

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. 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. 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 act 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.

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.