

## **EDUCATION BASED ON THE DIALOGICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD AND PEOPLE: BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF MARTIN BUBER'S PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION**

### Abstract

The philosophical thought of Martin Buber especially focuses on the topic of education. He is not a mere educational theorist but a true and the most dedicated educator who gave priority to the fundamental values of human life that flow from the original relationship with God, which is an integral part of personal identity. The first part of the article deals with the traditional Jewish thought, Hasidism, about a man and his role in the world, his hiding from God and turning back to Him and the man lost in the chaos of egoism. The second part refers to the basic principles of Buber's philosophy of dialogue. The encounter with the other is structural need of personal existence, because the other complements what the man's state lacks as a final being. The third part focuses on dialogical education that aims at forming the person's character thus capable of overcoming the alienation of the contemporary world. The last part of the article outlines the religious education. Namely, everyone in one's own most intimate sense of self is called to religiosity. We can experience God in every encounter. It is not good to impose religion as well as a rule-based system to young people, but rather to revive their faith; awake their readiness to meet with the reality of the Unconditioned. One should be raised for dialogue with oneself, with others, and with God.

*Key words: education, walk, turning back, dialogue, relationship, creative abilities, character, religious education, Hasidism, philosophy of dialogue, God.*

### **Introduction**

Our society is facing the globalization processes in the contemporary world. Globalization affects almost all areas of life threatening to make the traditional lifestyles of people more universal and uniform, which ultimately weaken the ancient concept of upbringing and education. A

competency-based learning system disregards the humanistic approach to upbringing and education thus neglecting traditional values. Buber's thought is structurally marked by Jewishness and the Jewish legacy, so his concept of education leads us to phenomenological and ontological paradigms which guide man to his human self-realization through relationships. Taking into consideration the etymology of the German noun "Erziehung", which comes from the verb "ziehen" and means to 'drag', 'draw', we can conclude that the noun refers to the very essence of education, which means to bring out the best in man. This thought is central to Buber's theory of education. Buber is not a mere educational theorist but a genuine educator who, from the very beginning, directs man to the true values of life that flow from his relationship with God. As every man strives for the "I-the eternal Thou" relationship, so the aim of education process is to revive that divine dimension within him. From the very beginning, the man's life is basically religious, 'Thou- man' is transcendental. God is Transcendence for the faithful if it is not the object of thinking or the burden of fear and ignorance, if the part of the world is not "It" but a person. However, a growing secularization characterized by materialism and relativism weakens the influence and role of religion in shaping Christian worldviews in Western civilization, so young people are becoming less interested in faith and its values. Deeply rooted in his philosophical thought, Buber's main purpose of education is the education for genuine dialogue, the development of the creative capacities people we are born with; in autonomy and independence, and in education for responsibility, i.e. the purpose of education is to develop the character of person that would be able to respond and accomplish a task entrusted to him/her by God.

### **1. A Way of man – the way back to true self and God**

The teaching of Hasidism<sup>1</sup> and dialogical-based perception of the essence of human being determined Martin Buber's philosophical thought. Buber often refers to the Hasidic tradition emphasizing the value of the community, interpersonal relationships, a dialogical way of life, and the meaning of common activities. Hasidism promoted a positive attitude toward the world as well as the importance of worship and God's plan. The limiting factors of every religion, the cleavages between religious and worldly in man, between "life in God" and "life in the world" have been overcome in Hasidism. According to it, the worldly life has divine roots, so the relationship between God and man means not serving God, but

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<sup>1</sup> Hasidism was the 18th century Jewish movement of pietists founded in Poland. The founder of this social and religious movement was Baal Sem Tov (his real name is Jisrael ben Eliezer). Based on mystical tradition, the movement rejected asceticism and mesianism, and taught about a man's true redemption through his inner religious spirit.

a true encounter between God and man, man and man. Applying the Socratic Method in his approach to Hasidism, Buber claims that Jewish culture has a deep prophetic dimension that significantly influenced it. Thus, the old mystical Jewish tradition<sup>2</sup> becomes the key to reading and understanding of Buber's thought which is obviously associated with fideism as well as existentialism, aestheticism and idealization of Eastern Jewish culture. Applying such approach to the legacy of the Jews, he rejects an attempt of medieval thought to harmonize religious truths and the truths of faith as well as the views of the Enlightenment and Idealism on mind and revelation.<sup>3</sup>

At the Woodbrook Congress in in Bentweld, in April 1947, Buber presented an article on "The Path of Man", which was published one year later. His work "*Der Weg des Menschen nach der chassidischen Lehre*" is more a pedagogical booklet, dealing with the man and the way of his life, than a manual for pious instruction. Man's true walking with God starts in Eden Garden. The man does not answer to God's question. Adam hides himself to avoid rendering accounts, to escape responsibility for his way of living. To escape responsibility for his life, he turns existence into a system of hideouts. In trying to hide from God, man is hiding from himself. God does not give up on a man, but asks him a question designed to awaken him and to destroy his system of hideouts that helps him to overcome this emotion. God wants to show man to what pass he has come and to awake in him the great will to get out of it.<sup>4</sup>

So long as *man does not face the question asked by God, his life will not become a way, walk with God.*<sup>5</sup> Whatever success and enjoyment he may achieve, whatever power he may attain and whatever deeds he may do, his life will remain way-less, so long as he does not face the Voice. When Adam faces the Voice he perceives his enmeshment, and avows: "I hid myself"<sup>6</sup>; this is the beginning of man's way. The decisive heart-searching is the beginning of the way in man's life; it is the beginning of a human way, the way to God. For there is the wrong kind of heart-searching, which does not prompt man to turn, and put him on the way,

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<sup>2</sup> "Tradition constitutes the noblest freedom for a generation that lives it meaningfully, however, it is the most miserable slavery for the habitual inheritors who merely accept it tenaciously and complacently." M. Buber, *Discorso sull'Ebraismo*, Milano, 1996, 11.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. A. Akrap, *Fenomenologija prisutnosti. Apsolutno, religija i filozofija u Misli Martina Bubera*, Bogoslovska smotra, 85 (2015) 4, p. 985-987. Martin Buber "In his numerous works he praises the whole Hasidic movement, but refers not to the actual teaching of Hasidism when it comes to the non-Jews..." I. Shahak, *Židovska povijest, židovska religija. Tri bremenita tisućljeća*, Zagreb, 2006, 54.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. M. Buber, *Der Weg des Menschen nach der chassidischen Lehre*, Verlag Lambert Schneider, Heidelberg, 1977, 10-11.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. M. Buber, *Der Weg des Menschen nach der chassidischen Lehre*, 12.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. M. Buber, *Der Weg des Menschen nach der chassidischen Lehre*, 12.

but by representing his turning as hopeless. It is a sterile kind of heart-searching which leads to nothing but self-torture, despair and still deeper enmeshment. It drives man to a point where he can go on living only by demonic pride, the pride of perversity.<sup>7</sup>

In order to empower himself for turning to God, it is important for man to recognize his role and task in the world. Since the persons are naturally unequal we should not strive for their equality. There is no general way to the service of God; walking with God means a personal relationship with Him.<sup>8</sup> Men are essentially unlike one another, and which therefore does not aim at making them alike. All men have access to God, but each man has a different access. "Each man has his role and task in a manner determined by his particular nature, ... so each one of us in his own way shall devise something new in the light of teachings and of service, not the repetition of something that another has already achieved, but what has not yet been done."<sup>9</sup> So, man's returning to God is the glorification and celebration of his own dignity and awareness of his own values. "It is the duty of every person in Israel to know and consider that he is unique in the world in his particular character and that there has never been anyone like him in the world, for if there had been someone like him, there would have been no need for him to be in the world. Every single man is a new thing in the world, and is called upon to fulfill his particularity in this world."<sup>10</sup> Every man's foremost task is the actualization of his unique, unprecedented and never recurring potentialities, and not the

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<sup>7</sup> When the Rabbi of Ger (Góra Kalwarya near Warsaw), in expounding the Scriptures, came to the words which Jacob addresses to his servant: "When Esau my brother meets thee, and asks thee, saying, Whose art thou? and whither goes thou? and whose are these before thee?," (Genesis 32, 18) he would say to: "Mark well how similar Esau's questions are to the saying of our sages: 'Consider three things. Know whence you came, whither you are going, and to whom you will have to render accounts.' Be very careful, for great caution should be exercised by him who considers these three things: lest Esau ask in him. For Esau, too, may ask these questions and bring man into a state of gloom." There is a demonic question, a spurious question, which apes God's question, the question of Truth. Its characteristic is that it does not stop at: "Where art thou?," but continues: "From where you have got to, there is no way out." This is the wrong kind of heart-searching, which does not prompt man to turn, and put him on the way, but, by representing turning as hopeless, drives him to a point where it appears to have become entirely impossible and man can go on living only by demonic pride, the pride of perversity. M. Buber, *Der Weg des Menschen nach der chassidischen Lehre*, 12-13.

<sup>8</sup> Rabbi Baer of Radoshitz once said to his teacher, the "Seer" of Lublin: "Show me one general way to the service of God." The zaddik replied: "It is impossible to tell men what way they should take. For one way to serve God is through learning, another through prayer, another through fasting, and still another through eating. Everyone should carefully observe what way his heart draws him to, and then choose this way with all his strength." M. Buber, *Der Weg des Menschen nach der chassidischen Lehre*, 14.

<sup>9</sup> M. Buber, *Der Weg des Menschen nach der chassidischen Lehre*, 15.

<sup>10</sup> M. Buber, *Der Weg des Menschen nach der chassidischen Lehre*, 15.

repetition of something that another, has already achieved.”<sup>11</sup> Mankind’s great chance lies precisely in the unlikeness of men, in the unlikeness of their qualities and inclinations. God’s all-inclusiveness manifests itself in the infinite multiplicity of the ways<sup>12</sup> that lead to him, each of which is open to one man.<sup>13</sup>

The way that leads man to God can be shown in a unique way through the knowledge of one’s own existence, one’s own values or lifestyle aspirations. “In every man is something precious that is not in anyone else”.<sup>14</sup> Thus, to realize his true task in the world, man cannot turn away from the things and beings he encounters, but by hallowing his relationship with them, with what manifests itself in them as beauty, pleasure, enjoyment. Therefore asceticism should never gain mastery over a man’s life. Certainly, nature needs man for what no angel can perform on it, namely, its hallowing.<sup>15</sup>

However, the basic foundations of Hasidic teaching, as presented by Buber, i.e. man’s beginning with himself, the unity of his being,<sup>16</sup> choosing his particular way and forgetting self, seem to contradict. The questions than arise: How come ‘forgetting oneself’ is consistent with the others and fits into the whole as a necessary link, as a necessary stage of man’s growth? What is man to begin with himself for, to choose his particular way for, to unify his being for? The reply is that to begin with oneself means only to start from oneself, but not to end with oneself.<sup>17</sup>

‘Turning’ stands in the center of the Jewish conception of the way of man and means here something much greater than repentance and acts of penance; it means that by a reversal of his whole being, a man who had

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<sup>11</sup> The wise Rabbi Bunam once said in old age, when he had already grown blind: “I should not like to change places with our father Abraham! What good would it do God if Abraham became like blind Bunam, and blind Bunam became like Abraham? In the same spirit, Rabbi Zusya, a short while before his death, “In the world to come I shall not be asked: ‘Why were you not Moses?’ I shall be asked: ‘Why were you not Zusya?’” M. Buber, *Der Weg des Menschen nach der chassidischen Lehre*, 16.

<sup>12</sup> God does not say: “This way leads to me and that does not,” but he says: “Whatever you do may be a way to me, provided you do it in such a manner that it leads you to me.” M. Buber, *Der Weg des Menschen nach der chassidischen Lehre*, 17.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. M. Buber, *Der Weg des Menschen nach der chassidischen Lehre*, 17.

<sup>14</sup> M. Buber, *Der Weg des Menschen nach der chassidischen Lehre*, 18.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. M. Buber, *Der Weg des Menschen nach der chassidischen Lehre*, 20.

<sup>16</sup> The unity of man’s being is one of the fundamental postulates of the teaching of Hasidism. Life has taught us to observe ourselves through mind-body dualism, and so we are prone to having delusion that the body is superior to the soul and that it is or over-riding concern in life. This attitude leads us to detachment, indecision, and denial of any change in life.

<sup>17</sup> Here’s the answer: “Not the goal in itself”. So, there is saying: beginning with oneself should not be taken as the goal itself (in the sense of adopting an elevated self-importance), but searching for the center of the self should become one’s starting point. M. Buber, *Der Weg des Menschen nach der chassidischen Lehre*, 37.

been lost in the maze of selfishness, where he had always set himself as his goal, finds a way to God, that is, a way to the fulfillment of the particular task for which he, this particular man, has been destined by God. Repentance can only be an incentive to such active reversal; he who goes on fretting himself with repentance, he who tortures himself with the idea that his acts of penance are not sufficient, withholds his best energies from the work of reversal.<sup>18</sup> Christianity is essentially concerned with the salvation of man's soul making each man's salvation his highest aim. This is the one of the essential doctrines of Christianity. Judaism regards each man's soul merely as the most sublime form of self-intending. Thus, self-intending is what Hasidism rejects most emphatically.<sup>19</sup> Judaism regards each man's soul as a serving member of God's Creation which, by men's work, is to become the Kingdom of God; thus no soul has its object in itself, in its own salvation. True, each is to know itself, purify itself, perfect itself, but not for its own sake — neither for the sake of its temporal happiness nor for that of its eternal bliss — but for the sake of the work which it is destined to perform upon the world of God. Thus, one should forget himself and think of the world.

The environment which man feels to be the natural one, the situation which has been assigned to him as his fate, the things that happen to him day after day, the things that claim him day after day — these contain his essential task and such fulfillment of existence as is open to him.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> "In a sermon on the Day of Atonement, the Rabbi of Ger warned against self-torture: "He who has done ill and talks about it and thinks about it all the time does not cast the base thing he did out of his thoughts, and whatever one thinks, therein one is, one's soul is wholly and utterly in what one thinks, and so he dwells in baseness. He will certainly not be able to turn, for his spirit will grow coarse and his heart stubborn, and in addition to this he may be overcome by gloom. What would you? Rake the muck this way, rake the muck that way — it will always be muck. Have I sinned, or have I not sinned — what does Heaven get out of it? In the time I am brooding over it I could be stringing pearls for the delight of Heaven. That is why it is written: 'Depart from evil and do good' (Psalm, 37,27) — turn wholly away from evil, do not dwell upon it, and do good. You have done wrong? Then counteract it by doing right." M. Buber, *Der Weg des Menschen nach der chassidischen Lehre*, 38-39.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. M. Buber, *Der Weg des Menschen nach der chassidischen Lehre*, 40.

<sup>20</sup> "Rabbi Bunam used to tell young men who came to him for the first time the story of Rabbi Eizik, son of Rabbi Yekel of Cracow. After many years of great poverty which had never shaken his faith in God, he dreamed someone bade him look for a treasure in Prague, under the bridge which leads to the king's palace. When the dream recurred a third time, Rabbi Eizik prepared for the journey and set out for Prague. But the bridge was guarded day and night and he did not dare to start digging. Nevertheless he went to the bridge every morning and kept walking around it until evening. Finally the captain of the guards, who had been watching him, asked in a kindly way whether he was looking for something or waiting for somebody. Rabbi Eizik told him of the dream which had brought him here from a faraway country. The captain laughed: "And so to please the dream, you poor fellow wore out your shoes to come here! As for having faith in dreams, if I had had it, I should have had to get going when a dream once told me to go to Cracow and dig for treasure under the stove in the room of a Jew — Eizik, son of

For Baal-Shem, the founder of Hasidism, no encounter with a being or a thing in the course of our life lacks a hidden significance. The people we live with or meet with, the animals that help us with our farm work, the soil we till, the materials we shape, the tools we use, they all contain a mysterious spiritual substance which depends on us for helping it towards its pure form, its perfection. If we neglect this spiritual substance sent across our path, if we think only in terms of momentary purposes, without developing a genuine relationship to the beings and things in whose life we ought to take part, as they in ours, then we ourselves shall be debarred from true, fulfilled existence.<sup>21</sup> If we maintain holy intercourse with the little world entrusted to us, if we help the holy spiritual substance to accomplish itself in that section of Creation in which we are living, then we are establishing, in this our place, a dwelling for the Divine Presence.<sup>22</sup> God wants to come to his world, but he wants to come to it through men: this is the mystery of our existence, the superhuman chance of mankind.

## 2. The basic ontological structure of the 'I-Thou' relation

Buber grounds his philosophy of dialogue on the underlying principle "In the beginning was the relationship"<sup>23</sup> and each relationship is reciprocity, the primordial category of human reality. By insisting on the relationship, Buber challenges the central position of the subject and thus the metaphysical foundation of the modern epoch. In a speculative endeavor to determine the essence of man, modern philosophy has closed the subject within the province of his subjectivity.<sup>24</sup> For Buber, the man is not

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Yekel, that was the name! Eizik, son of Yekel! I can just imagine what it would be like, how I should have to try every house over there, where one half of the Jews are named Eizik and the other Yekel!" And he laughed again. Rabbi Eizik bowed, trabbi elled home, dug up the treasure from under the stove, and built the House of Prayer which is called "Reb Eizik Reb Yekel's Shul". "Take this story to heart", Rabbi Bunam used to add, "and make what it says your own: There is something you cannot find anywhere in the world, not even at the zaddik's, and there is, nevertheless, a place where you can find it." M. Buber, *Der Weg des Menschen nach der chassidischen Lehre*, p. 43.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. M. Buber, *Der Weg des Menschen nach der chassidischen Lehre*, p. 46-47.

<sup>22</sup> "Where is the dwelling of God?" This was the question with which the Rabbi of Kotzk surprised a number of learned men who happened to be visiting him. They laughed at him: "What a thing to ask! Is not the whole world full of his glory?" Then he answered his own question: "God dwells wherever man lets him in." M. Buber, *Der Weg des Menschen nach der chassidischen Lehre*, p. 49. We can let God in only where we really stand, where we live, where we live a true life.

<sup>23</sup> M. Buber, *Ich und Du*, in: *Werke - Schriften zur Philosophie*, I, München - Heildeberg, 1962, p. 90.

<sup>24</sup> "What then am I? A thing which thinks. What is a..." R. Descartes, *Metafizičke meditacije*, Demetra, Zagreb, 1993, p. 54. Thus, according to Descartes' definition, a man is closed within the province of his subjectivity.

a closed substance because his life is permeated and intertwined with a network of human relationships, so Buber's thought on philosophy and relational personalism,<sup>25</sup> offer an alternative to modern theoretical and practical approaches to the world,<sup>26</sup> the new paradigm ego and equality renewal, the right to independence and identity of the other; the relationship with the other than becomes an ethical space, a space of realization of one's own personality: "*Alles wirkliches Leben ist Begegnung – All real life is a meeting*".<sup>27</sup> The other becomes the determining factor of my moral and existential growth, but also a prerequisite for man's infinite progression to the transcendence as a true essence.<sup>28</sup>

The structure of man is essentially dialogical. One's own ontological state depends on and is defined by the other. "*Man becomes me in relation with Thou.*"<sup>29</sup> Meeting with the other is manifested as a structural need for personal existence, since the other complements what is lacking in my state of one final being. For Buber, "*I – Thou*" relationship is fundamental. "*To be present*" is the starting point for every true I-Thou relationship and means the opening of I to Thou, coming closer to the other in his uniqueness, integrity and reality.<sup>30</sup> In order to realize his humanity,<sup>31</sup> the dialogical person does not consciously feel the other as an obstacle, "I-Thou" relation is direct<sup>32</sup> and as such is characterized by exclusivity<sup>33</sup> because dialogue can take place only between two persons.

Accepting of the differences in 'Thou' is the act of acknowledgment and acceptance and is a *crucial characteristic of dialogue* based on the aforementioned components. To accept the diversity of one who faces

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<sup>25</sup> We can define it as a philosophical and theological schools of thought that regard personhood (or "personality") as the fundamental notion, as that which gives meaning to all of reality and constitutes its supreme value; it is the center of cognition and the purpose of ethical action in which the relationships with God, the other and nature are ontically determined.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Z. Kindić, *Misaona figura odnosa u filozofiji Martina Bubera*, in: *Godišnjak fakulteta političkih nauka*, 4 (2010) 4, 149-150.

<sup>27</sup> M. Buber, *Ich und Du*, p. 85.

<sup>28</sup> "The extended lines of all genuine relationships intersect in the eternal Thou."- M. Buber, *Ich und Du*, p. 128.

<sup>29</sup> M. Buber, *Ich und Du*, p. 97.

<sup>30</sup> "We know presence only through the Thou (...)." M. Buber, *Ich und Du*, p. 86.

<sup>31</sup> "The relation aims to the contact (touch) with the thou". M. Buber, *Ich und Du*, p. 120.

<sup>32</sup> "The relation to the Thou is direct. No system of ideas, no foreknowledge, and no fancy intervene between / and Thou. No aim, no lust, and no anticipation intervene between I and Thou...; Every means is an obstacle". M. Buber, *Ich und Du*, p. 130.

<sup>33</sup> Each authentic relation is marked by exclusivity. "Each authentic relationship with some being or some essence in the world is an exclusive relationship. His Thou is separate, it is set apart, it is unique and it stands opposite." M. Buber, *Ich und Du*, p. 130.

me means *to accept him in his essence and in his reality*.<sup>34</sup> Who does not accept the factor of diversity creates the ontological boundary and lacks the basic word of the "I-Thou". The person who enters the relationship does not choose an interlocutor and this inability to choose based on ontology relationships shows that *the recognition of the other is not choice-based phenomenon*.

Relationships always seek mutuality that includes autonomy, independence of the partners in dialogue and unity in relation. It is not bipolar causality of I-Thou, which is expressed in giving and receiving. "Relation is reciprocity. My Thou affects me, as I affect it."<sup>35</sup> The ability to enter into a relationship is manifested in the interdependence of action and depends on the freedom of man.<sup>36</sup> Dialogue does not end in either I or Thou, but between I and Thou. "In one true dialogue ... what is essential does not end in either of the two participants, it does not end in a neutral way ... rather than in a very precise and accurate way between the two ..."<sup>37</sup> and "has its roots where the man sees his otherness in the other... I call this sphere – which is rooted in the existence of man ... and which has not been fully understood yet, conceptually – sphere of "interrelation" (*das Zwischen*). .. the primordial category of man's reality ... "<sup>38</sup> So history is happening in the interjection. *Zwischen* is a real place, a place of relationship. Buber refers to the sphere of interpersonal relation as the ontology of the interhuman "*Ontologie des Zwischenmenschlichen*", i.e. "*das echte Gespräch ist eine ontologischer Sphäre* – genuine dialogue is an ontological sphere".<sup>39</sup> The ontology of the interhuman becomes the basic concept of Buber's anthropology.

The relationship is the central principle of the definition of man for Buber who reminds us that every mode of realization of the relationship corresponds to a different way of life chosen by each "I". *The "I" of the primary word of I-It makes its appearance as individuality and becomes conscious of itself as a subject ... The I of the primary word I-Thou makes its appearance as a person and becomes conscious of itself as a subjectivity. Egos appear by setting them apart from other egos. Individuality makes its appearance by being differentiated from other individualities. A person makes his appearance by entering into relation with other persons.*<sup>40</sup> Fur-

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. H. Kirchhoff, *Dialogik und Beziehung im Erziehungsverständnis Martin Bubers und Janusz Krzaks*, Haag Herchen Verlag, Frankfurt/M., 1988, 63.

<sup>35</sup> M. Buber, *Ich und Du*, p. 88.

<sup>36</sup> "Here I and Thou freely confront one another in mutual effect that is neither connected with nor coloured by any causality. Here man is assured of the freedom both of his being and of Being." M. Buber, *Ich und Du*, p. 112.

<sup>37</sup> M. Buber, *Das Problem des Menschen*, p. 405.

<sup>38</sup> M. Buber, *Das Problem des Menschen*, p. 404.

<sup>39</sup> M. Buber, *Elemente des Zwischenmenschlichen*, p. 286.

<sup>40</sup> M. Buber, *Ich und Du*, p. 120.

therly: "No man is pure person and no man is pure individuality. None is wholly real, and none wholly unreal. Every man lives in the twofold I. But there are men so defined by person that they may be called persons, and men so defined by individuality that they may be called individuals. True history is decided in the field between these two poles."<sup>41</sup> "The moment of mutual relation changes the underlying perspective of the persons in relation, thus their mutuality is more than a category of human relationships, it is an anthropological reality in which the man and his neighbor form a community (*Miteinander*). The "I-Thou" relation is the meeting (*Begegnung*) of persons. For Buber, the "I-Thou" relation is grace.<sup>42</sup> Buber's thought on education is based on his philosophy of dialogue, of the meeting.

### 3. Dialogical education

When Buber refers to education, it is not only directed or limited to the individual, but also to the life of community, different groups and cultures. He defines education as: "Educating means to act in such a way that the (general) choice of the world acts through a person to another person, so the strange paradox is that the person mediates in this event or allows something to happen."<sup>43</sup> Referring to education, Buber points out to an authentic human exchange. A modern man, unfortunately, forgets the truth; he is not only a being in the world but also a being for the world, and no man is an island, entire in itself, so that no one can influence it. We all live in the flow of universal reciprocity and therefore we learn from all that belong to the world, including animals. "Our teachers educate us and our deeds shape us."<sup>44</sup> In his analysis of education, Buber points out the two seemingly distinctive but interrelated and interdependent essential components of our education. It is about education (*Bildung*) and the worldview (*Weltanschauung*)<sup>45</sup> since "the education of a person as well as the community building greatly depend on individuals and their efforts in mastering and maintaining their relationships with the world, which are manifested in different worldviews."<sup>46</sup> Accordingly, it is a matter of educational diversity that excludes any imposed or uniform model of education, the educators should be warned about. Buber is aware that educators' objective judgements are not freed from their personal considerations that are influenced by their vision of the world

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<sup>41</sup> M. Buber, *Ich und Du*, p. 122.

<sup>42</sup> "Das Du begegnet mir von Gnaden – The Thou meets me through grace." M. Buber, *Ich und Du*, p. 85.

<sup>43</sup> M. Buber, *Reden über Erziehung*, p. 804-805.

<sup>44</sup> M. Buber, *Ich und Du*, p. 88.

<sup>45</sup> A general perspective on life and the world embraces the highest life principles.

<sup>46</sup> M. Buber, *Bildung und Weltanschauung*, p. 811.

and life. The relativity of human understanding is a kind of worldview, so educators should be aware of their biases and maintain the intellectual integrity coping with the prevailing diversity of worldviews.

Education is always an organized process that involves three major components of human existence: ontological (the building of personhood, the positive features and attitudes, a view of life and the world), ethical (character, moral, society, work attitude; every man wants to be a subject in the process of creating things), and social (man's position within the sphere of interpersonal relationships, self-evaluation, and the shaping of attitudes and behavior toward others who are different).

For Buber, mutuality is the basis of every symmetrical relationship. However, each relationship does not imply full reciprocity and equality, especially asymmetric relation, such as the relationship between educator and student. Dialogical education is the fundamental task of all involved in the process of education due to the ever-increasing possibilities of communication among people. The encounter requires acceptance so that the other can uphold his/her personhood and feel affected by a positive environment filled with security and freedom.

According to Buber's philosophical thought on education, the fundamental goal of education is in developing the creative potential<sup>47</sup> in autonomy and integrity inherent to everyone and education for responsibility. "The relation in genuine education is one of pure dialogue."<sup>48</sup>

From the very beginning of life every human is gifted by the original creative impulse (*Urhebertrieb*).<sup>49</sup> The child, so every man at any age and in his own nature, wants to create, to make things. Unleashing the inward creative power of man is one of the prerequisites of upbringing. Creativity should not be guided by the greed, the lust of possessing the world's wealth, but by the desire of man to express himself. Creativity refers not merely to one's natural creative talent but rather the spontaneity of man, his naturalness and genuineness.<sup>50</sup> If the creative impulse of an individual is not awoken, it will never lead to an essential element of building a true human life and active participation in mutuality. Creativity can be accessed in various ways depending on the model of teaching. Old methods of teaching focused on prescripts and approved models, thus moving away from the child neglecting his creative spirit. Contrastively, modern methods of teaching, rooted in the scale of values and individualized

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<sup>47</sup> "Creativity originally denotes the divine calling to the hidden essence in the non-essence." M. Buber, *Reden über Erziehung*, p. 788.

<sup>48</sup> M. Buber, *Reden über Erziehung*, p. 803.

<sup>49</sup> Using this term Buber wants to highlight the difference between human creativity and divine creation. To be creative means to create something that has not been created yet. M. Buber, *Reden über Erziehung*, p. 789.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. M. Buber, *Reden über Erziehung*, p. 792.

knowledge, offered a completely different approach to the child, stimulating his creativity under the watchful eye of the teacher, i.e. his criticism and leadership. While the first approach provokes resignation or stiff resistance, the second approach stands in favour of providing freedom to the child but at the same time directing him to respect the form. This almost unobserved encounter, this utmost delicacy of approach – perhaps the raising of a finger, a questioning look – is one half of the educational activity.<sup>51</sup> The modern educationists advocate for freedom in teaching criticizing ancient educationists who recommended control and strict discipline. Education should enable a person to overcome the alienation of the contemporary world, individualism, narcissism, and solipsism. Life between birth and death can have its fulfillment if it is a dialogue.” ... I and Thou come into being only in the world of people, thus ‘I’ becomes a being only in relation with ‘Thou’. A subject matter of philosophical science of man that includes researches in anthropology and sociology should be a relationship between man and man. If you consider the individual by himself, then you see of man just as much as you see of the moon; only man with man provides a full range. If you consider the aggregate by itself, then you see of man just as much as we see of the Milky Way; only man with man is a completely outlined form. Consider man with man, and you see human life, dynamic, twofold, the giver and the receiver, he who does and he who endures, the attacking force and the defending force; the nature which investigates and the nature which supplies information, the request begged and granted-and always both together, completing one another in mutual contribution, together showing forth man.”<sup>52</sup>

Since we are involved in our own life experiences through; thinking, saying, acting, creating, influencing, we come into being through our responses. Buber confirms that today’s man is increasingly seeking for and finding the tyranny of ‘It’ in the world, instead of the presence of a *Thou*, an authentic presence.<sup>53</sup> The goal of education is a comprehensive character education; therefore a true education fulfills its purpose only through character development. Any form of education should strive to realize its aim; the aim of education should be cultivating personal moral integrity, understood as a concrete presence but also as a future possibility; it should be, as repeatedly emphasized in the pedagogical essays of German philosopher – the education of a ‘great character’.<sup>54</sup> The “great character” is neither an originally isolated “self-sufficient individual, nor a member of the natural (organic) community,”<sup>55</sup> as seen by Freud, but

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. M. Buber, *Reden über Erziehung*, p. 792-793.

<sup>52</sup> M. Buber, *Das Problem des Menschen*, p. 407.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. G. Milan, *Educare all’incontro. La pedagogia di Martin Buber*, Città Nuova, Roma, 1994, p. 114.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. G. Milan, *Educare all’incontro*, p. 51.

<sup>55</sup> G. Milan, *Educare all’incontro*, p. 54-55.

the dialogical man, so Buber rejects both individualistic and collectivist educational approaches as negative, since they weaken man and make him inactive.

In his essay “Über *Charaktererziehung*”, Buber analyzes the relationship between the educator and the student and points out the necessity of observing the person’s integrity, presence, current state, possibilities and future. He contemplates on the integrity of the person as the unity of body and soul, freed by any influence of the educator, as opposed to the character, which he understands as a link between the individual’s uniqueness and a unity of his attitudes and deeds which can be affected by education.<sup>56</sup> Character formation primarily means harmonizing one’s life and acting with natural law; being intelligent and active in shaping one’s own attitudes and personality, having a clear vision of life and being ready to resist the influence of others.

For Buber education is asceticism. “He points to the ascetic character of education, which, in responsible love, is joyfully directed to the world of our life entrusted to us, in which we should work and should not interfere it with the ‘will to power’ or to ‘eros’.”<sup>57</sup> Thus, asceticism comes from responsibility for entrusted life, and as such includes a self-discipline and renunciation of the bodily and the earthly needs in the interest of the individual or the community, and thus leading to the transformation of life that makes him able to overcome all the obstacles that separate him from his foundation; referring to the educational process, it includes renunciation of negative factors such as the ‘will to power’ and ‘eros’ that negatively affect the dialogical character of education.<sup>58</sup>

Neither ‘eros’ nor ‘will to power’ can constitute an educative relationship. The ascetic character of the true educator consists in his sense of responsibility and inclination not to enjoy or control the student, but primarily to determine the person’s proximity or distance for the sake of good relationship rather than enjoyment.

Eros is choice; choice made from an inclination. This is precisely what education is not. The man who is living in ‘eros’, chooses the beloved, the modern educator finds his student there before him. For Buber, being a loving modern educator is not about choice or inclination, but about loving each student he finds before him.<sup>59</sup>

The relationship between the educator and the student is realized through a relationship in which the other is regarded as a neighbor, as a “companion” on the way whom I try to understand and confirm as the

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. M. Buber, *Über Charaktererziehung*, p. 817.

<sup>57</sup> M. Buber, *Reden über Erziehung*, p. 800.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Askeza, in: O. Mandić, *Leksikon judaizma i kršćanstva*, Matica Hrvatska, Zagreb, 1969, p. 53.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. M. Buber, *Reden über Erziehung*, p. 799.

definite person he is in his potentiality and actuality; to look at him and treat him as partner in a “bipolar relationship”, as an interlocutor in the educational dialogue.<sup>60</sup> A student is not considered as a “tabula rasa” but as an authentic, active, competent and gifted interlocutor who contributes to the continuous educator growth in the process of education. Thus, the process of education always involves the educator enhancement called by Buber the “*die Erfhrung der Gegenseite*”<sup>61</sup>, the experience of the other which includes empathy, immersing into the other’s feelings, the capacity to understand others’ emotions and as such is a precondition for socialization.

Buber indicates that the educative relationship is realized through a “world of solidarity before God, where the educator is raised to become a tool,”<sup>62</sup> a representative or God’s deputy, one that facilitates and accompanies the other, but also one who has the opportunity for one’s own improvement and fulfillment.<sup>63</sup> The educator becomes a true mediator through whom the student opens to the world. “The educator who helps to bring man back to his own unity will help to put him again face to face with God.”<sup>64</sup>

The educator, the true God’s deputy, is not the master of the educative relationship because of the task assigned to him; to realize personalized education in the way God would have done it, in a specific and individual way, because each person is an “Individual” and should be treated accordingly. So, educative relationship should be based on a trusting and mutually affirming reciprocation required for genuine listening, questioning and communicative dialogue.<sup>65</sup> Buber affirms that education must lead man to live responsibly and in solidarity with others, not only in the community but also before God.<sup>66</sup>

The true and genuine goal of education is not learning, knowledge acquisition, to come to knowledge and truth, or to reveal what is deeply hidden in man (maieutic), but above all to empower the subject to meet with creative and formative forces in the world; to educate person for dialogue, to empower him to discover the true values of both the individual and the community. The goal of education is to form the “image of God” in man.

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<sup>60</sup> Cf. C. Soares, *La filosofia dell’educazione in Martin Buber*, Puntopace, Taranto, 2011, p. 101.

<sup>61</sup> M. Buber, *Reden über Erziehung*, p. 801.

<sup>62</sup> M. Buber, *Reden über Erziehung*, p. 787.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. C. Soares, *La filosofia dell’educazione in Martin Buber*, p. 102.

<sup>64</sup> M. Buber, *Reden über Erziehung*, p. 832.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. M. Buber, *Über Charaktererziehung*, p. 820.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. M. Buber, *Reden über Erziehung*, p. 807.

#### 4. Faith Formation and Openness to the Divine

Man can find the purpose and meaning of life through his intimate relationship with God. By his nature, he is “*homo religiosus*”, and the desire for God is written in his heart. He seeks to overcome his constraints through religious experience. The relationship between God and man is primordial and an integral part of human identity.

While all other relationships have utilitarian elements, God cannot be used as a means to achieve the goal. Thus the human relationship becomes the symbol of perfect relationship. “The relation to a human being is a proper metaphor for relation to God.”<sup>67</sup> It is an ontic relation, since one bears witness to God by being accountable for the other.

The relationship as such becomes a privileged path that leads us to God where “The extended lines of relations meet in the eternal Thou. Every particular Thou is a glimpse through (*Durchblick*) the eternal Thou. By means of every particular Thou primary word addresses the eternal Thou<sup>68</sup>, so this meeting with the Thou of man and of nature is also a meeting with God.”<sup>69</sup> “From the very beginning, Buber’s thought is oriented towards religious relationship”.<sup>70</sup>

The relationship between God and man is “interdependent”, but this “interdependence” is not its essential element. God needs man to accomplish His creation,<sup>71</sup> which is the beginning of a dialogical life. You know always in your heart that you need God more than everything; but do you not know too that God needs you — in the fullness of His eternity needs you.<sup>72</sup> The relationship with the eternal Thou is not a closed relationship within itself, but it is open to man’s task and witnessing. Influenced by Hasidic teaching,<sup>73</sup> Buber indicates to an ethical dimension of the religious sphere.<sup>74</sup>

The man’s task is to realize God in the world, but he wants to possess God, thus moving him into the realm of the world of ‘It’, he wants to have Him in time and space<sup>75</sup> and makes Him the object of his worship,<sup>76</sup> so for

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<sup>67</sup> M. Buber, *Ich und Du*, p. 148.

<sup>68</sup> M. Buber, *Ich und Du*, p. 128.

<sup>69</sup> M. Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue*, London, 1955, p. 58.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. R. Misrahi, *Martin Buber - Philosophe de la Relation*, Paris, 1968, p. 65.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. M. Buber, *Ich und Du*, p. 132.

<sup>72</sup> “Man is needed, he is a need of God.” A. J. Heschel, *Čovjek nije sam*, Rijeka, 2010, p. 164.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. M. Buber, *Ich und Du*, p. 133.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. M. Buber, *Gottesfinsternis*, p. 577.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. “Man desires to possess God; he desires a continuity in space and time of possession of God. He is not content with the inexpressible confirmation of meaning.” M. Buber, *Ich und Du*, p. 155.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. P. Vermes, *Martin Buber*, Edizione Paoline, Milano, 1990, p. 86.

Buber, religion<sup>77</sup> poses the greatest danger in breaking the original dialogue. We are more concerned about God than about the world, and the essence of religion and particularly religiosity is the action in the world that must be visible. We shape the human figure of God in the world.<sup>78</sup> Buber distinguishes religion from religiosity. While religiosity is the creative principle through which human feelings of adoration and bowing down before the Unconditioned are expressed through various forms and expressions, religion is the organizational principle, the sum of customs and teachings through which it is manifested and in which the religiosity of a people is contained, strengthened by the commandments and dogmas that are transmitted to the future generations as binding endurance.<sup>79</sup>

Life cannot be divided between a real relation with God and an unreal relation of *I* and *It* to the world. He who knows the world as something by which he is to profit knows God also in the same way.<sup>80</sup> In his human relationship with God, Buber saw the meaning of life and of the entire existence, so “God can be met in every encounter”.<sup>81</sup>

Original dialogue between God and man is maintained through faith which should be inseparable from man. It should permeate his everyday living being the meeting place between man and God, for only in this way man can realize his personality and find the meaning of life.

For Buber, one of the major problems of contemporary Jewishness is the problem of the young people's attitudes towards religion. Namely, in the most intimate sense, every person is called to religiosity.<sup>82</sup> What is the relationship between young people and religion? Youth is the time of one's total opening to the fullness and diversity of the world, and thus to the eternal life. At that time, man has not yet opted for the truth that would be worth of obscuring all other views. His thirst for knowledge knows no bounds other than those imposed by his own experience; there are no other responsibilities in life than that for his own life. But sooner or later he will have to subjugate his own knowledge and will to the restrictive laws of being and obligation and to decide on his adherence to religious doctrines and various precepts. “Whoever imposes religion to youth closes all the windows of one's own building except one; closes all

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<sup>77</sup> Religion is “the exile of humankind; its homeland is the fullness of life lived in ‘the face of God’, a life that is rooted in the fear of God in which ‘all security is the mystery’”. M. Buber, *Gottesfinsternis*, p. 528-529.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. M. Buber, *I racconti dei hassidim*, Ugo Guanda Editore, Parma, 1992, p. 377-378.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. M. Buber, *Discorsi sull'Ebraismo*, Milano, 1996, p. 71-72.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. M. Buber, *Ich und Du*, p. 151.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. X. Tilliette, *Il Cristo dei non credenti e altri saggi di filosofia cristiana*, Roma, 1994, p. 165.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. M. Buber, Discorso intorno alla gioventù e alla religione, in: *Discorso sull'Ebraismo*, Gribaudi, Milano, 1996, p. 135.

roads except one.”<sup>83</sup> There is no good in imposing religion to young people and involving them into a system of binding rules, but it is necessary to awaken their faith, their readiness to meet with the Unconditioned. Young people should not be taught about the superiority of one religion over another, but they need to know that everything can become a means of revelation; that every deed in its shining unity is dedicated; that “every man has his own moment,” in which doors are opened for him to hear the Word. Human life is nothing but dialogue, so whatever man does is a response or his failure to respond to what meets him. The entire history of the world is a dialogue between God and His creatures. Every revelation is a call and a mission. History as a dialogue between God and mankind takes place between these two poles: the call invoked by God and the final positive response. Young people need help to discover their call and to avoid any inertia in discovering the metaphysical in their own being, in order to respond to the call of the Absolute, in dignity.<sup>84</sup>

Their life should not be determined by God’s laws and rules because the divinity of human life is above the law and rules. The religious principles and commandments are a variable outcome of the attempt of the human spirit to act in harmony with the Unconditioned. God does not change, his manifestation changes through the human mind. The action of the Unconditioned reaches out every man, at least once, but youth is the period in which It meets everyone. In that time, every man experiences a moment when the Infinite opens in his own being and penetrates him, but only if he recognizes him; he recognizes the Unconditioned by the strength of his glimpse and through the creation of symbols, through his surrendering and response. In the most intimate sense, every man is called to religiosity; It is the true opening of a young man; His spirit opens not only to all parts but to the whole.<sup>85</sup> But most of people miss this moment, they remain in the circle of faith they have inherited or turn away from it; they continue to believe in and live according to what the symbols of faith impose in their forms or refuse to follow the religious rules, not supporting the meeting with the Unconditioned but rather *turning to something that is limited*. Whoever neglects this call for the encounter lives in the profane and limited world full of confusion where there is no success. The Unconditional acts through man only when he is surrendered to Him; allows Him to shake and transform him, only when he responds in the totality of his own being; by his mind through the symbolic perception of Godhead; by his soul through the love for the Wholeness, by desire through the actions of his life.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> M. Buber, *Discorso intorno alla gioventù e alla religione*, p. 134.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. M. Buber, *Discorso intorno alla gioventù e alla religione*, p. 135-136.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. M. Buber, *Discorso intorno alla gioventù e alla religione*, p. 135.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. M. Buber, *Discorso intorno alla gioventù e alla religione*, p. 137.

However, instead of accepting the call, man turns away from God which is the first mistake inherent to the previous generation, inclined to superficial rationalization; the second mistake refers to a superficial approach which is far more serious. A false consent is worse than rejection. In some way, faith can reach out the detached one, but not the *deceitful heart*. Man can be a rationalist, free thinker, atheist, but he cannot be a passive recipient of spiritual wealth, the one who merely talks about God.<sup>87</sup> Such man is alienated and sees nothing but his own existence, thereby harnessing his inner potential and the power of the divine in him.

The one who is truly connected is aware of the three elements of the community. The first element precedes his existence, and consists of *the scriptures and the sacred history of the people* witnessed by words and deeds; their signs depict the relationship between the people and God. The second element encircles him i.e. his community neighbors in whom, though in degenerate form, the divine is present and perseveres in the dark tragedy of everyday life which is divinely illuminated by the original light from above. The third element is hidden within very man, *the ancient memory of the deepest levels of his own soul*, from which he hears the word more truthful than the ones coming from the surface of one's own life experience; but it is only heard by the truthful surrender to God and by the attached one.<sup>88</sup> These are three sources of strength for a young man; the threefold basis for his relationship with the Unconditioned, since His action on an individual is merely a symbol of His acting on mankind. Unlike a Christian, a Jew holds his own ground, and even when formal forms of religion do not give him answers, he needs not to turn to other spheres of life because, "there is simply no sphere of life that is not closely related to religion."<sup>89</sup> Young Europeans today feel depressed and alienated. This is the consequence of intellectualism, the hypertrophy of the intellect separated from the organic life, the parasitic intellect contradictory to the natural spirituality that includes the totality of life. Such intellect is alienating because the bridges of human communion such as friendly love, companionship and partnership lead from man to man, from spirit to spirit, not from brain to brain. The parasitic nature of the intellect makes man isolated; it is a powerful loneliness of people isolated and lost in their anxiety and depression. Young people want to escape such loneliness; they long for communion so strongly that they are willing to sacrifice themselves for an illusory communion. The parasitic

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<sup>87</sup> Buber once wrote, "If to believe in God means to be able to speak about him in the third person, then I certainly do not believe in God, but if to believe in him means to be able to talk to him, then I believe in God." M. Buber, *Begegnung*, Heidelberg, 1986, p. 56.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. M. Buber, *Discorso intorno alla gioventù e alla religione*, p. 137-138.

<sup>89</sup> M. Buber, *Discorso intorno alla gioventù e alla religione*, p. 140.

intellect of Jewish youth, provoked by an anomalous life in exile and loneliness, is even more powerful. Moreover, a majority of young Jewish people, especially on the western part, are separated from their people and organic relations with other people are illusory. Therefore, they eagerly seek for communion. What can satisfy this part of the Jewish youth and help them *to overcome loneliness (the product of intellectualism), is a true attachment to the creative religious life of their own people*. Man should be raised for dialogue with himself, dialogue with the other and God; it should be a truthful conversation, because truth is life for religion and not just a concept. Briefly, it can be communicated through words but it is revealed in the most appropriate way through the life of a man of solid faith. Religious truth, unlike philosophical, is not a common formulation; it is a path, not just a thesis, it is a process.<sup>90</sup> When asked about what the truth is, Buber answers: "God is the truth as well as man; they are both truth as much as they are both living beings". The individual corresponds to God. For "to be a man means to be related to the divinity", an individual realizes the "image" of God at the moment he becomes an individual. God is the truth because He is (exists), the individual is the truth because he finds himself in his own existence.<sup>91</sup> We find ourselves in the process of opening ourselves to others and through them to God.

## Conclusion

Buber's philosophy offers an alternative to modern theoretical and practical approaches to the world. It restores equality, the right to independence and the other's person identity; the relationship with the other becomes an ethical space, the space of realization of one's own personality. The encounter with the other is structural need of personal existence, because the other complements what is lacking in our state of one final being.

The life of every man is a dialogue that starts from the moment when God called creatures from nothingness into life. Faith maintains this genuine dialogue of life, so it should not be separated from the person but rather permeate his everyday life, which is the meeting place of God and man. It is therefore impossible to observe the man's life without his relationship with God since all segments of his life are intertwined by Him. Buber observes education look through the prism of the man's relationship with God. Education is essentially dialogical and should enable a person to overcome the alienation of the contemporary world, individualism, narcissism and solipsism. Education is asceticism that flows from responsibility for life, which free us from the negative factors that change

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<sup>90</sup> M. Buber, *Discorso intorno alla gioventù e alla religione*, p. 141-144.

<sup>91</sup> M. Buber, *Die Frage an die Einzelnen*, p. 225.

the dialogical character of education expressed through 'will to power' and 'eros'. The space in which such education is realized is the world of solidarity before God, where the educator is the tool, the deputy of the true God, the bridge that helps the person to return to the original unity in order to stand again before God's face. The goal of education is to form the "image of God" in man, building a great character, the dialogical man who lives responsibly and in solidarity not only with the community but also before God, in an atmosphere of trust and truth, for "being a man means to be related to the divinity". Indeed, Buber proves not merely to be an educational theorist but a true and genuine educator who points to the fundamental values of human life that arise from the primordial relationship with God being an integral part of personal identity.