

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HOPE IN SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT. A PSYCHOLOGICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Magdalena BIOLIK-MORON¹, Aleksandra KŁOS-SKRZYPCZAK²

ABSTRACT: Hope, as one of the theological virtues, is an important area of human spiritual development. However, like the other virtues, it is necessary to shape it along with the development and growth of spiritual life. The article will discuss threads of hope from the theological perspective and spirituality, both from the point of view of Catholic theology but also from the point of view of human psychological development. Hope will be analyzed from a theological, moral and biblical perspective, and its meaning, importance and universality will be indicated. Then, the process of shaping human spirituality will be described: its importance from a theological perspective, and the individual stages of spiritual development will be presented from the perspective of developmental psychology and the psychology of religion. The last part will present contemporary research on the relationship between hope and human spirituality as well as perspectives on further research directions.

Keywords: Hope, spiritual development, spirituality.

¹ Magister at University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland; e-mail: magdalena.biolik.moron@gmail.com.
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1906-4915>

² Doctor of the University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland; e-mail: aleksandra.klos-skrzypczak@us.edu.pl.
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0512-7938>



Introduction

Every human being has a hopeful predisposition. Along with faith and love, hope is one of the theological virtues, which is why its place in human life is so essential. The place for the manifestation of hope in the concreteness of human life is spirituality. This paper will focus on hope from the perspective of human spiritual life. The first part will present a theological analysis of hope: its sense, meaning and universality; the theological, moral and biblical perspectives. This will be followed by a description of the formation of human spirituality: its meaning from a theological perspective and the different stages of spiritual development from the perspective of developmental psychology and the psychology of religion. In the last part, contemporary research on the relationship between hope and human spirituality will be presented, as well as a perspective on further research directions.

Sense and meaning of hope

Hope, which is a fundamental disposition of both believers and human beings in general, is at the center of contemporary thought. While it received little attention in the past, it is now the subject of much debate, analysis and deliberation. All this is because post-industrial society has initiated a series of changes in the modern world, in which humans are striving for an ever-better vision of the future. This future is full of hope, expectation and trust, not only in terms of technological development, but also in interpersonal, economic or political relations³.

Nowadays, a hopeful attitude is widespread and takes multiple forms. Throughout their lives, human beings experience desires that guide their earthly actions, which “manifest themselves (...) on various levels, from the biological level, common to all living organisms and connected with the preservation of life and its transmission to offspring, through the whole range of desires linked to human culture, resulting from reflection on the world and the tendency to transform it, to the desires linked to the social nature of human beings, among which is especially friendship”⁴. The worldly reality cannot offer a human being complete happiness,

³ H. Ćmiel, *Teologia moralna szczegółowa: podręcznik dla studentów teologii*, Częstochowa 2013, 146.

⁴ W. Irka, *Oblicza chrześcijańskiej nadziei: praca zbiorowa*, Wrocław 2009, 49.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HOPE IN SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT.
A PSYCHOLOGICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

because all the goods rooted in it bear the mark of impermanence. There is no happiness in that which brings uncertainty and is associated with the fear of loss and depletion⁵. Hope, in all its varieties, is strongly rooted in concurrent depths of human greatness and smallness: we are aware that in our existence we are fully dependent on the Creator, but, on the other hand, we feel within ourselves an immense desire for the infinite. The body limits the human being, the spirit opens them to the infinite. Deep in human nature is the desire to overcome one's limitations, to strive for perfection, to develop oneself: in a word, the desire for a better tomorrow. It is this desire that is the deepest foundation of hope, which "(...) justifies the purely natural hope that is in us, and the supernatural hope - which is a virtue"⁶.

Hope (from the Latin *spec, expectation*) in philosophical terms is presented as "a human attitude expressed in a particular effort of the will, the object of which is a good that is hard to achieve" or "an irascible passion (encouragement) directed towards a difficult good"⁷. The Dictionary of Polish Language describes hope as: "the expectation that something desired will be fulfilled and the trust that it will come true, come to fruition" and "the possibility of the fulfillment of something"⁸. Charles Peguy, French playwright and publicist, wrote that "(...) hope moves forward suspended on the shoulders of two elder sisters who support it by the hands. And between the two sisters, she finds space to let herself be carried forward. Although she is like a child not strong enough to walk on her own, she is in fact the one who supports the other two"⁹. According to theological reflection, hope is "one of the three theological virtues (...) representing trust in God as opposed to despair. The content of this trust is the conviction that Providence watches over the whole world and over people in (...) temporal life (...) the conviction of the effectiveness of the work of salvation and, consequently, of eternal life in God"¹⁰.

⁵ Irka, *Oblicza chrześcijańskiej nadziei* 51.

⁶ R. Kostecki, *Tajemnica współżycia z Bogiem: zagadnienie cnót teologicznych wiary, nadziei i miłości*, Kraków 1983, 112.

⁷ A. Maryniarczyk, *Odkrycie wewnętrznej struktury bytów*, Lublin 2006, 472.

⁸ Nadzieja, in: *Słownik Języka Polskiego*, (24.10.2023), <https://sjp.pwn.pl/sjp/nadzieja;2485974>.

⁹ J. Bramorski, *Cnoty teologiczne w życiu moralnym chrześcijanina*, Gdańsk 2008, 21.

¹⁰ A. Podsiad, *Słownik terminów i pojęć filozoficznych*, Warszawa 2000, 544.

At a natural level, hope presupposes love and grows out of love, since it is the psychological experience that is the source of all others. When we love a good, we aspire to possess it because it is closely linked to a feeling of happiness, whereas we feel sorrow and sadness when evil prevents us from obtaining the good. However, when the good appears to us as attainable, hope arises in the soul. "Hope, then, grows out of love, like desire and lust. It has many similarities with them, but (...) yet it differs from them, because its object is the difficult good (...) whereas desire and lust concern any good"¹¹. When we look at hope through an empirical lens, we notice that hope is awakened in us the moment we find that the desired good is available to us, even though it is not easy to attain, or when someone else convinces us of the possibility of attaining it. Hope, like love, strives for the good and is closely connected to it. In loving the good we desire it. Hope begets love when, in pursuit of the desired good, we rely on the help of others and therefore expect something because we can count on others to help us. Then hope gives rise to love towards those who help us in our pursuit of the good. Thus, a peculiar correlation between love and hope emerges, "insofar as hope concerns the good we expect, then hope is born of love of concupiscence; and insofar as it concerns the one who helps us achieve the expected good, hope awakens in us a love of friendship towards him"¹².

Theological and moral reflection

Hope is the driving force of human action "by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises" (CCC 1817). Every human being needs hope "from the moment he experiences himself as a historical being, becoming and therefore open to the future, directed towards development and towards fulfilling himself ever more perfectly as time progresses"¹³.

Hope is a kind of intense desire for and striving towards the good. This striving, although directed towards the good, with due restraint, does not, however,

¹¹ Kostecki, *Tajemnica współżycia z Bogiem* 113.

¹² Kostecki, *Tajemnica współżycia z Bogiem* 113.

¹³ M. Kluz, *Nadzieja w życiu i postawie moralnej człowieka w świetle encykliki "Spe salvi" Benedykta XVI, Roczniki Teologii Katolickiej*, vol. XIV/2, 2015, 98.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HOPE IN SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT.
A PSYCHOLOGICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

constitute a special virtue. It is only at the supernatural level that hope can be a virtue. Virtues of supernatural origin, or theological virtues, are the foundation of Christian moral activity; they animate it and give it its special character. They inform and give life to all the moral virtues. They are infused by God into the souls of the faithful to make them capable of acting as his children and of meriting eternal life. The Catechism of the Catholic Church lists three theological (divine) virtues: faith, hope, charity (CCC 1813). Tradition sees the above-mentioned fundamental truths of faith as the essential element of the Christian message, which draws us closer to God than any other virtue or attitude. It is in the theological virtues that “we turn to God for the sake of his love: in faith to the God who reveals himself, in hope to the God who promises to be our highest fulfillment and the way to attain it, in love to the God in which he first loved us”¹⁴.

The theological virtues are integrally, intrinsically linked and form a close whole, however, love is superior to the other two virtues because, as St Paul wrote, “So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Co 13:13). These divine virtues constitute the foundation of moral rectitude, are the fruit of God’s action in a person, and “express (...) a particular transformation of the human condition, embraced and transformed by the novelty of divine grace. Through these virtues, Christian existence develops as the story of the realization of eternal life in time, in such a way that it is no longer possible to separate the human from the divine”¹⁵.

The Apostle Paul reduces Christian existence to faith, hope and charity: “faith in the risen Christ (...) hope of future salvation (...) love for Christ realized in charity and service to the world and people”¹⁶. To enter the Kingdom of God, it is necessary to hope and perform the right acts. Hope is a necessary means in this regard on a par with faith and love. The Lord God expects hope from humans in the various commandments. “Although there is no special commandment concerning hope in the Decalogue, the very fact of giving this Decalogue to mankind contains within itself the requirement of nourishing hope in what the Lord God promises for its observance. We can say, therefore, that the commandment of hope is contained

¹⁴ Ćmiel, *Teologia moralna szczegółowa* 75.

¹⁵ Bramorski, *Cnoty teologiczne w życiu moralnym* 7.

¹⁶ J. Alfaro, *Chrześcijańska nadzieja i wyzwolenie człowieka*, Warszawa 1975, 32.

in the Ten Commandments as their prerequisite and essential condition”¹⁷. Faith, hope and charity constitute three different, but closely related, aspects of human life.

The nature and qualification of human actions depend on the object towards which a given action is directed, and the object of hope is a good. In the strict sense of the term hope, it must be emphasized that it concerns only a good which we do not yet possess, but which we wish to attain in the future. This is why hope differs, for example, from the joy that arises in the human psyche “here and now” when the desired good comes into our possession. A further object of hope is a good that, due to its greatness and loftiness, is difficult but not impossible to attain. The highest good is God, who in his infinite goodness has given himself to man. Thus, the object of the supernatural virtue of hope is the infinite good that makes man happy, i.e., God.

In the virtue of hope, a distinction must be made between its main or principal object and its secondary object. What we expect supernaturally, i.e., the main object, is the happiness of eternal life. The secondary object is all that helps us in the pursuit of eternal happiness: sanctifying grace, gifts of the Holy Spirit, sacramental and actual graces. In a broader sense, secondary objects also include “all temporal goods which, although they are of themselves indifferent to eternal happiness, when properly used can greatly assist in its pursuit”¹⁸.

In terms of its ontic existence, the virtue of hope is supernatural, and its first and principal author is God. The direct subject of hope is the will. The virtue of hope guides a person towards the Lord God as the supreme spiritual good. This good can only be accessible to the spiritual appetitive power, i.e., the will. The indirect subject of hope can only be rational beings for whom God is the future and attainable good. “It is therefore not the saved in heaven, who have already attained full happiness in the Lord God, nor the damned. The saved, however, can expect to receive yet additional glory after the resurrection of their bodies”¹⁹.

¹⁷ C. J. Wichrowicz, *Zarys teologii moralnej w ujęciu tomistycznym*, Warszawa 2016, 84.

¹⁸ Wichrowicz, *Zarys teologii moralnej* 79.

¹⁹ Wichrowicz, *Zarys teologii moralnej* 81.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HOPE IN SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT.
A PSYCHOLOGICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Hope has a universal character, as it contains a liberating potential for the whole earth and the entire natural world. In its message, hope is trust in a God who remains faithful to his promises. The socio-historical context changes our ideas about the kingdom of God due to temporal conditions and particular mental categories, yet over the centuries they shape the “community of hopeful people”²⁰. Hope lives on from generation to generation; among Christians it attains a special dimension with the help of the gifts of the Holy Spirit: it is not a hope “... for the final shape of the kingdom of God, but also for its temporal anticipation in interpersonal relationships”²¹.

A critical issue, in not only theological but also theoretical considerations, are the actual and true sins against hope. We can act against the virtue of hope by means of thoughts or actions: voluntarily ceasing to trust in God, despairing, trusting overly in our own strength or relying, in the mundane of life, solely on God’s grace. Hope consists in both trusting and desiring God as man’s absolute fulfillment. “Man trespasses against this element of hope when he does not strive for God and consciously feels no joy in and no liking for Him. This is proven especially in an attitude of weariness and spiritual laziness (...) The two essential components of hope, trust and desire, are separate, but in reality, they are always bound together, so that a sin against one of them always strikes in some way also at the other”²².

Personal models of hope in the Bible

To understand the theological virtue of hope, it is necessary to refer to God’s revelation in the Bible, which is the foundation of all theological considerations. People were created in the image and after the likeness of God (Cf. Gn 1:26), and with love “(...) we should be called children of God” (1Jn 3:1). Being a child of God determines in us an attitude of contemplation with the Triune God, generating at the same time the need to aspire to the infinite, and the aforementioned “natural longing is deepened, expanded and intensified by the sanctifying grace”²³.

²⁰ W. Hryniewicz, *Dlaczego głoszę nadzieję?*, Warszawa 2004, 12.

²¹ Hryniewicz, *Dlaczego głoszę nadzieję?* 12.

²² Ćmiel, *Teologia moralna szczegółowa* 179.

²³ Bramorski, *Cnoty teologiczne w życiu moralnym* 2.

Communion with God requires the adoption of certain enduring moral attitudes, permanent internal dispositions to do good. This predisposition of humans to live in unity with God is called virtue, because it “allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of himself”²⁴. Virtues support and enhance the performance of morally good acts, and a virtuous person “is like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers” (Ps 1:3). The coming of Christ into the world demonstrated the need to do “something more”, to “abandon the old man” according to the principle: “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Php 4:8).

In Greek, hope expresses both the expectation of happiness and the fear of misfortune. In Scripture, the term has an incredibly positive character, as it points towards salvation and it does so in very diverse forms. In the Old Testament, hope is characterized through the lens of God’s covenant with the people, who hopefully await the fulfillment of the promises. Hope is oriented towards the conquest of the promised land (Cf. Gn 15:7; 17:8; Dt 1:8), after the conquest of which the people entrust themselves to God’s care and ask Him for a blessing. However, God’s help presupposes the obedience of the people, while “false prophets promise (...) God’s favor in spite of (...) sins, and thus lead them to feed false hopes”²⁵. In the pages of the Old Testament, hope is linked to the anticipation of the Messiah that would come to the world as the mediator of the expected salvation, “however, this Old Testament anticipation (...) never reached a level of actual acceptance and definite unity, nor did Old Testament hope in its entirety”²⁶.

In the books of the New Testament, reflection on biblical hope is not given adequate attention or considered in a sufficiently broad spectrum. The Synoptic Gospels are mainly about the message of Christ in the context of the Kingdom of God and about the fulfillment of Old Testament promises. In contrast, the situation is quite different in the Pauline texts, which even recommend hope to Christians, emphasizing the importance of the *parousia*.

²⁴ CCC 1803.

²⁵ Ćmiel, *Teologia moralna szczegółowa* 147.

²⁶ Ćmiel, *Teologia moralna szczegółowa* 149.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HOPE IN SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT.
A PSYCHOLOGICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The noun “hope” appears 53 times in the pages of the New Testament, while the corresponding verb “to expect” or “to hope” appears only 31 times. While the noun appears mainly in the Pauline epistles, the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistle to the Hebrews, the verb is mentioned in the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, St Paul’s epistles, the Epistle to the Hebrews as well as the Second and Third Epistles of John and the First Epistle of Peter.²⁷ It is impossible to define the content of hope without including terms denoting attitudes that depend on maintaining hope, such as “perseverance” or “patience”.

As a model and source of hope, the Apostle Paul points to the figure of Abraham, who was filled with the promises of God and “(...) believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations” (Rm 4:18). These words are an extremely apt interpretation of the patriarch’s attitude towards God. The Epistle to the Romans sets Abraham’s faith as a model for all believers, and “having hope is linked directly to the act of faith”²⁸. Blessing as an object of hope is also mentioned in Isaiah (Cf. Is 44:1-5) or in the Epistle to the Hebrews (Cf. Heb 10:23). The 11th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews mentions the possibility of doing great works because of God’s promises on many occasions. The term “hope” is implied directly by the noun “promise” (Heb 11:13.17.33.39) and indirectly by such verbs as: “to look forward” (Heb 11:10), “to seek” (Heb 11:6), “to desire” (Heb 11:16) or “to look to” (Heb 11:26)²⁹. Based on these examples, it is clear that hope is seen as a companion of faith, empowering us to perform great deeds³⁰.

A new characterization of hope is revealed in the Epistle to the Romans in the passage: “For in this hope we were saved” (Rm 8:24a). The Apostle Paul calls for the abandonment of the human view of the future in favor of God’s plan of salvation and captures this characterization by distinguishing between two attitudes later in the Epistle: “Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience” (Rm 8,24b-25).

²⁷ A. Malina, Gdy nie widzimy (Rz 8,25). Nadzieja w listach Nowego Testamentu, in: *Nieść nadzieję na współczesne areopagi otaczając troską życie. W roku św. Pawła Apostoła Narodów. Materiały z XVIII Piekarskiego Sympozjum Naukowego*, ed. Biela B., Księgarnia św. Jacka, Katowice 2009, 45-46.

²⁸ Malina, Gdy nie widzimy (Rz 8,25) 49.

²⁹ Malina, Gdy nie widzimy (Rz 8,25) 52.

³⁰ Malina, Gdy nie widzimy (Rz 8,25) 52.

In the case of the visible, it is not possible to speak of hope, since it arises either from present circumstances or from actions that can be foreseen in the future. The second attitude, to which St Paul alludes, is based on a different kind of relationship, namely, “not seeing implies the absence of any purely human justification for adopting the attitude required by God. The person who does not see can only rely on what hope directs them towards: the manifestation of God’s sonship, the adoption as sons of God and the redemption of bodies³¹.”

The certainty of understanding Christian hope is accomplished in the person of Jesus Christ, as the blessings proclaimed by Him raise our hope towards eternal life. Through the incarnation of Jesus Christ, God preserves us in a hope that “does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rm 5:5). In the Pauline epistles, we find a comparison of hope to “the anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner shrine behind the curtain” (Heb 6:19), to the armor that protects the breastplate (Cf. 1Th 5:8) or the source of joy in tribulation (Cf. Rm 12:12). The virtue of hope is overflowing in the “Lord’s Prayer,” which summarizes everything that hope allows us to desire (Cf. Lk 11:2). Humans should cultivate hope “(...) in the glory of heaven promised by God to those who love Him and do His will. In every circumstance, each one of us should hope, with the grace of God, to persevere “to the end” and to obtain the joy of heaven, as God’s eternal reward for the good works accomplished with the grace of Christ”³².

The model of Christian hope is the figure of Mary, who “(...) standing beside the cross (...) is the first (...) to receive and bring to perfection the attitude of many who trusted in God in the Old Testament and persevered in the hope of receiving goods which they had not yet seen”³³. In the pages of the New Testament, Mary is the one who accompanied Jesus from the beginning to the end of his earthly journey. As the Mother of Jesus, she became the Mother of all believers. She is the Mother who brings hope despite the hardship and suffering she faced at the time of God’s Son’s martyrdom.

³¹ Malina, *Gdy nie widzimy* (Rz 8,25) 50.

³² CCC 1821.

³³ Malina, *Gdy nie widzimy* (Rz 8,25) 53.

Spirituality – an attempt at a universal definition

Modern perspectives on spirituality recognize it as an innate capacity residing alongside other human cognitive, physical, emotional and social capacities, and as such spirituality is considered separate from religious belief. Contemporary literature widely agrees that being spiritual does not mean that a person is religious – but rather religious beliefs can be linked to a person's spirituality³⁴.

Contemporary scholars believe that there can be a spirituality unrelated to a specific religion. At the same time, they maintain that spirituality is a natural manifestation of human functioning. For example, according to R. Rolheiser, man cannot function without spirituality. He defines spirituality as the integration or disintegration within the body, mind and soul and the integration or disintegration in the relationship with God, other people and the universe³⁵. Sandra Schneiders defines spirituality as “the experience of consciously striving to integrate one's life in terms not of isolation and self-absorption, but in self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives”³⁶. Villegas believes that spirituality is manifested in people's search for answers to ultimate questions and that human beings are deeply motivated to live out the answers, to weave them into an intentional life project. The author emphasizes the relationship between spirituality and faith. In his view, spirituality encompasses an intentional approach to life, guided by beliefs that should answer questions about meaning and enable transcendence. In the case of Christian spirituality, the central belief will be about the triune God, the possibility of a relationship with this God, and the meaning and transformation made possible by grace and following Jesus³⁷. One can also see a critical approach to defining spirituality in isolation from religiosity. Carr believes that the term spirituality has

³⁴ C. Robinson, To be 'formed' and 'informed': early years' educators' perspectives of spirituality and its affordance in faith-based early learning centres, *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 25 (2020) 225-226.

³⁵ R. Rolheiser, *W poszukiwaniu duchowości XXI wieku*, Kraków 2005, 25-26.

³⁶ S. M. Schneiders, Spirituality in the Academy, *Theological Studies* 50 (1989), 684.

³⁷ D. Villegas, Spirituality and belief: Implications for study and practice of Christian spirituality, *HTS Teologiese Studies*, 74 (2018).

meaning only in connection with a religious tradition³⁸. Jan Grajczonek outlines the key features of spirituality: a person's relationship with self, relationship with others, with the environment, with God; a sense of wholeness or becoming whole; a search for meaning and purpose; a sense of value; an appreciation of the beauty of nature and human achievement; a sense of mystery and transcendence; as well as moral sensitivity³⁹. In the Polish context, the issue of Christian spirituality is taken up by Grzywocz. He points out that spirituality may be healthy or pathological. In defining healthy spirituality, he refers to the Gospel passage on the commandment to love God and neighbor (Mk 12:30-31). A healthy spirituality will, according to the author, be based on three pillars: love of God, love of neighbor and self-love. Love of God involves entering a deep and personal relationship with Him. Similarly, in the case of love of neighbor – it will be the ability to build an authentic relationship with another person. It indicates that the encounter with God also takes place through human relationships – hence we can say that these will be an element of human spirituality. Also, the Church called by Christ to be a community based on human relationships is an expression of the importance of relationships in the spiritual realm⁴⁰. And the final element of healthy spirituality, as understood by Grzywocz, is self-love, i.e., the ability to recognize one's needs and to take care of oneself. Both in the concepts that refer to a specific religion and in the understanding of spirituality in a universal way, one can distinguish characteristic manifestations of spirituality such as integration with a person and his or her life, the ability to build relationships, reflexivity related to existential questions, having a life goal and a value system.

When talking about spirituality, it is important to understand the dynamics of its development. Spirituality is not static, but it is shaped in the cycle of human life. It is intricately linked to the stages of human psychological development.

³⁸ D. Carr, Rival conceptions of spiritual education, *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 30 (1996), 159-77.

³⁹ J. Grajczonek, Interrogating the Spiritual as Constructed in Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia, *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 37 (2012), 152-160.

⁴⁰ K. Grzywocz, *Patologia duchowości*, Kraków 2020, 27-29.

Human spiritual and religious development

The concepts of human religious/spiritual development are based on the stages of human psychosocial development. One of the key figures who developed the issue of psychosocial development was Erik Erikson. He identified five stages of psychosocial development in childhood and adolescence as well as the crises associated with them,⁴¹ which are the basis for a new developmental quality. Each stage has both positive and negative dimensions: infancy (basic trust vs. mistrust), early childhood (autonomy vs. shame and doubt), play age (initiative vs. guilt), school age (industry vs. inferiority), adolescence (identify vs. confusion)⁴². According to Erikson, a positively resolved developmental crisis leads to the formation of virtues. A consequence of a well-lived infancy stage is the virtue of hope, understood as “the tendency to believe in the possibility of fulfilling one’s basic desires, in spite of the unrestrained demands and scope of dependence”⁴³. A consequence of the developmental crisis in early childhood is the virtue of will, understood as the enduring ability to make decisions, to make free choices, to restrain the expression of violent emotions or to defer them as well as consistency of action⁴⁴. The age of play is associated with the acquisition of the virtue of purpose, or the ability to set and achieve goals⁴⁵. The next developmental stage, i.e. school age, is a time when the virtue of competence is formed. Sękowska, following Erikson, defines competence as “free exercise of dexterity and intelligence in the completion of serious tasks unimpaired by an infantile sense of inferiority”⁴⁶. The positively resolved crisis of adolescence is related to the acquisition of the virtue of fidelity, i.e., “the ability to keep one’s commitments against the inevitable contradictions of value systems”⁴⁷.

⁴¹ The term crisis is used in its normative sense here.

⁴² D. Wulff, *Psychologia religii*, Warszawa 1999, 325-328.

⁴³ M. Sękowska, Neops psychoanalityczna koncepcja rozwoju psychospołecznego Erika H. Eriksona, in: *Duchowy rozwój człowieka*, ed. P. Socha, Kraków 2000, 119.

⁴⁴ Sękowska, Neops psychoanalityczna koncepcja rozwoju psychospołecznego 119.

⁴⁵ Wulff, *Psychologia* 327.

⁴⁶ Sękowska, Neops psychoanalityczna koncepcja rozwoju psychospołecznego 124.

⁴⁷ Wulff, *Psychologia* 328.

There are three crises in adulthood: in early adulthood, a person's identity is formed and there is a time to build an intimate relationship that connects one person's identity with that of another. The solution to the developmental crisis at this stage will therefore be intimacy and an unresolved crisis will lead to isolation. The virtue achieved here is love. The next stage of adulthood can be considered the most important stage in human life. Its essence is generativity, i.e., creating and molding the next generation, in the literal sense, by bearing and raising offspring, and in the symbolic sense, through creativity. The virtue of this developmental period is care, "the widening concern for what has been generated by love, necessity or accident"⁴⁸. The final developmental crisis occurs in old age. When positively resolved, it leads to integrity, while the opposite is despair. The essence of this period is acceptance, that there is only one life and it has had one shape and not another. The virtue achieved here is wisdom.

One of the best known, psychological concepts of the development of human spirituality are J. F. Fowler's Stages of Faith Development⁴⁹. Much like Erikson, Fowler also built on a stage-based understanding of development⁵⁰. Fowler based his theory on the work of scholars such as Erikson, Piaget and Kohlberg. He distinguished eight stages of faith development. There are three stages in childhood: intuitive-projective faith, mythic-literal faith and synthetic-conventional faith. According to Fowler, these are preceded by the so-called pre-stage in the time up to about 2 years of age, referred to as undifferentiated faith. This is when the first perceptual experiences take place and the so-called pre-images of God begin to form. At the core of the development of faith is a primal trust, which is expressed in the child's bond with their mother. In the first stage of faith (intuitive-projective), the child has completed the process of separation and a sense of self is formed. Previous experiences are freely processed in the imagination. An image of God is formed at this time and the first awareness of existential concepts such as death and gender appears⁵¹. The mythical-literal stage occurs between the ages of 6.5 and 11

⁴⁸ Wulff, *Psychologia* 328.

⁴⁹ M. Skubic, The First Relationship – the experience of Fundamental Trust as a Foundation for the Development of Faith, *The Person and the Challenges* 11 (2021), 176.

⁵⁰ P. Socha, Teolog jako psycholog: koncepcja rozwoju wiary Jamesa W. Fowlera, in: *Duchowy rozwój człowieka*, red. P. Socha, Kraków 2000, 169.

⁵¹ Socha, Teolog jako psycholog 173-174.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HOPE IN SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT.
A PSYCHOLOGICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

or 12. It is characterized by literal thinking, cause-and-effect reasoning and the overcoming of previous egocentrism. The child in this period may have an anthropomorphic idea of God, and begins to formulate his or her own religious and existential judgments (which, however, are usually formed on an *ad hoc* basis and serve materialistic gratification). In Fowler's view, the strength of this stage is the ability to perceive meanings and symbols consistently through story and myth, facilitated by the ability to dramatize reality. As Socha notes, "this fairy-tale period of life presents the child with an opportunity to have unique religious experiences, bringing complex, unconscious objects of faith into the child's spirituality"⁵². The third stage proposed by Fowler is synthetic-conventional. It begins around the age of 12 and continues throughout adolescence. This is a period of identity formation. The child/adolescent embarks on reflection about events and their meaning, has a need for self-definition and experiences disillusionment with authority figures while still having a strong need for them. This is also a time of forming relationships (especially in the peer group) and in the context of faith, the "I vs. world" and "I vs. God" perspective emerges. In this period, a value system is internalized, although still in an incomplete way (so faith can be easily shaken at this stage).

The next three stages of faith development occur in adulthood: individuative-reflective, conjunctive (paradoxical-consolidative) and universalizing⁵³. Individuative-reflective faith may develop in early adulthood, later or not at all⁵⁴. The essence of this stage is a departure from relying on external authority. The achievement of this stage consists in demythologization. The individual has the capacity to critically reflect on their views and identity, resulting in the internalization of beliefs⁵⁵. Not every adult reaches this stage. Many continue to rely on external authority without engaging in deeper reflection.

The next stage of faith development is conjunctive. The internalization of beliefs from the previous stage is followed by integration. At this stage, a person discovers how many contradictions and paradoxes there are in themselves and their experience. They come to the conclusion that faith cannot be understood two-

⁵² Socha, Teolog jako psycholog 175.

⁵³ Socha, Teolog jako psycholog 173.

⁵⁴ Socha, Teolog jako psycholog 177.

⁵⁵ Wulff, *Psychologia* 346.

dimensionally. Consequently, they re-internalize religious traditions and symbols (which in the earlier stages are understood reductively). Furthermore, the person becomes convinced that ultimate truth goes far beyond the possibilities of cognition. They come to terms with the fact that transcendent reality cannot be adequately represented, but at the same time strongly submit to symbolic expressions while acknowledging their relativity. At this stage, the person is open to other traditions and communities, while at the same time being loyal to his or her own community.

Conjunctive faith. This stage can occur after the age of 30 at the earliest, but usually later, i.e., in the second half of life. It is characterized by “going beyond any specified worldview system and beyond the boundaries of identity”⁵⁶. The emergence of this stage is often linked to a previous difficult or extreme experience, such as an illness, an accident, etc. The person then comes to the conclusion that their entire structured perception of the world has collapsed. Fowler notes that it is difficult to describe this stage because it transcends language in its essence. At this stage people cease to analyze the truths of faith and simply surrender to them.

According to Fowler, the final stage, i.e., universalizing faith, is very rare. Examples of people who have reached this stage are, in the author’s view, for example Mother Teresa of Calcutta or Thomas Merton. These individuals, and this is characteristic of the universalizing faith, displayed a charisma that was appealing to others and were unquestionable authorities. Socha acknowledges, however, that although many authors highlight charisma and authority specifically in this stage, a selfless passion to change the world, oneness with the community, justice, love and radical commitment are equally important⁵⁷. This stage is characterized by a certain kind of identification with the entire world.

The place of hope in human spiritual and religious development

Next to faith and love, hope is also a cardinal virtue. When it comes to spiritual and religious development, the formation of faith and love seems more natural, while hope seems to be a much more difficult area. Contemporary research

⁵⁶ Socha, *Teolog jako psycholog* 179.

⁵⁷ Socha, *Teolog jako psycholog* 179.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HOPE IN SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT.
A PSYCHOLOGICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

directions that combine the themes of hope and spirituality tend to focus on life experiences such as illness, loss or other moments of crisis. For instance, an article on hope during the COVID-19 pandemic⁵⁸, another on hope for eternal life for cancer patients⁵⁹, hope for those experiencing chronic pain⁶⁰. Hope, like faith and love, should be developed and accompany a person throughout their spiritual journey, not just at critical moments. Analyzing Erikson's stages of human development and Fowler's stages of faith development, one can see moments filled with hope. We can look at the concept of development itself from the perspective of hope, i.e., when experiencing a crisis, we hope that its positive resolution will enrich our development. Already at Erikson's first stage of development, the virtue achieved by the infant is precisely hope. While it is obviously not identical to hope in the theological sense, it still serves as the seed from which hope in the latter sense can grow. According to some scholars of religious development, the infancy period and the relationship with the mother are the matrix for the later relationship with God and His image.

A well-resolved crisis results in development, i.e., a concrete psychological good that is achieved by the person and equips them with new skills or gives their life a new quality. It is similar in spirituality, i.e., spiritual development brings a person closer to God and the hope of God's closeness makes it possible to overcome the preceding difficulties.

Hope in spiritual life can thus be viewed from two perspectives. On the one hand, it is a virtue achieved in spiritual life. On the other hand, it is a kind of motivation that enables one to survive adversity, crises and spiritual darkness. Walerian Słomka, analyzing hope in the perspective of spirituality, points out that hope means taking a stance towards the ultimate future, but also results in a stance

⁵⁸ E. Gry, L.B. Jelstad, Carriers of Hope. Creating Organizational Spaces of Hope During COVID-19, *Journal of Management, Spirituality & Religion*, 19 (2022), 341-363.

⁵⁹ G. Espedal, Hope to See the Soul: The Relationship Between Spirituality and Hope, *Journal of Religion and Health*, 60 (2021), 2770-2783.

⁶⁰ W. Edey et al., The Being Hopeful in the Face of Chronic Pain. Program: A Counseling Program for People Experiencing Chronic Pain, *The Journal for Specialists in Group Work*, 41(2016), 161-187; D. J. Larsen et al., The hope collage activity: an arts-based group intervention for people with chronic pain, *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 46 (2018), 722-737.

towards the temporal future⁶¹. Out of it arises action in temporal reality, resulting in joy, trust in God and in people, patience and invincibility⁶². A hopeful person is a person of action who embodies values in the temporal reality because they contribute to the fulfillment of eternal hope.

Hope the perspective of spirituality undoubtedly needs deeper reflection. One important perspective requiring attention is the emergence of hope in human spiritual development. Another important theme would be the formation of hope in the upbringing of children.

Conclusion

In the modern world, a hopeful attitude is widespread and takes multiple forms. Its various forms tend to be hugely different and often contradictory. The expectation of a better material tomorrow, limited to an earthly perspective, closed to transcendence, is the domain of the modern, secularized world. The postmodern vision of hope created by consumerism, hedonism and moral permissiveness is illusory, unstable and incomplete. In the materialist worldview, hope is strictly temporal in nature. In it, by creating a perfect earth, humans alienate themselves from communion with God and authentic human desires. Many humanist tendencies, especially evolutionary theories, contrast hope with unbounded faith in scientific achievements. At the present time, the range of forms of hope is extremely diverse. "In view of this fact, it is of utmost importance to provide a good explanation of the fundamental attitude of Christian hope in the light of the Revelation, illustrating its proper nature and the elements which set it apart from other expectations of the future"⁶³. However, one should bear in mind that every human being needs hope, since it constitutes the essence of human life, regardless of the moral qualification of their actions. "Hope may be tainted by a disease of the spirit, it may lose its proper purpose, but its object will always be human happiness (...) the conscious need for happiness and its good grounding in God are capable of putting

⁶¹ W. Słomka, Nadzieja, in: *Leksykon duchowości katolickiej*, ed. M. Chmielewski, Lublin-Kraków 2002.

⁶² Słomka, Nadzieja.

⁶³ Ćmiel, *Teologia moralna szczegółowa* 147.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HOPE IN SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT.
A PSYCHOLOGICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

human life in order both in the vertical dimension – actualized in prayer – and in the horizontal dimension, embodied in friendship”⁶⁴.

As with hope, spirituality can also be lived separately from religiosity. The place of hope in spirituality is usually associated with difficult and borderline experiences, such as illness, death or life-threatening situations. Although important, this is an overly narrow understanding of hope from the perspective of spirituality. Looking at the human being from the perspective of religious and spiritual development shows us the place of hope in a much broader area, which need not be tied to borderline experiences only. The very progression through the successive stages of development (both in the sense of psychological development and religious development) is linked to the experience of hope. Understanding development in the sense of reaching the following stages preceded by a crisis is a space where hope can be actualized, i.e., entering a crisis experience, a person hopes for a positive resolution of the crisis, which will help them reach the next stage and gain new competences. In religious and spiritual development, too, hope is both formative and formed. Formative, since through religious and spiritual development a person hopes for a closer relationship with God and growth in virtue. Formed, because, as one of the theological virtues, it needs, alongside faith and love, continuous growth at every stage of life.

Hope in spirituality poses a challenge for formators: catechists, spiritual leaders, preachers and parents raising their children, but also for scholars of theology.

⁶⁴ Irka, *Oblicza chrześcijańskiej nadziei* 60.

