

Paulina DAWIDEK

HOPE On Existing in spite of Reality

Is it possible to learn to hope? One might perhaps find the answer to this question by looking at the lives of those who, in the face of adversity, manage to ‘move on,’ enjoy life, and, simply, be happy. Research shows that such people have faith in themselves, adopt a proactive attitude, and persevere despite failures. Charles R. Snyder, a precursor of positive psychology, suggests that there is another characteristic they share: that of hope. According to Snyder, hope is not an emotion, but a specific mode of thinking, and involves positive energy focused on reaching the set goal.¹

Hope seems to be woven into the tissue of our lives; it is also a gift which should be shared with others. Undoubtedly, St. John Paul II was a man of persistent and fervent hope who, throughout his life, bore witness to his experience of “the God of hope” (Rom 15:13). A testimony of hope which “does not disappoint” (Rom 5:5) can be found in the prophetic words of the homily he preached at the mass inaugurating his pontificate. Reflecting on this event in the book *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, the Pope reminisces: “When, on October 22, 1978, I said the words ‘Be not afraid!’ in St. Peter’s Square, I could not fully know

how far they would take me and the entire Church. Their meaning came more from the Holy Spirit.”² Cardinal Leon Joseph Suenens, in turn, in his poetic answer to the question, “Why am I a man of hope?” writes: “Because I believe that every morning God is new, that he is creating the world exactly at this particular moment, and not one in the past, enveloped in cloud and forgotten.”³

The personalistic concept of hope, hope conceived as a value and expressed in a literary work of art, as well as the aim of hoping and the duty to hope are among the themes discussed in the volume *Wobec nadziei: Aksjologiczne problemy dramatu i teatru XX i XXI wieku*⁴ [Confronting

² J o h n P a u l I I, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, ed. Vittorio Messori, trans. Jenny McPhee and Martha McPhee (New York: Alfred A. Knopf), 218–9.

³ Leo Joseph S u e n e n s, “Dlaczego jestem człowiekiem nadziei?,” *W drodze* 4, no. 4 (1976): 4. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

⁴ See *Wobec nadziei: Aksjologiczne problemy dramatu i teatru XX i XXI wieku* [Confronting Hope: On the Axiological Problems in the Plays and Stage Productions of the 20th and the 21st Centuries], ed. Joanna Michalczuk and Mariusz Lach (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL 2018). The earlier versions of the articles collected in the volume were presented at the

¹ See Charles R. S n y d e r, *Handbook of Hope: Theory, Measures and Applications*, (San Diego: Laurence Academic Press, 2000), 25–6.

Hope: On the Axiological Problems in the Plays and Stage Productions of 20th and the 21st Centuries]. The articles collected in the book address the need, arising in the context of the current socio-cultural crises, to reintroduce anthropological research on values into the humanities.

Wobec nadziei comprises three parts, preceded with a theological and philosophical study “Nadzieja”⁵ [Hope] by Kazimierz Krajewski who describes hope as an act of the human person projected towards the future: the person knows that the best is yet to come and her heart reaches out towards it in an ardent and active expectancy. Thus a hopeful person does not succumb to difficulties, but continues fighting and eventually wins, being able to enjoy her future victory in finding happiness. The theological perspective Krajewski adopts shows hope as rooted in God’s promise, in the belief that through his grace man will achieve eternal happiness. The author emphasizes the connection of hope to faith and love and, following Paul the Apostle (cf. 1 Thes 5:8), compares the three virtues to an armour protecting a human being in the struggle for salvation. On this view, Christian hope is related to the desire for happiness which God has put in the human heart. So understood, hope strengthens and purifies human actions, guides the human being towards the Kingdom of God, and provides an answer to the mystery of human life.

The first part of the book, entitled “Nacinanie sykomory” [Cutting the Sycamore Fruits], opens with the article “Teatr wobec nadziei”⁶ [The Theatre Confront-

ing Hope] by Wojciech Kaczmarek. In his reflection on the anthropological crisis of the 20th-century theatre, Kaczmarek uses the biblical metaphor, taken from the Book of Amos, of dressing sycamores (cf. Am 7:14), i.e., cutting the sycamore fruits, which otherwise would not ripen. Applied to modern Europe and its culture, which manifest the need for being “cut” in order to achieve maturity, the metaphor in question makes it possible for Kaczmarek to assess the scale of the anthropological crisis in which they are immersed. In his view, the crisis of culture, reflected also by contemporary literary works and modern theatre, may be resolved only by way of being “cut with Logos,”⁷ which would inspire Europe to return to its Christian roots. Therefore, the author proposes that dramatics should clearly distinguish the genuinely Christian elements of modern spiritual culture from those entirely foreign to Christianity.

The other paper included in the first part of the reviewed monograph, Ryszard Strzelecki’s “Perypetie ludzkiej podmiotowości w dzisiejszej refleksji kulturowej”⁸ [The Vicissitudes of Human Subjectivity in Present-Day Reflection on Culture], addresses the difficulty to express hope in postmodern discourse. Strzelecki discusses the limitations of the postmodern vision of man, juxtaposing it with the metaphysics of the human person (in the classical philosophical sense), and the image of man implicated by the philosophy of dialogue, and

conference *Wobec nadziei* [Confronting Hope] organized by the Department of Drama and Theatre at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland, on May 30, 2016.

⁵ See Kazimierz K r a j e w s k i, “Nadzieja,” in *Wobec nadziei*, 13–28.

⁶ See Wojciech K a c z m a r e k, “Teatr wobec nadziei,” in *Wobec nadziei*, 31–46. For more

information on the Polish and European drama and theatre in the 19th and 20th centuries, see Wojciech K a c z m a r e k, *Przeniknąć człowieka: Chrześcijański horyzont dramatu i teatru XX wieku* (Lublin, Wydawnictwo KUL, 2016).

⁷ K a c z m a r e k, “Teatr wobec nadziei,” 39.

⁸ See Ryszard S t r z e l e c k i, “Perypetie ludzkiej podmiotowości w dzisiejszej refleksji kulturowej,” in *Wobec nadziei*, 47–66.

personalism. The author contrasts the image of the man of hope these philosophies advance with that of the postmodern subject who, torn between the various polarities of his condition, experiences different forms of *acedia*, described by Jean-Paul Sartre's and Albert Camus. Strzelecki holds, however, that the so-called post-Christian times are marked by *autarkia*, the attitude expressing the need to become independent of God and, as such, opposed to Christian hope. Discussing the anthropological problem of the identity of a human being, the author points to the strong tendency to adopt a reductionist conception of man which is characteristic of the postmodern times: the human being is most frequently seen as *homo ludens*, who exists in the unreal, globalized and anonymous world of consumption. Tradition and transcendence regarded as the primary sources of moral norms and duties are then rejected. The negation of values and of the moral order such an approach proposes in the name of the autonomy of a human being is tantamount to a violation of the ontological status of man and eventually results in his self-destruction.

The second part of the monograph, *Na ścieżkach interpretacji: Wobec najważniejszych pytań* [On the Paths of Interpretation: Confronting the Most Important Questions], focuses on selected plays written in the 20th and 21st centuries. In the article *Zmierzając ku nadziei? Człowiek i transcendencja w dramacie początku XX wieku*⁹ [Heading towards Hope? Man and Transcendence in Drama of the Early 20th Century], which opens this section, Anna

Podstawka argues that, shaped amidst an anthropological crisis, "the theatre of the early 20th century gradually transforms into a meditation on the existential eradication of the human being, on man existing in a void."¹⁰ In the analytical part of her paper, Podstawka focuses on three Polish plays. Firstly, she discusses *Sędziowie*¹¹ [The Judges] by Stanisław Wyspiański, who while portraying the tragedy suffered by a rural family and examining the possibility of their redemption passes a symbolic judgement over himself and the humanity. Secondly, Podstawka interprets *Sygnali*¹² [The Signals] by Ewa Szelburg-Zarembina, a drama telling the story of villagers enslaved with work symbolizing human existence reduced to mere vegetation, and argues that the awareness of the consequences of the deep social stratification made the writer's generation search for fresh sources of spirituality. Finally, Podstawka analyzes Jan Kasprowicz's *Marcholt* [Marcolf],¹³ a play depicting the experience of disorientation, so characteristic of modernist culture, of the human being in the relativist world of disintegrating values. In his drama, Kasprowicz reflects on man's longing for spiritual balance, his struggle to probe the mystery of human existence, and his sinking in sin. Despite having been created to do good, man must

⁹ See Anna Podstawka, "Zmierzając ku nadziei? Człowiek i transcendencja w dramacie początku XX wieku," in *Wobec nadziei*, 69–88. See also Anna Podstawka, "Antynomie ludzkiej kondycji w Marcholcie Jana Kasprowicza," *Acta Universitatis Lodziensis: Folia Litteraria Polonica* 33, no. 3 (2016): 171–85.

¹⁰ Wojciech Kaczmarek, "Horyzont antropologiczny młodopolskiego dramatu i teatru," in: *Młoda Polska w najnowszych badaniach*, ed. Edward Jakiel and Tadeusz Linkner (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 2016), 148.

¹¹ See Stanisław Wyspiański, *Sędziowie: Tragedya* (Kraków: n.p., 1907).

¹² See Ewa Szelburg-Zarembina, *Sygnali* (Warszawa: Gebethner i Wolff, 1933).

¹³ See Jan Kasprowicz, *Marcholt gruby a sprośny: Jego narodzin, życia i śmierci misterjum tragicomiczne w obrazach czterech zamknięte* (Lwów: Gubrynowicz, 1920).

continually experience tension between spirituality and carnality, between idealistic desires and lust, between his need for freedom and his enslavement in illusions of happiness the hedonistic world offers him. However, as Podstawka suggests, Kasprowicz's play, despite its complexity, "does not provide a complete answer to the existential dilemmas; rather, it rediscovers a path leading to the Christian value order and shows how the attitude of humility develops and the faith in Providence grows."¹⁴ Podstawka's complex interpretation of the discussed plays, combined with her clear perception of the weakening of Europe's Christian roots, is the background against which she scrutinizes unresolved conflicts of conscience characteristic of the late 19th and the early 20th centuries.

Podstawka's reflection on the meaning of human existence may be considered as an introduction to the interpretation of Georges Bernanos's *Dialogues des carmélites*¹⁵ [*The Carmelites*]¹⁶ proposed by Maria Jolanta Olszewska in the next article in this section.¹⁷ It is worth noting that Bernanos wrote his last work while suffering from a terminal illness and struggling with the fear of death. According to Olszewska, in his play he made "a perfect use of the fact that the concept of drama refers literally to the drama of human condition, but also to a genre which is supposed to express a playwright's worldview."¹⁸ *Dia-*

logues des carmélites is based on a novella *Die Letzte am Schaffot*¹⁹ [The Last One at the Scaffold] by Gertrud von Le Fort. Against the background of the brutal history of the French revolution, Bernanos places the fictional character of Blanche de la Force, a nun and a former aristocrat. The most characteristic feature of her character is morbid fear: from the play, we learn that her entering a convent was actually an escape from the dangers of the world, and we witness her flight from the convent in an attempt to save her life. Ultimately, however, the virtue of courage triumphs in Blanche's heart and, free from the fear of death, she joins other nuns on their way to the scaffold. *Dialogues des carmélites* is a masterpiece and a work of a deeply theological nature. In telling the story of sister Blanche, Bernanos reflects on the topic with which he was particularly concerned: that of the agony of Christ in the garden of Gethsemane. *Dialogues des carmélites* focuses on the specific psychological and spiritual aspects of what Christ lived through at that time: his fear, exhaustion, and his internal struggle to follow the choice once made, his experience depicting the *kenosis* of the God-Man, his complete 'self-emptying,' in which he embraces all human suffering.

In an article on the play "Drzewo"²⁰ [The Tree] by Wiesław Myśliwski, Agnieszka Jarosz²¹ addresses the question of the most important 'point of reference' for a human life. She finds the motif of hope in the construction of the characters in the

¹⁴ See Podstawka, "Zmierzając ku nadziei?" 85.

¹⁵ See Georges Bernanos, *Dialogues des carmélites* (Neuchâtel: Éditions de la Baconnière and Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1949).

¹⁶ See Georges Bernanos, *The Carmelites*, trans. Gerard Hopkins (London: Collins Fontana, 1961).

¹⁷ See Maria J. Olszewska, "W kleszczach lęku, czyli *Dialogi karmelitanek* Georgesa Bernanosa," in *Wobec nadziei*, 89–119.

¹⁸ Ibidem, 89.

¹⁹ See Gertrud von Le Fort, *Die Letzte am Schaffot: Novelle* (München: Kösel & Pustet, 1931).

²⁰ See Wiesław Myśliwski, "Drzewo," *Twórczość*, no. 7 (1988): 11–73.

²¹ See Agnieszka Jarosz, "'Ale nieraz bywa tak, że coś nie jest, a jest, i prawdziwsze niż by było': Ujęcia nadziei w *Drzewie* Wiesława Myśliwskiego," in *Wobec nadziei*, 121–43.

play, inhabitants of the ‘temporal’ world, who “appear lost and, their lives determined by the new reality, cannot find a way in it, nevertheless trying to function as best as they can.”²² The same motif appears in the ‘supernatural’ world also present in the play which intermingles with that of the living. One of the non-obvious aspects of hope which can be traced in Myśliwski’s drama is the victory over the enigmatic tempter who spreads doubt but, in the end, is defeated. In a still different way, hope is expressed by the eponymous tree which becomes a source of conflict. Following Dariusz Kulesza’s interpretation, Jarosz considers the symbolism of the tree as pertaining to the Judeo-Christian context, which is particularly close to Myśliwski’s poetic world; accordingly, the tree may be interpreted as both the tree of life and the one of the knowledge of good and evil.²³

The article “‘Co mają zrobić ci, którzy nie widzieli?’ Od wiary w Słowo do apokryficznej gry między słowami – na przykładzie *Szawła* Roberta Urbańskiego”²⁴ [Those who have not seen, what are they to do? From the Faith in the Word to an Apocryphal Play on Words: An Analysis of *Szawel* by Robert Urbański] by Joanna Michalczuk addresses the complex issue of the apocryphal discourse in contemporary literature, offering an interpretation of the categories of the religious play and its ‘canonical’ and ‘apocryphal’ elements. From among the contemporary Polish dramas whose authors use apocryphal motifs, Michalczuk has chosen the play which refers to the heritage of the biblical canon: Robert Urbański’s

Szawel [Saul] (which premiered in 2004). She brings together interpretations of the kerygma provided by theology and literary studies and non-textual elements comprising “figural representations, elements of collective consciousness: archetypical human situations, and the ways in which they are understood.”²⁵ Thus the reference to the canonical texts and representations becomes a reference to the kerygma, i.e., to God’s message of love proclaimed to man. Michalczuk claims that Urbański’s drama, by pointing to values which are universal yet unrelated to the kerygma as the source of hope, leads to conclusions which are in conflict with the Christian anthropology. The apocryphal story told by Urbański, in many ways similar to the one we find in the New Testament, explores the mystery of the transformation of Saul of Tarsus, a persecutor of Christians, into St. Paul, who became known as the Apostle of Nations. The playwright ponders the sense of offering one’s life to God and rejecting all the ‘earthly’ feelings, including love. What kind of sacrifice does God’s love demand? Did Saul make right decision, having chosen to die for faith? Was he right to reject the love of a woman in order not to let desire interfere with his mission to proclaim the love of God? And what about the others, those who, unlike him, have not seen Jesus? What are they to do? As an apocryphal text, Urbański’s work deprives the canonical message of its exclusiveness and makes the object of faith lose its dogmatic nature, become ambiguous, and thus open up to human creativity. Although Joanna Michalczuk interprets *Szawel* as a story about the human nature and the human pursuit of God, her analysis of the play results in a metaphorical image of the Church of the Christians of the early 21st century.

²² Ibidem, 124.

²³ Ibidem, 134.

²⁴ See Joanna Michalczuk, “‘Co mają zrobić ci, którzy nie widzieli?’ Od wiary w Słowo do apokryficznej gry między słowami – na przykładzie *Szawła* Roberta Urbańskiego,” in *Wobec nadziei*, 145–81.

²⁵ Ibidem, 157.

A reflection on modern theatre and on the direct and indirect influences of drama on both the audience and the performers is proposed in Sylwia Dęga-Frątczak's paper "Teatr 'za kratami,' ale z nadzieją"²⁶ [A Theatre 'Behind Bars,' but Still with Hope]. Dęga-Frątczak describes theatre-related resocialization activities undertaken in the penitentiary center in Sieradz, Poland, by showing the role of literature, and particularly of staging plays, in the process of the social rehabilitation of prisoners: introduced into the 'non-theatrical' space of the prison, theatre helps the inmates engage in self-creating activities and in personality transformation.

The use of modern theatre activities in education is discussed by Agnieszka Osęła in the paper "Aksjologiczne barwy świata teatru młodzieżowego"²⁷ [The Axiological 'Colours' of the Youth Theatre]. As educator and drama activities leader in secondary schools, as well as director and manager of a university theatre group, Osęła emphasizes that, by helping individuals determine their aesthetic, personality-related, and social goals, theatre opens them up to highest values and makes them sensitive to the needs of others. To substantiate her claims, the author presents the drama group established at a secondary school in Zwierzyniec, Poland, and shows how their work confirms Wiesław Karolak's observation: "Creative activity resembles play.... Experiencing the joy of creation is more important than the greatness of the work."²⁸

²⁶ See Sylwia Dęga-Frątczak, "Teatr 'za kratami,' ale z nadzieją," in *Wobec nadziei*, 185–92.

²⁷ See Agnieszka Osęła, "Aksjologiczne barwy świata teatru młodzieżowego," in *Wobec nadziei*, 193–209.

²⁸ Wiesław Karolak, *Sztuka jako zabawa: Zabawa jako sztuka* (Warszawa: Centralny Ośrodek Doskonalenia Nauczycieli, 1999), 11.

The activity of youth theatre groups is discussed also by Mariusz Lach in the article "Reformy Juliusza Osterwy na początku XXI wieku w amatorskim teatrze religijnym"²⁹ [Juliusz Osterwa's Reforms in the Amateur Religious Theatre in the Early 21st Century]. The author argues that theatre imbued with religious values frequently becomes a space in which young people can grow by both improving their acting skills and developing as persons. Reinterpreting the concepts of teamwork and shared responsibility, as proposed by Janusz Osterwa and Mieczysław Limanowski (founders of 'Reduta,' Poland's first laboratory theatre, based on the idea of a 'holy' theatre resembling a convent or a commune), Lach observes that the environments in which young actors currently receive their formal education do not offer them communality or shared vision. At the same time, amateur youth drama groups, born spontaneously, gradually engender in their members an authentic need for teamwork, so characteristic of the beginnings of 'Reduta.'

The authors of the papers collected in *Wobec nadziei* place a particular emphasis on hope conceived as "the perspective most appropriate ... to discover and contemplate truth: the truth about Christianity, about man, about our world."³⁰ The variety of approaches they adopt, their insightful analyses of their chosen plays, theatre productions, and scholarly discussions, as well as the penetrating diagnoses of urgent social and cultural problems, make the volume an important contribution to literary and theatre studies. However, although scholarly in nature, the book may also become a companion for the reader on his or her path to self-knowledge and transformation.

²⁹ See Mariusz Lach, "Reformy Juliusza Osterwy na początku XXI wieku w amatorskim teatrze religijnym," in *Wobec nadziei*, 211–21.

³⁰ Józef Tischner, *Myślenie według wartości* (Znak: Kraków, 2011), 6.