

Ryszard STRZELECKI

CHRISTIAN HOPE IN THE POSTMODERN WORLD

On the Essence and Decline of Hope,
and on the Prospects for Its Restoration,
as seen from the Perspective of the Philosophy of Culture

It is not Christian hope that postmodern culture takes away from the human being; rather it deprives the human being of the dignity belonging to him or her as a person. And it is precisely this dignity which is an indispensable condition for hope. It is only as a result of the decline of hope that the subject's relationship with the Absolute begins to wane and becomes marginal, vulnerable, vacillating, and ultimately illusory.

The present considerations are focused on the issue of Christian hope, its absence from the reality of the contemporary society, and the potential conditions for its restoration. A major part of the paper addresses the phenomenon of the absence of hope characteristic of the current phase of the development of Western culture. Hope is essentially a sentiment cherished by individual rather than collective subjects, and since it is founded on one's personal faith, its object is individual, intimate, and unique. The individual experience hope embraces is, in its core, incommunicable and unimpartable. Thus the realm of hope is that of fundamentally autonomous and individual human personal existence. The characteristics of hope which will be discussed in the paper can be also referred to the domain of human spirituality as such.

A scholarly insight cannot fully probe into the depth of personal experience, which can be grasped only indirectly, by way of interpretation of the spiritual evidence and ego-documents available. The present considerations, which will follow the latter path, are intended to address the general traits of hope which are manifested in and constitutive of any of its Christian renditions.

However, the paper will not focus merely on the definition and theory of hope adopted for the above-formulated purpose, but it will address the condition and situation of hope in modern culture, in particular such phenomena as the current transformations of hope accompanied by its decline. The main goal is to probe the pathways on which hope becomes absent from modern culture and to address the resulting question of how to restore Christian hope in today's world. In this respect, an analysis of modern culture as such is of importance, since culture provides the middle area between the core of Christianity, its *depositum fidei*, and the human subject, to whom hope is a way to experience transcendence and tackle mystery, as much as it is part of his or her existential

condition. Thus the focal point of the present analysis is the human being seen from the perspective of metaphysics. Only such an approach can guarantee a highest quality anthropological analysis postulated by a classical reading of the core of the Christian message. Disregarding the metaphysical background of the problem would undermine the essence of the concept of hope based on the Christian *depositum fidei*. It is impossible to discuss hope as a Gospel virtue (or a heroic one) outside the metaphysical and theological context of the human person.¹ The metaphysical approach is a model one and it is crucial to the theological explanation of the meaning of the category of hope.

However, our considerations will not be confined to the realm of theology, since they will involve a much broader context designated by various disciplines employed in culture studies. Thus, while taking into consideration metaphysical and theological issues, we will concentrate on the status of hope² in modernity or, to be more precise, in the postmodern era. A significant issue is that of the multifold nature of hope in contemporary culture. While the teaching on hope provided by the Church in the field of theology is precise and exact, and the concept in question remains stable, the main characteristic of the postmodern era is continuous fluctuation of cultural factors, which triggers also transformations of the meaning of hope, which in turn generates the pressure to adapt one's thinking to the currently 'valid' understanding of the concept. Thus there is, on the one hand, hope as defined in the teaching of the Catholic Church (and addressed, in particular, by Benedict XVI in his encyclical *Spe salvi*³) and, on the other, the actual experience of a human individual. The mental space between the two is filled by culture with its various factors affecting the contents of the original concept by modifying, reducing, or even questioning them either in their entirety or in some aspects. The present considerations will address precisely the changeability of hope experienced by modern man.⁴

¹ Metaphysical personalism developed within Thomism is a theory of man which expounds the issue of Christian hope and provides intellectual tools helpful in culture analysis (which, in our case, will be reflection on postmodern culture).

² The terms "hope" and "Christian hope" are used interchangeably throughout the paper. The text generally addresses Christian hope conceived as a heroic virtue attained owing to God's grace and resulting in an act of will aimed at being granted salvation, which is the highest good, and which consists in loving and knowing God in eternity. Thus, in the present paper, 'hope' is tantamount to 'Christian hope.'

³ See Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi*, November 30, 2007 (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2007).

⁴ The article makes use of a broad concept of culture and disregards its narrowing specifications provided by various disciplines. The general understanding of culture in question embraces the human activity as such and its effects (artefacts, actions, attitudes, behavioral patterns and dispositions, norms and principles, appraisals and evaluations, and even the sphere of the unconscious) established and transmitted in the society in both the synchronic and the diachronic senses. Exploration of culture cannot be narrowly perceived as the research object of an individual field of study, but it

It is important to note that the contingency of the contents of hope is by no means a secondary issue: Neither in an individual life nor in the social reality can the pressure from cultural factors be avoided. The moment our thinking goes beyond the accepted Christian ethos (the truths of faith and the creed) the significance of the impact of culture begins to surface. A human being, who lives in the society in a particular time, cannot function outside culture, cannot develop his or her subjectivity other than in the given cultural context, and simply cannot continue his or her existence outside it. Culture continually forms us, pervades our spirituality, sets our standards, 'molds' us according to the socially dominant image of what a human life should be like. We must not forget that culture embraces the domain of the human spirit and therefore its impact on man cannot be simply disregarded. This cultural 'determinism,' which can be only partly and only sporadically controlled by an individual, interposes itself between Christian hope, which addresses the transcendent reality, and the unique personal subject. The result is multifarious configurations and variants of hope, a taxonomy of hope we shall address.

WHAT IS HOPE?

The key issue is that of what hope is. Answers to this question can be found in various studies representing such domains as, for instance, pedagogy, homiletics or eschatology. The proposed solutions are justified insofar as they draw on the 'core' concept of Christian hope, which they all share and which is rudimentary to all of them. This 'original' meaning of hope can be occasionally found in compendia of philosophy or theology. A possibly most comprehensive teaching on Christian hope has been put forward in Benedict XVI's *Spe Salvi*, which is an encyclical fully devoted to this topic.

First of all, we shall focus on the basic elements of the structure of hope, most obvious among them being its object. Christian hope is not tantamount to 'expectation,' or waiting for the ultimate goal in life to be accomplished. It is not only about what is going to happen, but about what already 'is.' Benedict XVI emphasizes that while subjective attitudes are grounded merely in the 'conviction' about what might come, true Christian hope has its roots in objective faith and applies to what already is, what is objectively given us in faith. "Faith is not merely a personal reaching out towards things to come that are still totally absent: it gives us something. It gives us even now something of

needs to be continued by multiple disciplines (such as the anthropology of culture, the sociology of culture, the psychology of culture, or the history of culture). Analyses of culture as a factor affecting Christian hope are provided in particular by the philosophy of culture and the theology of culture, as well as by philosophical and theological anthropology.

the reality we are waiting for, and this present reality constitutes for us a ‘proof’ of the things that are still unseen.”⁵ The objective nature and the oneness of the object of the experience of hope and the expectation it embraces lie in that “Christian hope is the source of the certainty inherent in the trust that what we experience now is going to have its continuation and its ultimate fulfilment.”⁶ The objective nature of hope is given neither empirically, nor in the inner cognitive experience of the subject. Rather, it springs from what is given in faith. Faith has the status of a declaration based on specific spiritual experience. The object of hope given in faith remains the same in the ontological sense both at the start of the Christian path and in its ultimate fulfillment. Departure from acknowledging this unity, which is a mark of the postmodern world, results in a degradation of hope or in rejecting it out of hand.

The second constitutive element in the structure of hope is its subject. One might say that the human subject, the person whose life in the objective world is a passage from each present moment towards the ultimate one, has been given the status of a wanderer, or a pilgrim. And it is hope that defines the pathway of the *homo viator* heading towards his or her ultimate destination, which can be perceived either in terms of the *finale* or as an endless pursuit, since God himself is infinite and impenetrable, as Blaise Pascal observed.⁷

Another constitutive element of hope is the effort and the focus of the human will which has discovered the foundation of hope in faith. Therefore hope involves purposeful volition marked by human rationality (which is in fact frequently considered as the *definiens* of hope).

Last but not least, an important element in the structure of hope is its context. While hope certainly needs to be perceived as a sentiment cherished by individual persons rather than by collective subjects, it is in the community of the Church that it flourishes. Hope needs the world, it needs its context and its background, which Thomas Merton, drawing on a meditation by John Donne, aptly expressed in the title of his book *No Man Is An Island*.⁸ It is in the company of others, together with the community of the faithful, that a human

⁵ Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, Section 7.

⁶ Stanisław Chrobak, *Podstawy pedagogiki nadziei: Współczesne konteksty w inspiracji personalistyczno-chrześcijańskiej* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo UKSW, 2009), 293. See also ibidem, 325–40. Chrobak extensively refers to the philosophy of religion advanced by Zofia J. Zdybicka. See J. Zdybicka, *Człowiek i religia* (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 1993). Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

⁷ See Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, 427, trans. W. F. Trotter (Woodstock, Ontario: Devoted Publishing, 2018), vol. 2, 74. See also Jadwiga Sokółowska, *Dwie nieskończoności: Szkice o literaturze barokowej Europy* (Warszawa: PIW, 1978), 15.

⁸ See Thomas Merton, *No Man Is An Island* (San Diego, New York, and London: Harcourt, 2003).

subject, a *homo viator*, follows his or her path in the world. And much depends on the world, which can play either a positive or a negative role.

Having pointed to the most essential elements in the structure of Christian hope, we shall now proceed to the main part of these considerations, namely, to a characterization of the cultural factors which undermine the functioning of hope's structure. The factors in question may affect either its single element or all of them simultaneously.

THE OBJECT OF CHRISTIAN HOPE

The object of our analysis will comprise two elements: (1) the 'here and now,' or the foundation of hope (p_1) and (2) the state it addresses, or the object of hope (p_2). In the case of Christian hope, their contents are the same and embrace God (the presence of Jesus Christ in the Church and in his transcendence, which is symbolically rendered, e.g., in the Parable of the Mustard Seed). However, the contents of elements p_1 and p_2 are identical only in the case of the 'core' Christian interpretation. In the wake of the processes of degradation of hope in postmodern culture, elements p_1 and p_2 are disjunctive, occasionally juxtaposed, or either one or both of them have become devoid of their marks of Christianity. In our analysis, the latter fact will be reflected in the notation we have adopted: what conforms to Christian faith will be indexed as 1 , while the reality which does not embrace living faith will be indexed as 0 .

The objective state, defined above, can be rendered by means of the following formula: $p_1 = 1, p_2 = 1$, where the same value (1), present in the case of either element, is the evidence of the presence of Christian hope both at its root and in its ultimate reference. Now, we shall focus on a series of departures from the objective state and, consequently, from Christian hope. According to the matrix we have received, the system of p_1 and p_2 generates three other possible configurations: $p_1 = 0, p_2 = 0$; $p_1 = 0, p_2 = 1$; $p_1 = 1, p_2 = 0$.

The least complex option is that in which, due to the absence of faith 'here and now,' on the one hand, and a lack of faith in the Ultimate Reality about to come, on the other, hope is absolutely impossible. This situation can be rendered by means of the following formula: $p_1 = 0, p_2 = 0$.

However complicated the two remaining options are, they are also crucial in a diagnosis of the condition of hope in the contemporary world.

FAILURES OF HOPE

In the case of the subjective attitude, hope identified with 'expectation' does not draw on p_1 , and focuses on p_2 exclusively, which can be illustrated

by means of the following formula: $p_1 = 0$, $p_2 = 1$. Ignorance of the effort and the sensibleness of the Christian basis of the 'here and now' results in an unrestrained development of visions regarding the eschatological future of the subject. In most cases apophatic visions of God are put forward, in which the Absolute is described as infinite, unbounded, inconceivable, or unnamed. Such an attitude to God is not uncommon among the approaches accepted by modern day Christianity. Also today's philosophers and theologians frequently fall prey to such concepts, which—we need to remember—have been present in culture since the time of antiquity.⁹ The goal of the theories in question is to make human thought free from metaphysics, which is considered to be 'parasitic.' A systemic positive image of God is, according to the followers of such views, all too anthropomorphic and the faith grounded in it approaches 'idolatry.' Therefore the goal of the 'new hope' thus postulated is to go beyond the borders of Western metaphysics and do so on the basis of the assumption that transgression will open us to better and more fulfilling encounters with God.

Yet proclamations of this kind are problematic. Obtaining knowledge of God through negating concepts that might be applied to him clearly goes against the Christian faith.¹⁰ However, the standpoints to which we are referring are not related to the formally developed negative theology; rather, they are those that seek a transformation of negative theology by means of the Heideggerian concept of 'being.' In the sense adopted by Heidegger, 'being' is the absolutely original condition and 'structure' of any already constituted entity, including God as conceived in religious thinking. 'Being' is then the ultimate foundation of all things, although it does not itself have a foundation. Being is "a potential horizon which provides the grounding for all things, for the universe as such. One is tempted to say that 'being' in a way fulfills the functions of the Christian God, although Heidegger himself did not allow such interpretational hypotheses."¹¹

The fact is that postmodern culture largely shares in Heideggerian existentialism and one may go as far as to say that Heidegger's philosophy is not only a point of reference in today's debates, but that it actually prevails in them,

⁹ See Tomáš Halík, *Wzywany czy niewzywany, Bóg się tutaj zjawi: Europejskie wykłady z filozofii i socjologii dziejów chrześcijaństwa* (Kraków: WAM, 2006), 121–2.

¹⁰ Asked by his disciple Philip, "Master, show us the Father," Jesus responds, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.... Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?" (Jn 14:8–10). The Biblical text ultimately points to the personal existence of God. (The fact that in the present considerations we have accepted the vantage point of the philosophy of culture justifies non-analytic references to the Biblical text and omission of its critical exegesis.)

¹¹ Jan Sokoł, *Spór o rozumienie świata. Monizujące ujęcie rzeczywistości w filozofii europejskiej: Studium historyczno-hermeneutyczne* (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Pax, 1998), 421.

which results in postulates of the existence of a transcendent Being of ‘beyond personal’ a nature. So conceived, a transcendent Being has hardly anything to do with the Christian God or with the ‘God of the faithful.’ Occasionally, the intention is to ‘make up’ a God better than the One the Church preaches, and the principle the enthusiasts of such an option follow is, “‘Yes’ for God; ‘no’ for the Church.’ As a result, postmodern culture is marked by various transformations of God, by individual ‘clouds’ of expectations of God, and by various aspirations in designing God according to one’s imagination and sensibility. Against such a background, true hope abandons its foundation in the Christian creed, in “confessional’ Christianity,”¹² and—in this ‘detached’ state—aspires after Transcendence.

In the wake of such tendencies, the Christianity of the ‘end time,’ or of the ‘return to the house of the Father,’ becomes a multi-faced religion, a conglomerate of ‘private’ faiths, and looks for support precisely in ‘apophatic’ attitudes, which resort to simplification and make the end time the only object of hope. What one hopes for is then universal salvation which will come regardless of one’s involvement or commitment to values. The attitude in question resembles to an extent apocatastasis conceived as the final restitution of the spiritual entities to their original condition, accomplished in a universal and irrevocable salvation. The theory of apocatastasis and the related apophatic theology have been discussed by Jean Clair in his book *De Immundo*.¹³ The degeneration of culture and spirituality the author describes transforms the image of hope, which in a way loses its significance, having embraced the certitude that naive expectations (held by self-proclaimed intellectual leaders) are going to be satisfied. The core message they convey is that life does not involve any duties and that its unavoidable toil will be compensated by God’s absolute and irrevocable goodness, which will nullify any complications resulting from the differences of religion, denomination, or morality.¹⁴

¹² ‘Confessional Christianity’ is a term used to distinguish creed-based Christianity from supra-confessional Christian faiths. In his research of the 17th century religion, Polish philosopher Leszek Kołakowski used also the phrase “non-confessional Christianity.” See Leszek K o ł a k o w s k i, *Świadomość religijna i więź kościelna: Studia nad chrześcijaństwem bezwyznaniowym* (Warszawa: PWN, 1987). We need to add, however, that the term ‘confessional Christianity’ by no means puts Catholicism above any other form of the Christian religion. Rather, we should perceive Catholicism and the Catholic Church as the expression of the essence of Christianity. Regardless of its history and schisms, the original deposit of Christian faith rests with the Roman Catholic Church.

¹³ See Jean C l a i r, *De Immundo* (Paris: Galilée, 2004).

¹⁴ Tadeusz Kornaś gives an instance of such views by pointing to public statements of Polish theatre director and stage designer Krystian Lupa. “Lupa questions the Christian vision of the world, which due to its binary character wants us to perceive the reality either as good or as evil and to divide the humanity into the saved and the damned.” Tadeusz K o r n a ś, *Aniołom i światu widowisko: Szkice i rozmowy o teatrze* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Homini, 2009), 254–5.

Such beliefs are supported by philosophical conceptions focused on idealistically understood Love and the Good. Those who advance them follow Plato in this respect and believe these ideas are as if 'above' being conceived as the research object of metaphysics. The Christian followers of this trend seem to forget that the aim is not to find the ultimate and the most clear description of God, but to comprehend the good in the context of the entire reality of the Absolute. Jesus says, "No one is good but God alone" (Mk 10:18), and his statement describes the goodness of the Person of God the Father. Indeed, it is his personal status that soon surfaces as the most important quality of the transcendent God. It remains so even should we be under the impression that his highest attributes appear to prevail over his personal nature.¹⁵ Christian thinkers are certain of the absolute significance of the personal status of God and their opinion is generally shared even by those who, having recognized God as Person, still tend to adopt Heideggerian philosophy. A good example is the theology of Paul Tillich, who holds that the Unconditional embraces qualities specific for 'being,' but simultaneously those characteristic of 'person.'¹⁶

According to the Christian doctrine, one should seek the supreme being in the mystery of personal God: that of the infinite being embracing subjects which transcend it. The divine Persons are infinite and each of them embodies this infinity individually. St. Paul describes the mystery of the Triune God in the following way: "For the Spirit scrutinizes everything, even the depths of God.... No one knows what pertains to God except the Spirit of God" (1 Cor 2:10–11). Thus, despite it being a theological inspiration, we cannot refute the conclusion that the mystery of the divine Persons which has been revealed to man (the mystery of the Triune God) manifests 'more ultimate' possibilities than those inherent in the mere concept of 'being.' This observation needs to be made in

¹⁵ Some postmodern thinkers believe that the person is a radically non-final being, personal status as such being reductive and limiting. The case is clearly observable once we attribute personal status to the Ultimate Reality. For this reason, Georges Bataille claims the Supreme Being must not be considered as 'person.' See Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1989), 33–4.

¹⁶ Tillich undertakes the hopeless task of trying to reconcile the understanding of 'the ultimate' as bearing qualities of both 'person' and 'being' as such. He writes: "Wenn man vom 'Unbedingten' spricht, so meint man das, wovon man spricht, im eigentlichen Sinne. Man könnte es mit den Scholastikern das Sein-Selbst (*esse qua, esse ipsum*) nennen. Eine solche Aussage ist nicht-symbolisch. Aber in unserer Beziehung zum Unbedingten müssen wir symbolisch reden. Wir könnten nie in Kommunikation mit Gott treten, wenn er *nur* das 'Sein-Selbst' wäre. In unserer Beziehung zu ihm begegnen wir ihm in der höchsten Stufe unseres Seins: als Person. Es wird also in der symbolischen Redeweise über Gott zweierlei ausgesagt: Er ist das, was unsere Erfahrung des Person-Seins unendlich transzendiert, und zugleich das, was unserem Person-Sein so adäquat ist, daß wir 'DU' zu ihm sagen und zu ihm beten können." Paul Tillich, *Die Frage nach dem Unbedingten*, in Paul Tillich, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 5, ed. Renate Albrecht (Stuttgart: Evangelische Verlagswerk, 1978), 218–9.

view of the fact that postmodern philosophy hardly accepts the category of ‘person.’

A CLASH OF PHILOSOPHICAL OUTLOOKS

We shall now analyze the impact of the controversy between the idealistic philosophies and the realistic ones on the way in which Christian hope is perceived. Idealistic philosophers readily conceive of God in terms of the Good or Love, juxtaposing them with ‘being’ as such. Yet we must remember that accepting the personal status of God is tantamount to the recognition of his status of a being. According to the classical understanding, a person is necessarily a being.¹⁷ If the personal status of God is questioned, it is mainly due to the ways of its theoretical and systemic elaboration. However, the elaboration in question is merely secondary, since, in any case, it is the aspect of existence that is of primary importance. Axiology based philosophies tend to disregard it in their insight into God and man,¹⁸ although there is undoubtedly a strong relationship between the emphasis on being (in the sense of existing) and the recognition of specific values. Postmodern philosophy in general (also its part growing out of Augustinian roots) tends to claim that the supreme Being is to be conceived as Love or the Good, but we need to remember that such a being cannot but be simultaneously real (in the sense of actually existing): colloquially speaking, we might say it must bear marks of life. Since the supreme Love manifests itself by offering its life (to be precise: its existence) for another (others), the value of any being is manifested in the personal love it exhibits. Even in the case of the Triune God, love, which decides about his unity and his being the only God, cannot come into being other than by means of its particular manifestations. This, however, could not be the case, were it not for the divine Persons’ offering themselves for each other up to the point of the highest sacrifice. It is here that we find the link between the existence of the divine Persons and the highest values embodied by them.

¹⁷ I refer to an objectively existing being rather than to a product of reflection (which, in any case, is likely to have an anthropomorphic character). According to Mieczysław A. Krapiec, God can be known as a being, and the ‘negative way’ (*via negationis*), as well as the ‘way of excellence’ (*via excellentiae*), is merely a modification of the only possible ‘way’ of being, which is the one conceived in the existential sense. See Piotr Moskał “Teologia negatywna” [Negative Theology], in *Powszechna encyklopedia filozofii*, vol. 9, ed. Andrzej Maryniarczyk (Lublin: Polskie Towarzystwo Tomasza z Akwinu, 2008), 423.

¹⁸ For a detailed discussion of this question and, in particular, of Józef Tischner’s view of Thomistic metaphysics, see Igor Strapko, *Apologia nadziei w filozofii i pedagogice Józefa Tischnera* (Kraków: Nomos, 2004), 101–38.

However, problems even deeper than those entailed by idealistic philosophies appear once we analyze the postmodern thought in which existence (in the sense of actual being) is considered as indeterminate and indefinite, seen as if in the ‘negative way,’ and given the enigmatic description of ‘non-being.’ Postmodern culture is certainly incapable of faith, or of objective hope aimed at Transcendence.

SUPERFICIAL HOPE

Now we shall consider the second option, namely, the one described by means of the formula $p_1 = 1, p_2 = 0$. Also this configuration fails to produce Christian hope. However, we are dealing here with the reversal of the case we have just discussed. The focal point is the ‘here and now,’ faith and trust in God considered as a merely temporal, worldly situation of the Christian person. In such cases, not infrequently can we encounter attitudes of honest commitment manifesting a genuinely Christian life. And yet in such cases faith does not go beyond the sphere of the temporal or that of a mere wish to accomplish ultimate fulfillment in an encounter with God. The main obstacles on the pathway of faith are then, on the one hand, its rootedness in skepticism entailing secular life and its distance from the norms guiding one towards eternity, on the other.¹⁹ As a result, believers become deprived of true hope and no longer seek in their experience of faith the ‘evidence,’ or the guarantee, that their existence will be ultimately fulfilled in transcendence. Such attitudes surface in statistics. In a survey conducted in 2015 by the Center for Public Opinion Research (CBOS) in Poland, only 36% participants declared their beliefs in the ‘last things.’ 31% of them stated that although they believed that death was not the end of existence, they did not know what would follow afterwards.²⁰ In a survey conducted by the Center for Public Opinion Research in 2009, in turn, 70%

¹⁹ “Johann Baptist Metz once said that the formula today is: No to God, Yes to religion. People want to have some kind of religion, esoteric or whatever it may be. But a personal God, who speaks to me, who knows me personally, who has said something quite specific and who has met me with a specific demand, and who will also judge me—people don’t want him.” Joseph Ratzinger, *God and the World: A Conversation with Peter Seewald* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2002), 69. According to this attitude, religion is considered as a value useful in daily life, but it must not place eschatological responsibility on the subject.

²⁰ The survey, no. 297 in the series “Aktualne problemy i wydarzenia” [Current Problems and Events], was conducted on February, 5–11, 2015, on a simple random sample of 1003 adult residents of Poland. See CBOS, “Kanon wiary Polaków” [The Standard of Religious Faith among the Poles], ed. Rafał Boguszewski, in *Komunikat z badań CBOS*, no. 29 (2015), www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2015/K_029_15.PDF. The survey disregarded the issue of the correlation between the participants’ eschatological views, their attitudes to religion, and their denominations (or the lack of one).

of the participants declared that they believed in 'heaven' (although only 38% of them stated that they 'definitely' believed in its existence) and 66% of the participants declared that they believed in 'personal resurrection' (although, again, only 38% stated that their beliefs were 'definite').²¹ The research results reported in both surveys show that a large percentage of those who consider themselves as Christians do not believe in a conceivable eternal life. Therefore, one can say that Christian hope is not fully lived through by them.

The attitude in question has had a deeper theoretical background in the so-called radical theologies developed in the 1960s and 1970s (at an early stage of postmodernist culture) and discussed extensively by Langdon Gilkey²² already decades ago. The doctrines in question have been variously developed until our times as part of either secular or postsecular thought. The tendency such theologies commonly exhibit is one to exclude key aspects of the Christian image of God as a being. Much as forerunners of radical theology (e.g., Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Friedrich Gogarten, Gustave Thils, Harvey Cox, or Gabriel Vahanian) and the successive proponents of the theory of 'God's death' do not openly question the real existence of the transcendent God, they certainly consider such a possibility increasingly problematic. Their hypotheses prove sufficient to validate adherence to the doctrine in the daily life, but they fail to provide a solid ground for personal eschatological beliefs to become the source of the person's stable existence or her perception of the meaning of life.²³ Once the existence of God is put into question, which goes as far as creating mythologies about God's self-abandonment of his divinity,²⁴ the eschatological future becomes illusory and the hope in the transcendent reality no longer has any support. This 'limitation' of religion and of the potential of its being an object of trust is accompanied by man's growing belief in his own maturity and independence of any transcendent being (or its superior nature determining the presence of religious structures in social life). What we are talking about is by no means complete abandonment of the deposit of faith, but its free interpretations. It is against such a background that the objective nature of faith is questioned for the sake of a subjective attitude to transcendence. Faith is respected as objective merely 'here and now,' but it turns out absent

²¹ The survey, no. 225 in the series "Aktualne problemy i wydarzenia," was conducted on February 5–11, 2009, on a simple random sample of 1048 adult residents of Poland. See CBOS, "Wiara i religijność Polaków dwadzieścia lat po rozpoczęciu przemian ustrojowych. Komunikat z badań" [Religious Faith and the Religiousness of the Poles Twenty Years after the Change of the Political System], ed. Rafał Boguszewski (CBOS: Warszawa: 2009), https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2009/K_034_09.PDF.

²² See, e.g., Langdon Gilkey, *Gilkey on Tillich* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1990).

²³ One might say that what such theologies propose is a kind of inertia.

²⁴ See Mieszko Cieśielski, *O Bogu, który był: Nowa interpretacja Jezusa nauki o Bogu* (Warszawa: Scholar, 2016).

when considered in relation to the eschatological domain. A decline of hope for eternal life begins.

THE SUBJECT OF HOPE

Having acknowledged the postmodern subject's inability to perform an act of faith (rather than his or her loss of faith, or of what is given in faith), we need to make a step backwards in our analysis and ask what makes the postmodern subject incapable of believing and why the subject has become rid of 'evidence' of what is to come, as well as of the certainty that faith offers an ultimate fulfillment in transcendence. In order to answer this question we need to make an insight in the ontic structure of the human person. While the latter issue has been scrutinized by philosophy in its theoretical discourse, it significantly comes to light also in various practical situations in life, in particular those involving reflection on the human condition. The metaphysical conception of the human being adopted in these considerations points to certain attributes which are constitutive for a human person as an existing entity and verifiable in an analysis of actual human acts which involve the person's own understanding of her existential status. The specifically human attributes in question are self-awareness, love, freedom, dignity, subjectivity, being a subject rather an object of law, and existential completeness.²⁵ Each of these dimensions of a human being manifest such a deep presence of the Absolute that their transcendent source is evident to the person in her self-understanding. Insofar as she confronts her status of 'person' and consciously lives it through, she retains her ability to perform acts of faith and hope. In this sense, the theoretical metaphysical analysis is in unison with her experience of her condition. However, we must note that the Absolute merely renders the presence of the specifically human attributes in question free of contradiction.

Thus the fullness of faith and hope is possible once the subject enters a personal relationship with the Absolute, which—according to the Christian tradition—is the only proper relationship with God. Once the subject can see God as 'person,' God becomes a 'neighbor,' a 'you,' or the transcendent 'Thou.' A relationship with God in whom one believes and by whom one has been called (which is a relationship between persons by nature) is often manifested by the actions the person chooses to perform, acting as such

²⁵ See Mieczysław A. Krąpiec, *Ja – człowiek: Zarys antropologii filozoficznej* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 1979), 380–88. See also Mieczysław A. Krąpiec, *I—Man: An Outline of Philosophical Anthropology* (New Britain, CT: Mariel Publications, 1983).

being a specific trait that signifies the personal mode of existence.²⁶ A relationship with God may also be perceived in terms of the pathway a *homo viator* follows: it is the pathway at the end of which there is transcendent reality: an encounter with God.²⁷ In the case of hope, it is precisely the freedom of pursuing God, combined with getting to know him and love for him, that plays the crucial role. The highest act of love may be manifested by means of an offering of self, a sacrifice (which we have already discussed), or through self-denial by means of which, at the moment of one's death, one entrusts oneself to the Absolute, who is a person. In such cases dying is conceived as an act²⁸ and Christian hope may anticipate such highest acts of love. Regardless of the anthropology we accept, though, the human person cannot be fully understood without reference to the Absolute.²⁹

Based on the above considerations, one might ask about the factors which make a human subject actually lose hope. A major one among them is by no means lack of a personal relationship with God (the Absolute), but abandoning the belief that he validates the personal status of the human being. This fact must be emphasized, since it is not Christian hope that postmodern culture takes away from the human being; rather it deprives the human being of the dignity belonging to him or her as a person. And it is precisely this dignity which is an indispensable condition for hope. It is only as a result of the decline of hope that the subject's relationship with the Absolute begins to wane and becomes marginal, vulnerable, vacillating, and ultimately illusory.

In postmodern culture, the human being, deprived of the attributes of a person, becomes equal to the material or biological objects present in the world.

²⁶ Karol Wojtyła discusses the human act as the most important manifestation of a human person. See Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, trans. Andrzej Potocki (Dordrecht, Holland; Boston, USA; London, England: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979).

²⁷ See, e.g., Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator: Introduction to the Metaphysic of Hope* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine Press, 2010).

²⁸ See Krąpiec, *Ja – człowiek: Zarys antropologii filozoficznej*, 383.

²⁹ See, e.g., the theories of man proposed by, respectively, Maurice Blondel, Gabriel Marcel, Romano Guardini, Jacques Maritain, Maurice Nédoncelle, Karol Wojtyła, Emmanuel Mounier, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Robert Spaemann. Omitting reference to the Absolute in the definition of man, or in the metaphysical conception of the human being, precludes giving justice to who a human person is. This is particularly obvious in the case of attempts to justify the existence of human dignity. Such attempts inevitably need to resort to a transcendent and absolute realm providing the ground which will make it impossible to reduce a human person to a worldly reality or to degrade her in any other way. Recourse to a reality that goes beyond this world, however vague it might be, is also indispensable in the case of attempts to defend human dignity on grounds other than purely religious. See Francis Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002). Being a subject of law is, in turn, the reason why a human person must be perceived in reference to the common good, which (in the objective sense) is tantamount to the Absolute.

In the first case, his identity is reduced to that of a subject of culture, i.e., the subject of acts of speech or narration and a correlate of virtual fictional or gaming worlds. Although the human being becomes the organizing principle of intellectual discourses and participates in the interactions and games characteristic of the reality in which he lives, he remains a merely linguistic creation. In the second case, the human being is perceived only in biological terms, as is the case in various instinctivist conceptions, in ethology and in sociobiology, among others.

THE HUMAN SUBJECT IN THE POSTMODERN CULTURE

A further exploration of the condition described above will make it possible for us to probe into the mechanisms responsible for the reduced image of the human being in postmodern culture. The deep structure of those mechanisms embraces the reversal of the relationship between being and values. According to the classical conception, it is personhood that determines the existential status of the human beings, while the relationships obtaining among them provide the basis for the society, which is a relational entity with its own attributes implicating its functions and significance.³⁰ In postmodernism, ideas are said to precede the shape of the society as such, and the existential status of its members is granted only secondary importance. The various 'ideas' or conceptions of the society fostered by postmodern thought involve social engineering and, in consequence of this process, the society is deprived of its attributes, which—in the classical conception—are manifested by actual social roles and statuses, and by the functioning of social groups and institutions which have developed as a result of the interpersonal relations in question, such as, e.g., the family, the nation, the Church, the educational system, or the humanized economy. In the (global) society molded on this principle, not only social 'realities,' but also the human person³¹ are subject to radical reinterpretation, which substantially changes, among others, the meaning of the human rights

³⁰ Krapiec emphasizes that from the vantage point of philosophy (metaphysics) a community is certainly an entity, a being. Although the relationships which obtain among particular people do not constitute a substance in the philosophical sense, they nevertheless constitute a social, i.e., relational being. See K r a p i e c, *Ja – człowiek: Zarys antropologii filozoficznej*, 291.

³¹ Defining the human being by reference to social determinants results in putting the status of a person as member of the society above her personhood. Krapiec notes that both Maritain and Mounier held that the person is entirely distinct from the political individual. While the person is dependent on the society in the respect of her being its member, she transcends the society, which is supposed to serve her welfare. See *ibidem*, 278. The reinterpretation of the social reality by post-modern ideology results in the degradation of both this entity and the human being as its member.

(or the rights of the human person), such as social freedom, democracy, and, above all, human dignity. The postmodern subject yielded by these processes is deprived of numerous attributes of personhood. The subject's new condition is determined merely by the categories formed on the grounds of cultural awareness conceived in the diachronic sense. Consequently, the affirmation of persons by one another is replaced by tolerance, which is tantamount to promotion of moral egocentrism and to disregarding the value of the common good. Rather than cultural identity, variety, multiculturalism, equal value, and critique of the so-called neocolonialism (postcolonialism) are promoted. The latter phenomenon, however, does not relate to the continuation of colonialism in today's world. Instead, it is an expression of a normative attitude critical of Western (Judeo-Christian) civilization and its philosophical foundations as such. In consequence of this transformation, interpersonal relationships tend to be replaced by new tribalism, and religions addressing a transcendent reality and confessed on the basis of personal belief tend to be substituted by primitive social ritualism, which manifests cultural regression. Among the prevailing marks of postmodern times are: individualism, transvaluation of values, as well as social and cultural uprootedness, all these phenomena and processes being accelerated by the theory and practice of globalism.³²

SUBJECTIVITY AND PERSONHOOD

The reversal of the relationship between being and values in the postmodernist times affects the world as much as it affects the human being, who needs to individually confront the image of God as Person (the divine 'Thou') with that of God conceived as 'Ultimate Reference,' a cultural product of transgression. In the case of such a collision, no compromise is possible. The same problem appears in the realm self-experience. Krapiec observes, though, that a human person is always aware that her acts are hers: her subjectivity (her being a 'self') is unavoidably given her in her cognitive experiences. Owing to this givenness, which is perceived in an existential sense, the person knows that she exists: she is aware of her existence as a subject who accomplishes her own acts.³³ The experience of being an existing entity is inalienable from

³² In the case of postmodern thought, the method which has allegedly made it possible to go beyond the unchangeable metaphysical categories has been deconstruction embracing any element rooted in the cultural tradition and explained by modern and, in particular, realistic philosophies representing the classical current. Deconstruction manifests hope for the ultimate welfare of humanity. Such a postmetaphysical, postpersonalist, and utopian vision of the world can be found, e.g., in various currents of transhumanism.

³³ See K r a p i e c, *Ja – człowiek: Zarys antropologii filozoficznej*, 373–4.

the subject's experience of being a person and embraces any act the subject performs, among them those rooted in faith and in Christian hope. As opposed to the metaphysical interpretation, the reductionist concept of the human experience characteristic of postmodernism deprives the subject of his personal and existential constitution. As a result, the subject is 'free' to adopt a new identity prompted by the intellect (by way of 'reflection') even though such an identity may disagree with the subject's experience of his own being. Again, we need to emphasize that abandonment of faith and decline of hope do not result from breaking the bond with God conceived as Person, but in consequence of distancing oneself from one's own personal status. Human beings are merely individuals functioning in a global situation: they are inevitably part of the universal cultural process and identify themselves with the position they occupy in it. The environment in which they live suppresses their existential self-determination.

Although his being an actually existing entity is certainly undeniable, the human subject finds it difficult to develop his personhood. Since important aspects of the subject's self are disregarded, identities of provenance other than personal (or even ones undermining his personhood) are being constantly shaped in him.³⁴ The postmodern subject seems unbound since he is free from moral duties or obligations towards the community (including the religious ones) and he does not pursue the Gospel virtues, which would amount to taking on the 'yoke' of Christ (cf. Mt 11:25–30). The postmodern subject does not truly live in the presence of God. In postmodern thought, God assumes the shape of a vague transcendence.

The human being in postmodernist culture is subject to continuous cognitive and ideological pressure which goes against his own experience of existing as 'person' not only in the sense of spiritual life or relations with others, but of all the remaining aspects of life as well. The pressure in question affects, among others, the understanding of the natural functions of the human body, which, in today's world, are subject to manipulation. Genetic engineering is increasingly introduced as a response to the visions of a 'posthuman' future or cultural gender transformations. Postmodern visions of man, conveying an understanding of the human body that goes against the human experience, question not only the ontological status of the human person, but also the validity of the contents of the Christian creed, which sets the pathway of hope for each human person.

³⁴ In this context, there appears the tendency to reduce personhood as such to secondary characteristics of identity. Thus we witness a paradox: the status of the human being as 'person' is rejected, which is accompanied by a fervent pursuit of its equivalent. Representatives of cultural or biological reductionism go even further and openly question the ontic structure of the human being as 'person.'

THE FOCUS OF WILL ON THE GOSPEL VIRTUE OF HOPE

According to a philosophical definition, Christian hope is “a virtue instilled (granted) by God, and its function consists in sustaining the focus and effort of the human will in order to accomplish the highest good to which the human being has been destined, namely, salvation, tantamount to knowing and loving God in eternity.”³⁵

The focus of the will being a significant condition for Christian hope, post-modern culture is marked by a decline of this kind of volition; rather, it encourages passiveness, despondency, and only partial involvement in the pursuit of temporal goals. Zygmunt Bauman offers the following diagnosis: “Immortality is no longer the transcendence of mortality. It is as fickle and erasable as life itself; as unreal as the death transformed into the disappearing act has become: both are amenable to endless resurrection, but none to finality.”³⁶

Another characteristic trait of contemporary culture is disappearance of the commitment to serious causes which might serve others. Instead, the prevailing attitude is that of *homo ludicus*, who pursues pleasure, is fond of appearances or virtual creations, and lives his life as a narration. The same despondency that engenders indifference can also inspire visions of an unconstructive agonistic life which ultimately turns against others. What appears truly interesting in the post-modern outlook is not the lowering of the aspirations of the humankind, though, but the transformation of the human subject. The continuing crisis and paradoxes of the identity of the postmodern man are manifestations of the incompleteness of his existence, which is devoid of goals that would match his rank of an autonomous being. Despite the demand for a strong identity of the human subject the need to resort to religion disappears in contemporary culture due to its persistent efforts to make the human being existentially self-sufficient.³⁷ Christian hope is now devoid of a very important factor: the subject’s focus on the deposit of faith and its fulfillment in the eschatological realm. Deconstruction of hope is observable on every level of faith, even in its most elementary manifestations.

THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY OF THE CHURCH

The path of hope must be accomplished in the community of the Church, where the faithful can experience each other’s presence. “Part of the essence

³⁵ Zbigniew Pańpuch, “Nadzieja,” in *Powszechna encyklopedia filozofii*, vol. 7, 472.

³⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodernity and Its Discontents* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 163.

³⁷ See Leszek Kołakowski, *Modernity on Endless Trial* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1990).

of Christianity—and this is included in the concept of the Church—is that our relationship to God is not just an inner one, one made up of my ‘I’ and his ‘Thou,’ but is also a matter of being spoken to, of being led.... As human beings we are there so that God can come to people by way of other people. He always comes to people through people. So we, too, always come to him through other people ... in whom he himself meets us and opens us up to him.”³⁸ Faith, which ‘reveals’ the object of Christian hope is both initiated and sustained in interpersonal relations within the community of the Church. Each ‘you’ making up this community is a member of the Church and a sign of Transcendence. Each ‘you’ is a manifestation of *Ekklesia*, those belonging to the Lord. “*Ekklesia* means *called out*, those who are called out. The word in its technical sense refers to the ‘assembly’.... to ‘those called together by God,’ those who have gathered together with him, who belong to God and who know that he is in their midst.”³⁹

However, in postmodern societies, both the Church as an institution and the community of the faithful tend to depart from the concepts of “royal priesthood” or “holy nation,” and turn into a dispersed collectivity of individuals, occasionally forming short-term coalitions or loose alliances which do not serve accomplishing long-term goals and might be considered in terms of new tribalism. Although they have the shape of small communities, they do not generate a lasting foundation for Christian hope, which was characteristic of the Church. In the case of new tribalism, acts of faith are limited to immanent and changeable religiosity exhibiting vague reference to the transcendence. Unlike the communities participating in the mission of the Church, which transcend their temporal existence in the mystical reality of the Body of Christ, tribal collectivities do not make a lasting or systematic effort to follow the ‘path’ which has been set for them and neither do they focus on the eschatological dimension of existence.⁴⁰ Their key problem is not a lack of inner cohesion, but the cause of this condition, that is, the transformation of the personal subject into a postmodern identity affected by global determinants. Individualism, praised as the ideal by the postmodern society, has been—paradoxically—subsumed by globalism.⁴¹ Even the numerous eschatologies proposed today are derivative

³⁸ Ratzinger, *God and the World: A Conversation with Peter Seewald*, 70.

³⁹ Ibidem, 63–4.

⁴⁰ One needs to distinguish small communities active in the Church from the ‘new tribalism’ characteristic of the postmodern reality which does not participate in the mission of the Church. For an analysis of the ‘new tribalism,’ see Michel Maffesoli, *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society* (London: Sage Publications, 1996).

⁴¹ For a broader explanation of this thesis, see Jolanta Kociuba, “Indywidualistyczna i personalistyczna koncepcja jednostki a tożsamość,” in *Kim jestem? Kim jesteśmy? Antropologiczne i socjologiczne konteksty współczesnej tożsamości*, ed. Dorota Czakon and Mirosław Boruta (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Pedagogicznego, 2012), 54–69.

of the global trends. No wonder the attitude of Christian hope no longer appeals to modern man. Although egocentric individualism and new tribalism, which obliterates subjectivity, might seem disjunctive standpoints, neither of them encourages building relationships among human beings. As a result, eschatology, which needs a real community of the Church, is impossible, which, in turn, makes adopting the attitude of hope impossible. This is true about any type of religion founded on the postmodern concept of subjectivity. The transcendent reality Christianity affirms is radically different from purely conceptual forms of religion, which—in postmodernist culture—manifest a regression to primitive behaviors rooted in the human psyche: expecting ‘a future’ after death turns out a false substitute of Christian hope.

RESTORING CHRISTIAN HOPE

Decline of hope is a serious problem in modern day societies. An academic scrutiny of the elements of the structure of hope (including the threats it faces) is by no means tantamount to the restoration of hope. Yet one can point at least to certain conditions for accomplishing such an objective. In determining them, we shall refer to the analysis of the process of the degradation of hope. In all the three variants of incomplete hope we have discussed ($p_1 = 0, p_2 = 0$; $p_1 = 0, p_2 = 1$; $p_1 = 1, p_2 = 0$), faith and its object are in some way deformed. The first case, which is most serious, involves a lack of faith in God existing simultaneously in temporality and in eschatological transcendence. In the other cases, faith is either present ‘here and now,’ but does not entail a prospect of transcendence, or it is not present ‘here and now,’ but comes to the fore once the subject faces the prospect of transcendence.

As we can see, in each case we are dealing with the problem of the loss of faith and the need for its restoration. Already St. Augustine said, “But the Lord Himself says openly ... : ‘This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He has sent.’ ‘That ye believe on Him,’ not, that ye believe Him. But if ye believe on Him, ye believe Him; yet he that believes Him does not necessarily believe on Him. For even the devils believed Him, but they did not believe on Him.”⁴²

According to the above explanation, overcoming postmodernism would first involve rational belief “on God,” retrieving the human rights and respect

⁴² St. A u g u s t i n, “Tractate 29,” 6, in St. Augustine, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel according to St. John*, transl. by John Gibb and James Innes, [http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0354-0430,_Augustinus,_In_Evangelium_Joannis_Tractatus_CXXIV_\[Schaff\],_EN.pdf](http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0354-0430,_Augustinus,_In_Evangelium_Joannis_Tractatus_CXXIV_[Schaff],_EN.pdf), 266. For a broader spectrum of this insight into the essence of faith, see Étienne G i l s o n, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Augustine* (New York: Random House, 1960).

for human dignity, as well as restoring the common good. Only then can faith in God become possible and follow genuine Christian hope, as well as the pathway to the participation in the life of God.

Another condition for restoring hope is a return to the conception of the human being as ‘person.’ Only a person, due to her ontic structure and participation in the realm of morality, is capable of making the existential and moral effort characteristic of the *homo viator*. The return to the concept of person will affect not only the social domain, but the law, as well as the political and moral life, that is, all the aspects of human existence which are instrumental in the person’s self-fulfillment in the face of transcendence. Restoration of the humanity to its ‘personal’ dimension needs to compensate for its deconstruction brought about by the social transformations and genetic engineering aimed at the creation of virtual, or posthuman, beings. One can say that transhumanists have reached out for the fruit of the tree of life. Their desires express man’s need to be at his own disposal and derive transcendence from his immanence. Yet abandonment of God is inseparable from the abandonment of part of one’s own being. And it is only by restoring this part of human existence that man can restore his genuine and transcendent hope.⁴³

For the purpose of restoring hope, the focus of the human will needs to be real matters rather than irrational alliances made to establish arbitrary rules regarding ‘big’ ideas, such as, e.g., globalization. The ‘unreal’ matters on which the world is focused today relate to its virtualization and simulacralization, as well as to the popularity of *homo ludicus*. Thus real human problems are projected onto the realm of life which, rather than implying duties, manifests the so-called ‘lightness of being’ and is not actually real.

For hope to be restored means to come to life in a community of the faithful. Therefore the structural organization of Christian life is of importance and needs to involve parishes, assemblies, movements, fraternities, formations or ‘paths’ which make it possible for hope to flourish in interpersonal relations. Christian communities not only support individual hope, but occupy a part of the social space dedicated to communication, public debate, and value systems, thus competing with the collectivities formed against the secular or postsecular background.

⁴³ For a discussion of the weakening of the perception of the real world in today’s culture, the universal turn towards *homo ludicus*, and transhumanist tendencies, see Ryszard Strzelecki, *Homo ludens kultury współczesnej* (Bydgoszcz: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kazimierza Wielkiego, 2019).

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ABSTRACT / ABSTRAKT

Ryszard STRZELECKI, Christian Hope in the Postmodern World: On the Essence and Decline of Hope, and on the Prospects for Its Restoration, as seen from the Perspective of the Philosophy of Culture

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The focus of the article is Christian hope, its decline in postmodern culture, and the prospects for its restoration. The analysis in question is conducted with reference to Benedict XVI's encyclical *Spe Salvi*. The object of Christian hope is the deposit of faith, including the 'four last things.' Therefore hope in this sense involves a recognition of the objective nature of both the temporal and

the eschatological realities. The subject of hope is the human being conceived as a *homo viator* pursuing the Transcendence, while the remaining elements of the structure of hope include the focus of the subject's will and the subject's participation in the community. Deconstruction of hope may either affect its single element or destroy all of them. The article discusses various manifestations of the phenomenon of the deconstruction of hope in postmodern culture. The concluding part of the paper focuses on the issue of the possible restoration of hope, which can be accomplished if advice from St. Augustine be followed: in order to believe in God, one needs to believe God, which is tantamount to working for the sake of the common good and respecting the dignity of a human being as person as well the value of human life.

Keywords: Christian hope, person, God, postmodernity, apophatic theology, secularism, postsecularism, volition, eschatology, faith, community, personalism

Contact: Instytut Nauk o Kulturze, Uniwersytet Kazimierza Wielkiego, ul. Jagiellońska 11, 85-067 Bydgoszcz, Poland

E-mail: rjstrzel@ukw.edu.pl

Phone: +48 52 3220355

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Ryszard STRZELECKI, Nadzieja chrześcijańska w świecie ponowoczesnym. Istota – utrata – przywracanie. Refleksja kulturoznawcza

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Problematyka artykułu dotyczy nadziei chrześcijańskiej, jej utraty oraz warunków przywracania. Podstawą rozważań jest źródłowe rozumienie nadziei obecne w encyklice Benedykta XVI *Spe salvi*. Przedmiotem nadziei chrześcijańskiej jest depozyt wiary, w tym kwestia rzeczy ostatecznych. Nadzieja wymaga zatem uznania obiektywności rzeczywistości doczesnej i eschatologicznej. Podmiotem nadziei jest zwrócony ku Transcendencji *homo viator*, a elementy ją współtworzące to ukierunkowanie woli przez podmiot oraz jego udział we wspólnocie. Czynniki dekonstrukcji mogą dotyczyć jednego lub wszystkich elementów struktury nadziei. W artykule omówione zostało zjawisko dekonstrukcji nadziei w różnych wymiarach kultury współczesnej. Refleksja końcowa dotyczy kwestii przywracania nadziei, które dokonać się może na drodze przeciwnej wobec dekonstrukcji, a zatem poprzez odzyskanie wiary. Podstawą takiego zwrotu może stać się wskazanie św. Augustyna: aby wierzyć w Boga, trzeba wpierw wierzyć Bogu, czyli realizować dobro wspólne, uznawać osobową godność człowieka i transcendentną wartość ludzkiego życia.

Słowa kluczowe: nadzieja chrześcijańska, osoba, Bóg, ponowoczesność, teologia apofatyczna, sekularyzm, postsekularyzm, wola, eschatologia, wiara, wspólnota, personalizm

Kontakt: Instytut Nauk o Kulturze, Uniwersytet Kazimierza Wielkiego,
ul. Jagiellońska 11, 85-067 Bydgoszcz
E-mail: rjstrzel@ukw.edu.pl
Tel. 52 3220355
https://www.ukw.edu.pl/pracownicy/strona/ryszard_strzelecki/zyciorys-naukowy/