enders (ed.), Freiburg-Basel-Wien, 2008.; 26 and 31.

⁵³ Cf. Markus Enders, *Idem*, 60.

Philosophical faith, as a persistent certainty („certa cognitio“) in the reality of the divine being accessible to humans through their nature, forms a prerequisite for understanding and faith in religious and theological revelations. It serves as the foundation for understanding God's relationship with humanity.

However, the philosophical idea of existence and transcendence, as well as the ascent of the philosophical faith, serve as an „indispensable test of the words of revelation and faith in revelation“⁵⁴. Christian theology holds that the word of revelation cannot be in actual conflict with natural reason, although it transcends it. Therefore, natural rational knowledge serves as a negative and critical measure of revelation, meaning that philosophical certainty of existence must, as a prelude to faith, simultaneously act as a negative standard for the possibility of the Christian faith. It shows where faith cannot or should not be accepted. Philosophical „faith“ when genuinely realized, develops a critical awareness toward every claim of revelation, making philosophy, as the „handmaid“ of theology, essential for performing this service with the greatest freedom.⁵⁵

This critical corrective function of the philosophical faith or conscience is tasked with protecting the religious person from potential slips into excessive finality, ensuring that the authenticity and purity of the transcendental experience are appropriately assessed.⁵⁶ Furthermore, the philosophical faith serves as a guardian of human existential authenticity, the loss of which would inevitably lead to a loss of the transcendent perspective. The critical examination of the possibility of the religious faith in the incarnational revelation is aimed at initiating and sharpening the central theological question of the possibility of Christian faith in Jesus Christ as the ultimate and comprehensive manifestation of God in human history.⁵⁷

The question of the conditions for „the possibility of genuine Christian faith within the framework of genuine philosophical faith“ is of crucial importance in today's context. In this way, Welte has thoroughly clarified the relationship between the philosophical faith

⁵⁴ Cf. *Idem*, 60-61.

⁵⁵ Cf. Bernhard Welte, *Der philosophische Glaube bei Karl Jaspers und die Möglichkeit seiner Deutung durch die thomistische Philosophie* (1949.), in: Bernhard Welte, *Gesammelte Schriften II/3. Denken in Begegnung mit den Denkern III. Jaspers*, Klaus Kienzler (ed.), Freiburg-Basel-Wien, 2008., 289.

⁵⁶ Cf. Markus Enders, *Idem*, 61.

⁵⁷ Cf. Bernhard Welte, *Gesammelte Schriften II/3. Denken in Begegnung mit den Denkern III. Jaspers*, 291.

and Christian faith in revelation, defining the role of the Catholic Church in reconciling natural rational knowledge of philosophy with the supernatural knowledge of Christian revelation.⁵⁸ This discussion also addresses the historical development of the Church's teaching interpretation.

Welte interprets faith as an openness to the world, consisting in the existence of being, that is, in every meaningful relationship of a person with what is beyond them, thus in the goal of their intentionality. Faith is realized in the free and intentional movement of the individual towards the Other and vice versa, the Other towards the individual. Since it is real and concrete, it can only occur in history, and its significance is infinite. In its historicity and finitude, it always needs reaffirmation, so that one can continually start something new with the Other. Faith, as meaning, foundation, and premise of every human activity, enables every further decision and stance, including the hypothetico-deductive method used in modern science, which plays a decisive role in advancing human possibilities.

The movement towards the Other, that is, the intentional overcoming of oneself, is the most important and significant way in which an individual can encounter the real and historical God who calls, by facing the Other. In this analysis, when not explicitly specified, the term „Other“ refers not only to a person or an object but also to God. The encounter with another person is shown as an event where one can meet God Himself, when the other person is acknowledged in their elusive nature and given free space within oneself. In both cases – God and another person – the relationship involves choosing the Other and fully trusting them. The Other is, after all, radically different from me, and this difference is irreducible. Welte himself does not always clearly distinguish in his lecture „Catholicity and Reason“ the transition from remaining open to the truth of other people to remaining open to the truth that is God Himself.⁵⁹ This relationship with another person can, so to speak,

⁵⁸ In this paper, we did not consider Jaspers' objections to Christianity; instead, we focused exclusively on Karl Jaspers' concept of philosophical faith. However, it should be noted that Welte partially addressed these objections in his work *Heilsverständnis*, which was published in 1966, nearly 20 years after his habilitation. Our goal here was to show how Jaspers' philosophical faith leads Welte to the concept of religious faith, in which the Nameless, Unconditional, and Infinite-ultimately God-acquires the dimension of Mystery that encompasses all existence.

⁵⁹ Cf. Laura Bonvicini, *Idem*, 87.

be considered a training through which we learn and accept the relationship with God.

This further means that through the intentional transcendence of one's own egoism, or the opening towards the Other, an individual can encounter God. The fundamental idea is that through the relationship with the Other, whether it is another person or God, the individual develops the capacity to recognize and accept what is different, and through this interaction, can experience an encounter with the Divine.

We conclude this reflection by emphasizing that faith, whether philosophical or religious, shapes the spirit of the age, with the philosophical faith illuminating the religious faith, and the religious faith enlightening the philosophical faith.⁶⁰

„FILOZOFSKA VJERA“ KARLA JASPERSA I NJEZIN TEOLOŠKI ZNAČAJ U FILOZOFIJI RELIGIJE BERNHARDA WELTEA

Sažetak

U ovom radu nastojali smo pokazati da li je i na koji način filozofiju moguće promatrati kao misaono osvjedočenje čovjekova uzleta k Bogu, prvenstveno kroz prizmu pojma filozofska vjera. Stoga je cilj ovoga rada bio prikazati važnost Jaspersove filozofske misli za Bernharda Weltea te kako se pojam „filozofska vjera“ nadopunjuje s pojmom „religijska vjera“. Pokazalo se kako oba ova pojma imaju ishodište u onom „Bezimenom“ jer u konačnici i misao i vjera proizlaze i vraćaju se uvijek istome. Upravo smo kroz taj ugao gledanja prepoznali važnost Jaspersove „filozofske vjere“ i njezina teološkog značaja za Bernharda Weltea.

Ključne riječi: filozofska vjera, teološki značaj, religijska vjera, Bernhard Welte, Karl Jaspers

⁶⁰ Cf. Bernhard Welte, *Die Glaubenssituation der Gegenwart* (1949.), u: Bernhard Welte, *Gesammelte Schriften IV/1. Hermeneutik des Christlichen*, B. Casper (ed.), Freiburg-Basel-Wien, 2006., 197-229., here 198.