VIATORUM

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Editorial

Resilience and Its Cultural Variants

Four of the articles in this issue of *Communio Viatorum*[1] were first delivered in the form of short papers at a conference held in Prague in October 2024 with the title of "Beyond Wars and Anathemas: Hermeneutics of Conflict Resolution in Different Theological Traditions." The conference was supported by two different grant projects in which our faculty is involved. The first is a very small part of a much larger project entitled "Beyond Security: Role of Conflict in Resilience-Building." The team of six people at our faculty, led by Professor Ivana Noble, head of the Ecumenical Institute of our Protestant Theological Faculty, is investigating the spiritual resources for resilience. The second project, this time wholly under the leadership of Ivana Noble, is entitled "Theological Anthropology in Intercultural Perspective." It is a Charles University Centre of Excellence project, uniting people from all three theology faculties of Charles University, as well as from further afield.

Apart from showcasing some of the research work of our faculty, the conference raised, as is already clear from the title, important questions. Though there is a tendency throughout history for people to think that their era is the worst, at least it is obvious enough that we do not live in a time of unprecedented peaceful co-existence among the peoples of the earth. Moreover, the damage to the climate, the topic of one of our articles, will have catastrophic effects, unless serious action is taken by all of us. So conflict, war, some form of anathema (the cursing of the other for their otherness), all are present around us. And yet in the majority of countries, if not all, the vast majority of people do not want to support hate and exclusion. How can

1 This editorial and articles in this issue have been supported by the European Regional Development Fund project "Beyond Security: Role of Conflict in Resilience-Building" (reg. no.: CZ.02.01.01/00/22_008/0004595) and by the Charles University Research Centre program No. UNCE/24/SSH/019, "Theological Anthropology in Intercultural Perspective".

they be helped to form a voice strong enough to drown out the shrill cries of the minority?

Here the question of resilience becomes complex. Research in the field of resilience is relatively recent, focusing on both psychological resilience – the ability to recover from trauma and stress – and systemic resilience – the way in which systems are capable of recovering from different adverse impacts. In psychological studies, religious faith has been shown to have a positive impact on resilience. However, this may not be quite as positive as it seems, at least in systemic terms. For we come dangerously close to Karl Marx's famous comment about religion as a kind of anaesthetic, the opium that allows people to tolerate injustice and alienation. Religion is the uniting force (Marx uses the word *Gemüth*, not *Herz*, for what in English is translated as "heart") that provides ultimately, therefore, sustenance and support for the system.

Against this background, conflict resolution will not consist, as the article by Roman Shvets in this issue makes clear, in cheap compromises, or, more theologically, following Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in a search for cheap grace. Evil remains evil and wrong remains wrong. In this context, resilience moves beyond a support to allow a problematic system to continue to function and becomes a prophetic voice, crying out in the desert (Mt 3:3). The false prophets will continue to support the system, as we see among some so-called Christians in the United States of America defending the current president of that country. But such people – and there are many others who strongly oppose them – are those who "say, "Says the Lord," when the Lord has not sent them" (Ezek. 13:6), and Ezekiel is quite clear that these people are not coming from a place of truth, but of falsehood and lies. The true prophets speak out, offering warnings and consolations, regardless of the situation around them, even, indeed, when they would rather be quiet.

In recent times, many churches, church leaders and church members have, fortunately, learned once again to fulfil the task of prophecy, of speaking the truth against the lies of exclusion and hatred. In a small way, it is also a task of a theology faculty to contribute to this mission. For all that it is undoubtedly important and necessary for students to learn a great deal of content (languages, the history of Christian doctrine, its current systematic application, ethics, and so on), there is a further aim of theological education, to prepare people to lead active engaged Christian lives, be it as pastors or as members of a church community, or even simply as members of society. Resilience in this sense becomes about seeing otherwise, confronting the

world around with a new vision and a new sense of the possibilities inherent in a creation that God saw was good.

What this means in practice will vary in different times and places. Our conference last autumn was blessed with contributions not only from Christian scholars, but also Jewish and Muslim scholars, and not only from Czech participants, but participants from countries such as Bosnia Herzegovina, Germany, Lebanon and others. This reminded us that what unites and enables resistance may be in different settings somewhat different, but what is common is precisely the commitment to truth and to peace. Many of our participants had also had direct experience of conflict, so we were not presented with ungrounded and unrealistic optimism. In many of these settings resilience is possible because it has been experienced, and conflict resolution is also possible, because, however imperfectly, it has been attempted.

The varied approaches and examples that were presented at the conference are to some extent reflected in the different articles in this volume of our journal. Our authors come from four different Christian traditions, from three different countries, and from different fields of theological study. One of the articles focuses more specifically on resilience, one focuses more specifically on conflict resolution, not beyond wars and anathemas but precisely in a time of war and anathema. Two of the articles are more focused on individual resilience or individual life, whilst two are more focused on broader contexts, social or even global or cosmic. The articles thus form a kind of kaleidoscopic vision of what resilience and conflict resolution that seeks to go beyond recourse to war and anathema might look like. They are a reminder that, in a world marked by sin, there is also the presence of the risen Christ, and that the goodness of God is greater than any evil.

The first article, by Marion L. S. Carson, reads the story of Joseph to look at the building of resilience in those who are recovering from various forms of addiction. She looks first at the nature of resilience in addiction recovery and then addresses the story of Joseph, as someone who has undergone many traumatic experiences, asking what it is that enables him to "bounce back," to be resilient in the face of all that happens to him. He has to, and succeeds in learning to, cope with all that is thrown at him, even if he is never portrayed as entirely perfect in his actions. This is a helpful reminder both that religious faith can help in resilience, but that it does not produce a miracle intervention without any effort. The resilient human being is still a human being, flawed but possible of change and transformation.

Olena Chemodanova's article is less directly related to the theme of resilience, though Metropolitan Anthony Bloom, who for almost fifty years served as the Orthodox bishop in Great Britain of the Moscow Patriarchate, led a life that demanded a great deal of resilience. Chemodanova points to his theological roots and how he was naturally drawn to what we might today call forms of dialogue. As someone rooted in his church setting but also with a background in the sciences and especially in medicine, he sought to find the good in the world around him, recognising the failures of Christians to witness to the joys of their faith. Thus he also fulfilled a prophetic role, recognising especially that good can be found in all who do good (he liked to cite Matthew's story of the Final Judgement).

Our third article, by Roman Shvets, introduces the American Baptist ethicist Glen Stassen, best-known for his work on just peacemaking. The relationship between resilience and reconciliation is an intriguing one, but the first focus of the article is in looking at the way in which Stassen develops his argument. The article reminds us that, in the hands of some politicians, who try to operate with a moral compass, such as Jimmy Carter, there is the possibility of seeking for peace. Whether that is possible with some of the politicians we are cursed with today is, of course, another matter. This is pertinent for the end of the article, which looks at what possibility just peacemaking might have in the context of Ukraine. Where dialogue is not possible, is there any chance of bringing peace? The author, writing from Kyiv in the midst of the war, concludes that we will probably have to wait and see, which is at least realistic, if not the miracle cure many might hope for.

The fourth article by Tomáš Sixta broadens the discussion by looking at the resilience of creation. He sets about showing some ways of working with the concept of the Anthropocene in theological anthropology and spirituality. In many ways this can often be a problematic area, since climate change deniers and those who are simply too lazy to make any efforts to change their ways tend to assume that all talk of climate change is a strategy of doomsayers, and that nothing much will happen. On a planetary level, this is no doubt true, but on the level of animal (including human) and plant existence, the evidence is rather that a lot will happen, and very little of it good. For this reason Sixta introduces the concept of what he terms the hamartiocene, a world touched by sin. But he also looks at the possibility that the needs of the planet will create "an ecumenism for a dying planet," bringing together a "coalition of the willing" to produce change for the good of all creation.

Our final article is by Petr Macek, one of the leading experts in process theology. Though in no way linked to the other articles, his investigation of the way in which process theology understands the deeds of God, especially in the biblical accounts, can be seen as dovetailing nicely with the theme of resilience and conflict resolution. Given that there is a natural state of things and an overall aim for the universe, resilience is the return to the natural (God-given) state, and conflict resolution is the process of restoring the balance of the universe, so that all can become what they are created to become.

These articles offer us, then, food for thought and different approaches to both conflict resolution and resilience. There are no easy answers to the questions that are raised, but as a theological journal we approach them with a desire to contribute to a serious reflection on them from a position of faith. We hope that you will enjoy and benefit from reading them.

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Bouncing Back and Moving Forward: Resilience, the Joseph Narrative and Addiction Recovery

Marion L. S. Carson

Abstract: The use of biblical narrative is an important resource in the practice of pastoral care and counselling. In this paper, which draws on the psychology of resilience as well as recent work on trauma and resilience hermeneutics, it is argued that the Joseph novella can be a useful resource for helping people to develop resilience in their journey of recovery from substance abuse. Joseph's experiences of complex family relationships, abandonment, betrayal, estrangement, and imprisonment are deeply resonant with the experiences of many who have been caught up in addiction. This is the story of an individual who displays resilience in the face of repeated trauma and reversals of fortune, and it provides a rich resource for people in recovery to reflect on their own experience and develop skills for resilience as they learn to live lives free of alcohol and drugs.

Keywords: resilience; Joseph novella; narrative; addiction recovery; pastoral care and counselling

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1. Introduction

The importance of narrative for pastoral care and counselling has been increasingly recognized in recent years.[1] Stories, as Karen Scheib says in her book on the subject, can help us to make sense of our own lives and those of others. She writes, "As a narrative practice, pastoral care attends to the inseparable interconnection between our own life stories, others' stories, the larger cultural stories, and God's story."[2] For Christians, of course, the major

1 See C. V. Gerkin, *The Living Human Document: Re-Visioning Pastoral Counselling in a Hermeneutical Mode* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984); Suzanne M. Coyle, *Uncovering Spiritual Narratives: Using Story in Pastoral Care and Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Fortress, 2014); Carrie Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care: A Postmodern Approach* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015); Karen D. Scheib, *Pastoral Care: Telling the Stories of Our Lives* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016).

2 Scheib, *Pastoral Care*, xi.

resource for such stories is Scripture itself.[3] It contains not only the narrative of God's intervention in human history but the stories of those who were trying to make sense of their own part in that narrative. As Anthony Thiselton notes, the biblical narratives inform and transform our lives, and "provide a resource by which readers can transcend the present," helping us to see another way of being and viewing the world.[4] In the Hebrew Scriptures there is much to be learned from stories of characters such as Joseph, Elijah, Jeremiah or Job. So too, the stories in the gospels and Acts of the Apostles tell of communities of faith learning how to be followers of Jesus Christ. For centuries, readers of these stories have identified with the characters and drawn their own lessons from the struggles and experiences recorded in them.

In this chapter I wish to consider ways in which the Joseph novella can be a resource for people in recovery from addiction to drugs and alcohol. In my own pastoral practice I have found that the story of Joseph is particularly helpful for discussions of the theme of developing resilience.[5] Of course, there are major differences between the character of Joseph and people in recovery – not least that Joseph does not suffer from addiction and that for much of the story he is in a position of great power. Nevertheless, several of his experiences are deeply resonant for many who have been caught up in addiction – for example, complex family relationships, abandonment, betrayal, estrangement, imprisonment.[6] This is the story of an individual who displays resilience in the face of repeated trauma and reversals of fortune, and it provides a rich resource for people in recovery to reflect on their own experience and develop skills for resilience as they learn to live lives free of alcohol and drugs.

In order to explore how the Joseph narrative might inform the pastoral care and counselling of people in recovery from addiction I will go through three steps. First, I will clarify what I mean by both recovery and resilience. Second, I will consider the nature and place of resilience in the journey of

3 Edward P. Wimberly, *Using Scripture in Pastoral Counselling* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994).

4 Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 569.

5 I serve as chaplain to Glasgow City Mission in Scotland, working with people affected by homelessness, displacement and addiction.

6 On resonance and analogy as hermeneutical tool for contemporary application see Christopher Rowland and Zoë Bennett, "'Action is the Life of All': The Bible and Practical Theology," *Contact* 150 (2006), 8–17.

recovery. Third, adopting a narrative approach, I will focus on the characterisation of Joseph himself, and draw some insights from the story which I believe can prove helpful for the development of resilience amongst people seeking to live without drugs and alcohol.[7]

2. Addiction, recovery and pastoral care

The journey of recovery from substance addiction is fraught with difficulty. Very few people who want to give up drugs and alcohol succeed at the first attempt. In fact, recovery tends to be marked by several relapses before lasting sobriety is able to be maintained.[8] Explanations for this can vary depending on one's view of the causes of addiction. Those who espouse a neuro-biological view are likely to stress the difficulty in overcoming the body's desire for the drug of choice, while those who understand addiction from a psychological perspective are more likely to think in terms of default thinking and behaviour patterns. Whatever theory of addiction is preferred, it remains the case that life events such as bereavement, illness, family breakdown and estrangement can heighten the risk of relapse.[9] People in recovery need to be able to live with the effects of severe trauma, often from childhood, but also from events which took place during the years of active addiction. Stressful circumstances and past traumas are, of course, part of normal living, and we all have to develop our own ways of coping. For those who are trying to live without their accustomed coping strategy, however, these can be particularly perilous. In the effort to remain drug and alcohol free, individuals need to be able to develop resilience in the face of adversity and setbacks, in order to learn from them and grow.

Here, I am using the term "recovery" to refer to the experience of people with a history of addiction who have embarked on a journey of trying to

7 See Claus Westermann, *Genesis 37–50: A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress 2002); Donald B. Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph: Genesis 37–50* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 66–105.

8 Gabor Maté, *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters with Addiction* (Toronto: Vintage, 2008); Sonia E. Waters, *Addiction and Pastoral Care* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019).

9 For overviews of the main theories of addiction see Alan A. Cavaiola and Margaret Smith, *A Comprehensive Guide to Addiction Theory and Counselling Techniques* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020).

live without alcohol or drugs.[10] The term, therefore, refers to a process of returning to physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health, all of which have been diminished because of substance abuse. For many, the return to physical health is the easiest part of this journey. Abstinence and medical interventions can help restore depleted vitamins and heal damaged tissue and organs. For most, however, it is far harder to learn to respond to life stressors such as relationship difficulties, unemployment or bereavement without resorting to drugs or alcohol. There is a need, too, to learn to live with memories and consequences of the past. Shame, guilt, grief, anger and anxiety can be overwhelming and debilitating. In all these things, the recovering addict has to learn to cope with difficulties without recourse to the substance on which they previously relied. In other words, they need to develop resilience. But what exactly does this mean?

According to Gill Windle, resilience is "the process of effectively negotiating, adapting to, or managing significant sources of stress or trauma. Assets and resources within the individual, their life and environment, facilitate this capacity for adaptation and 'bouncing back' in the face of adversity."[11] Resilience, then, does not mean avoiding stressors or being able to ignore them. Rather, it is the ability to face the reality of the situation, acknowledge its painful nature, then to "bounce back" and continue on the journey. It is the idea of "bouncing back" which distinguishes resilience from that of perseverance. Perseverance refers to continued pushing through in a prolonged period of stress or effort – for example, persevering through to the end of a rehabilitation programme or through the inevitable days of boredom which accompany sobriety. While perseverance is important in the long haul of recovery, it is resilience which enables people to respond in a healthy manner to potentially overwhelming setbacks such as a bereavement or loss and so enable them to persevere in recovery. Resilience then is an important component of perseverance, but it is not the same thing.

10 Note that I am assuming that abstinence is essential in the road to recovery. For alternative approaches see, for example, G. Alan Marlatt, "Harm Reduction: Come as You Are," *Addictive Behaviours* 21:6 (1996), 779–88; Patt Benning & Jeannie Little, *Over the Influence: The Harm Reduction Guide to Controlling your Drug and Alcohol Use* (New York: The Guildford Press, 2017).

11 Gill Windle, "What Is Resilience? A Review and Concept Analysis," *Reviews in Clinical Gerontology* 21:2 (2011), 152–69, at 163.

However, resilience is not simply about bouncing back, it also includes the idea of moving forward – getting on with life, learning from experience and becoming stronger and wiser. Michael Neenan writes,

> This forward movement is a defining feature of resilience. As such, being resilient doesn't restore your life as it was prior to the adversity but, rather, what you've learnt from tackling the adversity usually changes you for the better; it helps you to become keenly aware of what's important in your life and, as we said, encourages you to pursue it.[12]

This "forward movement" entails the ability to learn from experience and to become more discerning as to what is important in life. In other words, resilience also entails growth towards maturity and wisdom. In a study of resilience in the elderly, psychiatrists Monika Areldt and Dilip Jeste note that people who are wise have developed a desire to understand life and human nature, "the inherent limits of knowledge, and of life's unpredictability and uncertainties." They are also willing to reflect on their experience and see things from others' points of view as well as their own. "This process," they say, "tends to reduce self-centeredness and increase acceptance of human nature and an awareness of the suffering of others, resulting in greater sympathy and compassion for others and the motivation to help others in need – the *compassionate (affective) dimension* of wisdom."[13]

Over many years, wise people have learned from reflecting on their experience, have remained teachable even in old age and become more compassionate towards others. People who are able to develop wisdom of this sort, Areldt and Jeste argue, tend to be able to withstand the hard knocks of life. Facilitating the development of resilience, maturity and wisdom must surely be part and parcel of any recovery programme.

2.1 Resilience in recovery

For those in recovery from substance abuse, it is crucial to be able to develop the ability to face stresses and adversities without resorting to chemical

12 Michael Neenan, *Developing Resilience: A Cognitive-Behavioural Approach*, 2nd ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 18.

13 Monika Areldt and Dilip V. Jeste, "Wisdom and Hard Times: The Ameliorating Effect of Wisdom on the Negative Association Between Adverse Life Events and Well-Being," *Journals of Gerontology Series B Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences* 73:8 (2018), 1374–83. On resilience from a psychiatric perspective, see further Steven M. Southwick, Dennis S. Charney & Jonathan M. DePierro, *Resilience: The Science of Mastering Life's Greatest Challenges*, 3rd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

props. However, there is much more to resilience in recovery than simply the ability to live without drugs and alcohol. As Martinelli *et al* say, "it is clear that addiction recovery cannot be reduced to abstinence and that it concerns growth and change on various life domains."[14]

It must, surely, also be about learning to live with honesty and integrity, taking personal responsibility and making better choices.[15] The question for us here is how we can help people in recovery to do this. From a psychological perspective, as Kitty Harris and Sara Smock Jordan note, people in recovery need to be able to develop healthy coping mechanisms to deal with emotional pain.[16] Factors such as personality traits, inherited characteristics and temperament do have an important part to play. However, individuals can be helped to develop cognitive skills such as decision-making, coping with emotions, communicating well with others and managing finances. As they begin to see positive outcomes (such as family reconciliation and reduced debt) they will grow in confidence and self-esteem. Another important aspect is being part of a caring community. The support of others, particularly those who are further along the journey, who have gained experience and are willing to become mentors is known to be invaluable. It has also been recognised that spirituality and a sense of the transcendent have an important part to play in the development of resilience.[17] The sense of being a part of something which is bigger than oneself contributes to the development of a balanced sense of self in relation to others and the environment, and can provide a framework for developing a sense of morality and purpose in life.

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14 T. F. Martinelli, G. E. Nagelhout, L. Bellaert, D. Best, W. Vanderplasschen & D. van de Mheen, "Comparing three stages of addiction recovery: Longterm recovery and its relation to housing problems, crime, occupation situation, and substance use," *Drugs: Education, Prevention and Policy* 27:5 (2020), 387–96, at 387.

15 A. B. Laudet, "What does recovery mean to you? Lessons from the recovery experience for research and practice," *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment* 33:3 (2007), 243–56.

16 Kitty Harris and Sara Smock Jordan, "Relapse Resilience: A Process Model of Addiction and Recovery," *Journal of Family Psychotherapy* 22:3 (2011), 265–74, at 270.

17 Julio F. P. Peres, Alexander Moreira-Almeida, Antonia Gladys Nasello and Harold G. Koenig, "Spirituality and Resilience in Trauma Victims," *Journal of Religion and Health* 46 (2007), 343–50; Christopher C. H. Cook, and Nathan H. White, "Resilience and the Role of Spirituality," in Dinesh Bhugra, Kam Bhui, Samuel Wong, and Stephen Gilman (eds.), *The Oxford Textbook of Public Mental Health* (New York – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 513–20; David W. Foy, Kent D. Drescher, and Patricia J. Watson, "Religious and Spiritual Factors in Resilience," in Steven M. Southwick, Brett T. Litz, Dennis Charney, and Matthew J. Friedman (eds.), *Resilience and Mental Health: Challenges Across the Lifespan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 90–101.

3. Introducing the Joseph Narrative

In his article on reading Scripture through the lens of resilience, Robert Schreiter speaks of texts in which "the undoing of trauma and evidence of resilience can be found."[18] Schreiter is interested in examining texts which witness to interiority, reflection and processing on the part of people who are in the midst of a traumatic experience. For example, Jeremiah, Second Isaiah, Lamentations and Ezekiel, which come from the Babylonian period, may be considered theological responses to imperialistic aggression and exile, providing pastoral care to those whose very survival is under threat.[19] Within these texts we see not only the emotional response to such trauma but also the ways in which the people were able to be, or encouraged to be, resilient in their circumstances.

The Joseph novella is distinctive in tackling the themes of trauma and resilience in Israel's story through an account of the life of one individual and his family.[20] As we trace Joseph's story from childhood into adulthood, we see that he is able to be highly resilient in the face of trauma throughout his life. We can observe some aspects of his emotional development as well as his response to repeated traumatic stress.[21] He is both the victim of others and at times of his own human weakness, yet at the end of the story he emerges as a man who can act with maturity, integrity and wisdom.

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18 Robert J. Schreiter, "Reading Biblical Texts Through the Lens of Resilience," in Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette (eds.), *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*, Semeia Studies 38 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 193–208. Further studies of resilience in biblical and theological perspective may be found in Nathan A. White and Christopher H. Cook (eds.), *Biblical and Theological Visions of Resilience* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019).

19 Kathleen O'Connor, *Genesis 25B-50* (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2020), 7; See further, David McLain Carr, *Holy Resilience: The Bible's Traumatic Origins* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

20 As Leon Kass suggests in *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 510, the story known as 'Joseph and his Brothers' is really the story of the legacy of Jacob and the national perpetuation of the way of Israel." The origins and dating of the novella are still a matter of debate. For an overview of the discussion see Konrad Schmid, Thomas Römer and Axel Bühler (eds.), *The Joseph Story Between Egypt and Israel* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021).

21 See for example, Caralie Focht, "The Joseph Story: A Trauma-Informed Biblical Hermeneutic for Pastoral Care Providers," *Pastoral Psychology* 69:3 (2020), 209–33; Fred Guyette, "Joseph's Emotional Development," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 32:3 (2004), 181–88. On the Joseph novella as trauma literature see Caralie Cooke, *Discovering the Religious Dimension of Trauma: Trauma Literature and the Joseph Story* (Leiden: Brill, 2023).

Readers are first introduced to Joseph when he is in his teens. His mother has died but he is his father's favourite. We learn that he tells his half-brothers of dreams in which they bow down to him, and takes a bad report about them to their father. Resentment and bitterness build up against him. One day they gain their revenge by throwing him into a pit and selling him to Ishmaelite merchants who happen to come by. Jacob is told that his favourite son has been killed by a wild animal. We next meet Joseph in Egypt where he has become Potiphar's slave. Recognising his leadership and administrative talents, Potiphar makes him head of his household. All goes well until Potiphar's wife tries to seduce Joseph. Though he resists her advances he ends up in jail, accused of attempted rape. In prison, his gifts are recognised once again. Interpreting Pharoah's dreams, he predicts famine and advises that Pharoah prepare for this by storing up food. He is now appointed as Pharoah's second-in-charge, administering the land, and does his job so well that when the predicted famine comes, there is plenty. So it is that his brothers come looking to buy grain, and in fulfilment of Joseph's youthful dreams, they bow down before him. After some time, Joseph reveals who he is to them, and the family is reconciled.

From this brief synopsis it will be obvious that Joseph's life is marked by both great privilege and great suffering. His childhood and adolescence are paradoxical – happy in some respects but unhappy in others. Certainly, he is gifted, but in his immaturity he comes across as spoiled, arrogant and naive. Youthful mistakes will mark the rest of his life. His brothers are so resentful and jealous that they attempt to murder him (he would have died in the pit had he not been sold). Joseph is the victim of intense cruelty, betrayal and rejection.

In adulthood, his talents ensure that he becomes immensely powerful. But he is still a slave, and his vulnerability is highlighted in the episode with Potiphar's wife. Joseph acts with integrity, but it is his voice against hers and he ends up in jail. When his brothers arrive we see some emotional response in him as he confronts the past with all its pain and rejection and he has to consider how best to respond to his calculating family. He is vulnerable, but he has his own flaws and weaknesses. His treatment of the Egyptian people during the famine, for example, is highly questionable, as he makes them give their produce to the state and pay to have it back.

3.1 Resilience in the narrative

Joseph's life, then, as depicted by the storyteller, is characterised by many very difficult experiences. This is a story of dysfunctional family, abandonment,

and betrayal. Nowadays we would speak of Joseph's youthful experiences as "adverse childhood experiences" which had repercussions throughout his life.[22] There is also considerable trauma in adulthood – injustice, grief and reversals of fortune. Nevertheless, Joseph is able to grow and mature, and ultimately to forgive and be reconciled with family members who have caused him such pain.

At this point, some general remarks can be made about how Joseph shows resilience as he builds up his life following severe trauma. Perhaps most obvious is his ability to make the best of very bad situations. He sees opportunities and makes use of them – both in Potiphar's house and in prison. Secondly, he makes use of his gifts – as dream interpreter, administrator and organiser – and gets himself noticed as someone who is worth having around. He works hard, and in a sense, work becomes his rescuer. In enslavement and even in imprisonment, meaningful work and responsibility helps him to survive in an impossible situation, even if ultimately he is at the mercy of the whim of his owner. Third, he does not allow his experiences of betrayal and hurt to incapacitate him – in other words, he does not adopt a victim mentality; we do not see him wallowing in his victimhood or blaming others for his predicament.[23] Rather, he takes responsibility for himself, even when his situation is highly precarious and when he encounters further hardship and injustice. Lastly, we note that he has the ability to plan ahead – most notably when he stockpiles enough grain to feed Egypt during the years of famine. Such long-term thinking not only gains him a position of responsibility, it also saves many lives and is a source of revenue for his master.

4. Building up resilience in recovery

Seeing opportunities, making use of gifts, avoiding "victim mentality" and planning ahead will help anyone to be resilient in the face of considerable adversity and fluctuating fortunes in every-day life. There are, however, some particular aspects of the recovery journey to which I believe the Joseph nar-

22 Roberta Waite and Ruth Ann Ryan, *Adverse Childhood Experiences: What Students and Health Professionals Need to Know* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

23 On victimhood mentality see for example, Rahav Gabay, Boaz Hameiri, Tammy Rubel-Lifschitz, Arie Nadler, "The Tendency for Interpersonal Victimhood: The Personality Construct and its Consequences," *Personality and Individual Differences* 165 (2020), 1–11.

rative can speak. Here I shall address the following: learning to cope with emotional "triggers"; developing healthy relationships; coping with injustice and adversity; and the role of spirituality in recovery.

4.1 Coping with emotional "triggers"

In the early stages of abstinence, the experience is one of discomfort. Neurological changes mean that in the latter phases of addiction the substance is taken simply to feel normal (rather than to get "high" or feel intoxicated).[24] Once the drug has been withdrawn, the person is feeling far from normal. As the person learns to live without the substance and learns to adjust, craving reduces. Eventually, the person's thoughts are no longer dominated by making sure the next drink or hit is available: it becomes easier to get through each day without it.

Nevertheless, it is important not to become complacent. Certain circumstances can pose great challenges to the abstinence that has been achieved over weeks, months and even years. In particular, emotional "triggers" pose a great risk for people in recovery. The term "triggers" refers to events, objects or places which make a person want to use drugs or alcohol again. It is a crucial part of recovery for each individual to learn what these triggers are. Triggers will, of course, vary from person to person, but there are some common ones. For example, people or places associated with previous drug use, the smell of alcohol, or simply seeing drug paraphernalia can be triggers for many.[25]

One of the most potent triggers is emotional distress. It is the default of someone in addiction to respond to any emotional upheaval by taking their drug of choice. When things go well – celebrate with a drink or a hit. When things go badly – do the same to help get through. This way of thinking can remain for many years, even after several years of abstinence. Of course, some things can be managed – carefully avoiding old haunts and groups of friends, for example. However, family tensions and relationship problems can also be a major source of emotional distress and be a trigger for relapse. The stress of facing one's past and the attempts at reconciliation can stir

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24 Judith Grisel, *Never Enough: The Neuroscience and Experience of Addiction* (New York: Doubleday, 2019).

25 Rebecca Williams and Julie Kraft, *The Mindfulness Workbook for Addiction. A Guide to Coping with the Grief, Stress and Anger that Trigger Addictive Behaviours* (Oakland: New Harbinger, 2012).

up memories of hurt and resentment which can severely test the resolve to steer clear of drugs and alcohol.

According to Aviviah Gottlieb Zornberg, "[t]he story of Joseph in Egypt is a history of his continued, desperate attempts to re-member himself, to integrate the broken pieces of his identity."[26] Joseph has spent the time learning to live with loss and past trauma, and by the time his family come to Egypt he has repressed his memories of the pain.[27] Of course, he has not forgotten, but has made efforts to ensure that these memories do not dominate his life and hinder his ability to succeed. Very often, recovering addicts must learn to do the same. The pain of the past remains, but it cannot be allowed to become debilitating. They must learn to live with memories without letting them become overwhelming.

Contact with family members, however, can arouse complex emotions and desires which are difficult to handle. When Joseph's brothers arrive in Egypt, they do not recognise him. Seeing them brings back memories of the dreams he had of them as a youngster, and presumably of their hostile, ultimately murderous, response. Little wonder that he speaks harshly to them. Eventually it all becomes too much, the pretence of haughty detachment breaks and Joseph has to turn aside to weep. "Just as Joseph has reached a point in his life where he prefers not to be reminded of his past," Sarna writes, "he is forced to confront it by the rush of events."[28] Joseph has a choice. Either he runs away and gets someone else to deal with the brothers who have turned up, or he confronts the matter head on. He chooses the latter.

Nevertheless, instead of revealing who he is and effecting immediate reconciliation he embarks on a series of cat and mouse games with them – accusing them of being spies, setting them up as thieves, putting Simeon in jail and insisting that they bring Benjamin to him. There are differing opinions as to Joseph's motivations here. Sternberg thinks he is taking revenge on his brothers, while Sarna holds that he is testing them to see if they regret

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26 Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, *The Beginning of Desire: Reflections on Genesis* (New York: Schocken Books 1995, 273).

27 For a psychologically based study of Joseph's response to trauma, see Meira Polliack, "Joseph's Trauma: Memory and Resolution," in A. Brenner and F. H. Polak (eds.), *Performing Memory in Biblical Narrative and Beyond* (Sheffield: Phoenix Press, 2009), 72–105.

28 Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis The Traditional Hebrew Text with new JPS translation* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 291.

their actions and have reformed.[29] We will return to this later, but for the moment it is noteworthy that Joseph does not act impulsively when he sees his brothers – he takes time to think about what he will do. If he is testing them, it may be legitimate. It could be naïve to assume that they would be pleased to see him again: shame and guilt can cause people to react angrily and defensively. There is wisdom in his reluctance to be open straightaway.

4.2 Developing healthy relationships

It is well recognised that learning to have healthy relationships is a vital part of recovery. In fact, according to Earnie Larsen, this is the second part of recovery after learning to live without drugs or alcohol.[30] A crucial part of helping people in recovery is to provide an environment in which they can develop positive relationships which will promote and value their growth.[31] Many recovering addicts find that they must deal with the damage done by and to existing and previous relationships, for example with families, spouses, partners and friends. As Joi Andreoli says in her book *The Recovery Cycle*, "[r]elationships become a major focus of attention in recovery. This focus can take a downturn into negative, obsessive and dysfunctional thinking. This kind of focus, with an old, scratched lens, can threaten sobriety."[32]

The Joseph story illustrates the lengthy and painful nature of working through emotional responses to painful family circumstances. There may be further pain even when there is good will to make things work on all sides. If learning not to react impulsively is a crucial part of developing resilience, so too is the need to be able to reflect on how one's actions affect other people. Many recovering addicts have to learn that their actions have had damaging effects on their families, and that there may be lingering pain and hurt. Some become fixated on the pain and rejection that they have experienced and can be resentful of what they perceive to be unjust treatment, say by former partners. This is common when there are children involved. Memories of loss, feelings of guilt and shame, and stimulation of old tensions

29 M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 288; Sarna, *Genesis*, 293.

30 Earnie Larsen, *Stage 2 Recovery: Life beyond Addiction* (London: HarperOne, 2013).

31 Sarah A. Buckingham and David Best (eds.), *Addiction, Behavioural Change and Social Identity: The Path to Resilience and Recovery* (London: Routledge, 2017); Harris, Smock and Wilkes, "Relapse resilience."

32 Joi Andreoli, *The Recovery Cycle: A Practical Guide to Loving your Sober Life* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022), 37.

and resentments can make family relationships very difficult indeed. There is a need to learn to live with these intense emotions without resorting to emotional anaesthetic.[33] Recovery programmes tend to focus on this, and Christian programmes in particular have much to say about God's forgiveness and acceptance which can be foundational for the recovery process.

Forgiveness is, of course, central to the Joseph story. He must forgive his brothers for what they did to him when he was young. But his forgiveness is not immediate: when his brothers appear, it takes some time before his suspicion and emotional turmoil give way to an acceptance of the situation. We are reminded that forgiveness is a process and not an instantaneous decision. Moreover, it is not just Joseph who needs to forgive. Jacob must do so too. His sons, Joseph included, have put him through a great deal of pain. The brothers also to acknowledge their sin and forgive themselves. In their alarm at the possibility of being accused of theft they reveal lingering shame and guilt at their treatment of Joseph.

While it is good that this is recognised and articulated, the family as a whole will not become resilient if the past is allowed to dominate.[34] Moreover, the precarious nature of forgiveness and reconciliation is reflected in the fact that immediately after Jacob's funeral, the brothers express the concern that now that their father is dead, Joseph might take revenge.[35] Reconciliation is just the beginning: old tensions remain. There is a responsibility on all sides to work hard at maintaining relationships and sometimes deep feelings and difficult personalities can make this very complicated indeed. Resilience is not simply an individual matter – families and friends need to develop it too if they are "to grow through adversity and disruption."[36]

4.3 Coping with the complexities of life

As well as learning to cope with immediate hazards such as emotional triggers and family tensions, people in recovery need to be able to cope with the mixed fortunes of everyday life. This includes learning to live with painful memories. It is well established that childhood trauma is closely related to

33 On shame and alcoholism, see James R. Nelson, *Thirst: God and the Alcoholic Experience* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 133–37.

34 Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 218.

35 Gabriel Josipovici, *The Book of God: A Response to the Bible* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1988), 82.

36 G. E. Richardson, "The Metatheory of Resilience and Resiliency," *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 58:3 (2002), 307–21.

substance abuse later in life. As David Lisak and Paul Miller note, "[a]mong the common psychological legacies of childhood trauma is PTSD, the symptoms of which often lead abuse victims to seek relief through self-medication – the consumption of mind-altering drugs and alcohol that deaden feeling, alleviate fears and anxieties, and provide temporary states of artificial euphoria."[37]

However, as they also note, any short-term relief is soon outweighed by additional problems which accrue from substance abuse. In recovery, the pain of the past must be faced as well as the fallout from further damage that has been done during their time of active addiction. This emotional pain can be overwhelming and be a major cause of relapse. For the recovering addict, then, a major task is to learn to live with painful memories without resorting to drugs or alcohol to provide an emotional painkiller.

Another task is to learn to live with difficulties which arise during the process of recovery: difficult relationships and unfair treatment, for example, can be hard to handle. Joseph's encounter with Potiphar's wife can be a rich resource for reflection and discussion. Just when life seems to be improving, he becomes embroiled in difficulty once more – this time because of Zuleika, who tries to seduce him. Joseph's resistance brings no reward but rather a term in prison. The reason given for Joseph's resistance is deontological – adultery is a sin against God.[38] For some readers, this may be enough. Others, however, will benefit from thinking about why the rule is there in the first place. Learning to think about the consequences of one's actions can be a major step in the recovery process. What would have happened had Joseph given in? Who would have suffered? Such questions can help people begin to think long-term rather than impulsively. There is another, perhaps more difficult lesson to consider: injustices happen, even when we try to do what is right. Although Joseph obeys God, he still finds himself in jail, falsely accused. This too can be a useful talking point as people consider the reality that doing the right thing may not always have the result that we want.

The realisation that human relationships are seldom straightforward can be a source of great distress and bewilderment to people in recovery.

37 David Lisak and Paul M. Miller, "Childhood Trauma, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Substance Abuse and Violence," in P. Ouimette & P. J. Brown (eds.), *Trauma and Substance Abuse: Causes, Consequences and Treatment of Comorbid Disorders* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2003), 73.

38 Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary Press, 2015), 217.

There can be a naïve expectation that sobriety on their part should mean that wounds will be healed, and relationships restored without effort. An important aspect of recovery is to develop some understanding of human nature: dualistic thinking (believing people to be either all good or all bad) and naïve expectations can be sources of disappointment and deep resentment. Biblical narratives know well the complexities of human nature. As Robert Alter notes, "the biblical tale, through the most rigorous economy of means, leads us again and again to ponder complexities of motive and ambiguities of character because these are essential aspects of its vision of man, created by God, enjoying or suffering all the consequences of human freedom."[39]

In fact, Joseph himself – the man who has been held up as a paragon of virtue in both Jewish and Christian tradition[40] – is all too human. His emotional turmoil translates into sometimes strange behaviour towards his brothers. Accusations of theft against them instigate anxiety and fear, and his demand to see Benjamin causes his father unnecessary anguish when he thinks that he is going to lose Simeon and Benjamin as well as Joseph. Could not Joseph have prevented such family distress? His behaviour is, in part, redeemed by his generosity to them in the long run. He does not allow a desire for revenge to have the last word.

Unfortunately, however, his generosity is not matched in his treatment of the Egyptian people. True, he stores up grain and brings prosperity to the land, but the people end up enslaved and exploited, having had to sell all their property to Pharoah in order to survive (Gen 47:20–22).[41] Of course, as a slave, Joseph has to protect himself, for his fortunes could be reversed in an instant. Nevertheless, from our twenty-first century perspective, his exploitation of the people seems morally reprehensible. Joseph, therefore, falls off the pedestal on which he has been placed by so many commentators. However, for this we can be grateful, for, from a pastoral viewpoint, exploring the behaviour of flawed characters in Biblical narrative can be instructive and healing. Assisting people to read the text in the light of their own experience

39 Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 24.

40 Mark Sheridan and Thomas C. Oden (eds.), *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament II Genesis 12–50* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2002); Maren Niehoff, *The Figure of Joseph in Post-Biblical Jewish Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1992); James L. Kugel, *In Potiphar's House: The Interpretive Life of Biblical Texts* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

41 O'Connor, *Genesis 25B-50*, 241ff. For a more positive view of Joseph's economic policy, see John Goldingay *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2020), 564.

can help develop self-awareness and foster the ability to maintain healthier relationships.

4.4 Spirituality

Spirituality plays a large part in many people's recovery journey. What this means for each individual will vary, but here I am thinking of a sense of the transcendent, of something beyond ourselves. In his memoir, AA's founder Bill Wilson gives an account of a profound spiritual experience he had which was foundational for his journey of recovery.[42] Not everyone will have an experience like Wilson's but the development of "self-transcendent values" which give meaning and purpose has been identified as an important aspect of resilience in recovery for many.[43] It is known too that being part of a community which shares values is vital not only for social support but also for learning new patterns of behaviour.[44]

At first sight, there seems to be remarkably little concern with religion or spirituality in the Jospeh novella. As Sarna notes in his commentary on Genesis, this story contains nothing in the way of the miraculous and God "never openly and directly intervenes" in Joseph's life. Nevertheless, "the secularity of the story is superficial, for the narrative is infused with a profound sense that God's guiding hand imparts meaning and direction to seemingly haphazard events."[45] It is made quite clear throughout the story that God is involved in the proceedings, even if not obviously so. The narrative is famous for its paucity of religious language, but it is clear that Joseph maintains his family's religious worldview as an exile in Egypt, and that this helps him to make sense of his experience. The names he gives his children demonstrate this, as does his insistence that his ability to interpret dreams comes from God, not himself. His faith in God helps him to find meaning in his trauma,

42 Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, *Alcoholics Anonymous: The Official "Big Book" from Alcoholics Anonymous Big Book* 4th ed. (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 2013), 1–16.

43 See further, Alcoholics Anonymous, *The Official "Big Book"*, Appendix 2; Claudia Russo, Daniela Barni, Ioana Zagrean, Maria Agnese Lulli, Georgia Vecchi, Francesca Danioni "The Resilient Recovery from Substance Addiction: The Role of Self-Transcendence Values and Hope," *Mediterranean Journal of Clinical Psychology* 9 (2021), 1–20.

44 Laurence Borras, Yasser Khazaal, Riaz Ahmad Khan, Sylvia Mohr, "The Relationship between Addiction and Religion and its Possible Implication for Care," *Substance Use and Misuse* 45:14 (2010), 2357–410.

45 Sarna, *Genesis*, 254.

enabling him to see the possibility that God can bring good out of human evil.[46] In other words, his religion helps him to find meaning and purpose in his experience.

The story presents Yahweh as present and active, albeit in the background, as Joseph endures betrayal, cruelty and exile. God is not always acknowledged as present in his sufferings. In her study of the novella as trauma literature, Caralie Cooke sees Joseph's experience in terms of the "loss of an assumptive world" – in others words the loss of all that gave him meaning and security in life. In the midst of this trauma Joseph builds a trust in a God who can turn the most wicked of human behaviour around for good. "Indeed," she says,

> Joseph's assumptive world has broadened to the point where he can now recognise the role of God in his life in the past even when he was not aware of it while the traumatic event was taking place. In this sense, the religious dimension of Joseph's rebuilt assumptive world offers hope: God is active in the world even when someone is not aware of it.[47]

This perspective can be helpful for people who are trying to live in abstinence. Besides the many losses which have been endured as a result of addiction (family breakdown, homelessness, loss of career), the attempt to live without the substance brings about the loss of the "assumptive world" that reliance on drugs and alcohol provides. In fact, the realisation that they have been ensnared by a trickster slave-holder is in itself a trauma. If recovery is learning to live without a substance which has become all-controlling in their lives, a large part of pastoral care might be to help the person see that God has been, and continues to be, active in their lives, and can even work for good through them, even when though this is not immediately evident.

4.5 Resilience and growth

It was mentioned earlier that resilience entails much more than simply "bouncing back" after trauma and difficulty. It also includes the idea of moving forward, learning from experience and maturing. The narrative provides

46 Meira Polliack, "Joseph's Trauma: Memory and Resolution," in A. Brenner & F. H. Polak (eds.), *Performing Memory in Biblical Narrative and Beyond* (Sheffield: Phoenix Press 2009), 72–105; See further Mignon R. Jacobs, "The Conceptual Dynamics of Good and Evil in the Joseph Story: An Exegetical and Hermeneutical Enquiry," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 27:3 (2003), 309–38.

47 Cooke, *Discovering the Religious Dimension of Trauma*, 156.

evidence of such growth in Joseph's life. While we cannot claim to be able to trace this in a linear fashion, we can catch glimpses which suggest maturing through experience. He grows from being a naïve, spoiled and arrogant young man who brings bad reports about his brothers to their father into one who is willing to concede that he might not be right. In adolescence he persists in telling his brothers about his dreams, causing resentment in the process.

However, later, when he is asked to interpret Pharoah's dreams, he is able to say that he does not have the ability to interpret but to listen to God (Gen 41:16). When asked to interpret his fellow prisoners' dreams he is careful to say that he is not speaking for God. This suggests a change in Joseph which McConville describes as "learning a kind of wisdom and insight more profound than the interpretation of dreams. The certainties of the dream interpreter are in contrast to the hesitation of the responsible man, as he handles a hard situation in which not only public affairs are at play but his own deepest being."[48] The mature Joseph knows that dreams are God's business and not his. He knows that they and his gift of interpretation have divine origin. He has learned that there is something beyond himself.

But growth in spirituality cannot be simply for the edification of the individual. As Bill Wilson observed, awareness of the transcendent must lead to an awakened concern for others.[49] The move away from the preoccupation with self is the hallmark of maturity. In the world of Alcoholics Anonymous, this has led to the development of sponsors, mentors with "lived experience" who are able to accompany and guide others on their journey of recovery. In the Joseph narrative, Joseph himself grows from favourite spoiled child to one who can assume great responsibility. He is able to pick himself up after profound injustice without wallowing in self-pity or becoming consumed with thoughts of revenge. His maturing is evident in his concern for his father

48 J. Gordon McConville, "Forgiveness as Private and Public Act: A Reading of the Biblical Joseph Narrative," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 75:4 (2013), 635–48, at 648. Some commentators see the development and transformation of Joseph in the story. See for example, Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1977), 418; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 18–50* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 523; Cf. Michael V. Fox, "Joseph and Wisdom," in Craig A. Evans, Joel N. Lohr and David L. Petersen (eds.), *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception and Interpretation* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 231–62. Cf., however, Susan Niditch, *A Prelude to Biblical Folklore: Underdogs and Tricksters* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), who thinks that his character is depicted as consistent throughout.

49 See Ernest Kurtz, *Not-God: A History of Alcoholics Anonymous* (Center City: Hazelden, 1979).

and his eventual willingness to forgive his brothers. And it is perhaps most obvious when, after Jacob has died and his brothers fear that he might now exact revenge, he can say "Fear not, for am I in the place of God?" (Gen 50:19) As Marilynne Robinson notes, he can now see "beyond a human conception of justice which still shapes his brothers' fearful expectations."[50] Ultimately this wisdom leads to reconciliation, the restoration of the family and the prevention of further violence and hurt.

5. Conclusion

I have been proposing that the Joseph narrative can provide a valuable resource for helping recovering addicts to develop resilience in their attempts to live without drugs or alcohol. It is well known that resilience cannot be taught.[51] However, it can be modelled and learned through personal example and story.[52] Drawing on the psychology of resilience as well as recent work on trauma and resilience hermeneutics, I have suggested that several of Joseph's experiences may be seen as analogous to those of many who are, or have been, caught up in addiction. Joseph's example of using one's gifts, working hard, avoiding victim mentality, and thinking long-term are useful to all of us as we face adversity in everyday life. But the story also contains elements which are particularly relevant to people in recovery: these include learning to resist the temptation to act impulsively, acknowledging painful feelings, coping with injustice and the rough and the smooth of life, living with the complexity of human relationships. The story also illustrates that forgiveness and reconciliation are not and cannot be instantaneous, and the role of faith in rebuilding life after the loss of one's assumptive world. In his journey toward maturity, Joseph provides a model for resilience despite, and indeed, because of his flaws. His is truly a story in which "the undoing of trauma and evidence of resilience can be found."

In my experience this narrative can be fruitfully used in formal pastoral counselling sessions or in group Bible study. Reading the story of Joseph's experience has enabled people in recovery to open up and tell their own stories. Pastoral counsellors and group facilitators (along with the others in the

50 Marilynne Robinson, *Reading Genesis* (London: Virago, 2024), 230.
51 Phebe Tucker, "What is Resilience?," *Psychiatric Times* 38:7 (2021), 9–10.
52 See, for example, the collection of essays in Anna Maria Fraile-Marcos (ed.), *Glocal Narratives of Resilience* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

group) can become "story companions" who learn from the narrative and from one another.[53] Engaging with it, in private study or in group discussion, will help people in recovery to develop the resilience they need to be able to bounce back and move on from the setbacks which will inevitably come their way.

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53 Scheib, *Pastoral Care.*

Dialogical Orthodoxy in the Theological Vision of Anthony Bloom

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Abstract: This article deals with the dialogical approach of Metropolitan Anthony Bloom. It offers a short outline of his life and the formative influences on his thought. Then it analyses some concrete themes of Metropolitan Anthony's theological reflections: these are dialogical personalism, a scientific approach to theology, the story of the two trees in the Garden of Eden, which symbolise two ways to God, namely, the contemplative and through experimental knowledge of the created world, and his ideas about the unity of Christians and the ecumenical movement. Finally, the conclusion offers an overview of his dialogical approach and its relevance for the contemporary world.

Keywords: Anthony Bloom; dialogue; science; atheism; Orthodoxy; ecumenical movement

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Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh (born Andrei Bloom, 1914–2003) was a prominent and widely known Orthodox public personality in the West. He was in charge of the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate diocese in the United Kingdom from 1957 until his death. He lived in a pluralistic society, in an age when science tried to replace religion. He managed to preserve an uncorrupted religious belief, reconciling the gap between religion and secularism. His public speeches were popular for their humanism, openness, and, at the same time, genuine Christian fervour. He was Eastern Orthodox, however, he felt at home in Western culture. The Orthodox community gathered around him paid due attention to English culture and incorporated both the use of the English language and local traditions. In essence, Metropolitan Anthony was in many ways open to dialogue, although he rarely used the word "dialogue" itself.

In this article,[1] I point to a few ideas of metropolitan Anthony, which are still of interest and importance today. To start with, I make a few references to his biography, in as far as they are relevant for my topic. Then I demonstrate

1 This article is a part of the research project entitled "Dialogical Nature of the Orthodox Theology in Modern Britain: Anthony Bloom, Kallistos Ware, Andrew Louth," funded by the Grant Agency of Charles University (reference number 291323).

that his theological vision was developed within the intellectual context of the Paris School. After this I elaborate on his original "scientific" approach to theology which seemed to be fruitful for reconciliation within and outside Christianity. Then I add a few words on his hope for a dialogue between religion and secular society. Finally, I analyse his thoughts about the unity of Christians and steps towards inter-Christian rapprochement. I think that his contribution to these issues remains relevant in our admittedly different, but no less problematic age.

Orthodox Bishop in the West

The life of Metropolitan Anthony has already been afforded considerable attention,[2] so I will limit myself to a very brief outline. Andrei Bloom was born in 1914 in Lausanne, Switzerland, to a family of Russian diplomats.[3] However, the outbreak of the First World War and the following revolution in the Russian Empire changed the social status of his family dramatically. His father, Boris Bloom, had received his last appointment to Persia, but very soon he had no state to represent as the Russian Empire had ceased to exist. The family had to emigrate and eventually found themselves among the poorest social strata in France. His parents divorced. His mother sent him to the cheapest boarding school in Paris, where he suffered from a great deal of physical and psychological violence. This lasted for around three years but caused him a psychological trauma and led to a loss of faith.

2 He himself gave numerous accounts of his life, especially its early stage. See, for example, Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh, "Without Notes," in his *Encounter*, trans. Tatiana Wolff (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2008), 165–214; Anthony Bloom, "Interview with Archbishop Anthony Bloom," by Timothy Wilson, in Metropolitan Anthony Bloom, *School for Prayer* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1970), 5–23. Currently, there are also two biographies of Metropolitan Anthony: Gillian Crow, *This Holy Man: Impressions of Metropolitan Anthony* (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2005), and Avril Pyman, *Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh: A Life* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2016).

3 His mother, Kseniia, was a daughter of the Russian diplomat Nikolai Scriabin and his Italian spouse Olga, and a half-sister to the composer Alexander Scriabin. His father, Boris Bloom, was also a Russian diplomat with some distant Scottish ancestry. So, Andrei was of a mixed origin. However, he did not feel himself as "half-Italian." He found Italian culture and mentality, due to its southern temper, quite distant from his own and acknowledged that "Italy is probably the last [country] in which I would choose to settle" (Anthony of Sourozh, "Without Notes," 167).

The young Andrei reconnected with God when he was about 14 years old, almost physically, while reading the Gospel. The feeling of the living presence of Jesus Christ he observed was so influential that he decided to dedicate his whole life to Christ. This event became in some ways foundational for his worldview. He changed his attitude to people: he stopped perceiving all those who were outside his closest circle as dangerous and hostile and started to see in them children of God, meaningful and important.[4] He also felt an acute need to share the truth about Jesus Christ – who revealed himself to him as life, joy, and meaning – with other people. Immediately he started to talk about this with his classmates, friends, and even occasionally people in the metro.[5] His religious experience taught him that the good news of the Gospel has no boundaries, either confessional or cultural. Thus, it strengthened his open attitude to the world. Moreover, a genuine religious experience became central for his later theological reflections.

Despite this bright spiritual revelation in his teens, the journey to the priestly ministry was long. On the advice of his father, he obtained first a medical education, studying Natural Sciences and Medicine at the Sorbonne between 1931–1939. Thus, he was just finishing his studies at the outbreak of the Second World War. For this reason, he started at once to work as a surgeon. During the war, he secretly helped people persecuted by the Nazis and assisted the resistance movement by producing false medical documents. In 1943, he was secretly tonsured as a monk by his spiritual father, Archimandrite Afanasii Nechaev, who died the same year from cancer.[6]

In 1948, as a result of several happy coincidences, Anthony was ordained to the priesthood and appointed to serve in the United Kingdom, at first as an Orthodox chaplain of the Fellowship of Saint Alban and Saint Sergius, and soon in a parish of the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate

4 Anthony Bloom, "The Atheist and the Archbishop," interview by Marghanita Laski, in Metropolitan Anthony Bloom, *God and Man* (London: Darton, Longmann, and Todd, 1971), 12–13.

5 Anthony of Sourozh, "Life for me is Christ…", in *Encounter*, 244–46.

6 Archimandrite Afanasii also helped Jews during the war and was twice imprisoned by Gestapo. He was both times released, perhaps due to his bad health condition, but did not stop to hide and help Jews until his death. See memories about him, for example, Monahinja Genovefa (Lavrova), "Vospominanija ob arhimandrite Afanasii (Nechaeve)," v arhim. Afanasij (Nechaev), *Ot Valaama do Parizha* (Moskva: Fond "Duhovnoe nasledie mitropolita Antonija Surozhskogo", 2011), 213–20, accessed on January 17, 2025 at https://azbyka.ru/otechnik/Afanasij_Nechaev/vospominanija-ob-arhimandrite-afanasii-nechaeve/.

in London. In 1957, he was consecrated as a bishop and was elevated to the rank of metropolitan in 1966. Between 1963 and 1974, he also held the position of the Exarch of the Moscow Patriarchate in Western Europe, residing between Paris and London. However, it was too time-demanding and exhausting, so he asked for dismissal from this post, and spent the rest of his life in the United Kingdom.[7]

As is obvious from this short outline, he never obtained any official theological education. In fact, however, he was deeply read in the authors of the so-called Paris School.[8] In his talks, he often referred to Sergei Bulgakov, Vladimir Lossky, Georges Florovsky, Lev Zander, Olivier Clément, Lev Gillet, and others. He also recollected his personal conversations with Vladimir Lossky.[9] It is clear that the Paris School indeed had a great impact on his theological vision. At the same time, he was not limited by the range of topics which they discussed and reflected on many other issues as well.[10] He was

7 It is worth noting that, on the hand, he was extremely loyal to the Moscow patriarchate, to the Soviet church, because he saw the Church in the Soviet Union as a victim of persecutions. He wanted to be in solidarity with the persecuted. At the same time, he did not pay attention to the fact that this church was an instrument of the political goals of the Soviet Union. On the other hand, he was one of the most liberal Orthodox bishops. He often spoke to secular audiences. He also as early as 1990 supported the independence of both Ukraine and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and asked patriarch Aleksii II to give it the Tomos of Independence (see, Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh, "Letter of 21 October 1990 to Patriarch Aleksii II," in Pyman, *Metropolitan Anthony*, p. 167–8).

8 Comprised of the theologians gathered around the Institut Saint Serge, the Russian Orthodox theological school founded in 1925 in Paris by Russian exile theologians.

9 The first edition of the collection of the last talks (2001–2002) of Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh was published in English as Anthony Bloom, *On the Light that Shineth in the Darkness: The Last Talks* (London: Metropolitan of Sourozh Foundation, 2014). Later it appeared in both Ukrainian and Russian translations. In Russian it was published under the title Antonij Blum, *Uverennost v veshhah nevidimyh: poslednie besedy (2001–2002)* (Moskva: Nikeja, 2014), also available online on a web page of Christian texts called *Azbuka.ru*, https://azbyka.ru/otechnik/Antonij_Surozhskij/uverennost-v-veshhah-nevidimyh-poslednie-besedy/#source. In the following year it was also translated into Ukrainian as Mitr. Antonij Suroz'kij, *Svitlo u temrjavi. Ostanni rozmovi 2001–2002 rr.*, transl. N. Bezborodova, L. Lisenko (Kyiv: Duh i litera, 2015). As the original version was difficult to access, hereinafter I use for page references the Ukrainian translation. However, I am grateful to the Ukrainian translator Nataliya Bezborodova, who provided me with the manuscript of the English original, so I was able to avoid the double translation. For the story about the meeting with Vladimir Lossky, see Antonij Suroz'kij, "10. Pro prismerk istorij, besida 11 kvitnja 2002 r.", in *Svitlo u temrjavi*, 130.

10 Another peculiarity of Metropolitan Anthony is that he was not an academic theologian, but mostly gave talks to a wider audience. So, it is sometimes hard to trace the exact

also well read in some midrashic sources.[11] Despite this, Christian-Jewish dialogue did not belong to his agenda. He used midrash mostly for deeper understanding of the Old Testament, contextualising it within Jewish culture.

Dialogic Personalism

To demonstrate his intellectual connection to the Paris School, I will point to the influence on him of dialogical personalism. All main representatives of the so-called Russian Religious Renaissance were to different degrees occupied by the idea of personalism that originally emerged in the intellectual milieu of German classic philosophy. According to it, the human being becomes a real person only when she or he engages into relations, preferably built on sincere love. Different thinkers defined these relations as those with other human beings, God, nature and even inanimate objects such as art. In the interwar period this idea served as opposition to both capitalism and totalitarianism, condemning the first for its egocentric individualism and the second for the subordination of human freedom to some illusory collective interest.

This idea became popular in European theology regardless of its denomination. But in Orthodoxy it was, perhaps, the most widespread. Orthodox thinkers also grounded it firmly into trinitarian theology.[12] They connected the terms 'hypostasis' and 'person' for the description of the three Divine Persons of the Holy Trinity and made an extrapolation to human relations: as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit dwell in each other in mutual love, so a human being, who is made as the image of the Holy Trinity, must love others to become a true person.[13] Sometimes, this statement is perceived almost as an ancient theological dogma, though its actual roots lie in the philosophy of the Enlightenment. Ancient Church Fathers indeed spoke on

works of the authors whom he mentioned as he often referred to "some" articles or books of well-known theologians, mostly from the Paris School, without giving their title.

11 He referred, for example, to *The Guide for the Perplexed* by Maimonides, written in the 12th century, or *Genesis Rabbah*, originating from Late Antiquity.

12 On the personalism of the Orthodox theologians, see, for example, Andrew Louth, *Modern Orthodox Thinkers: From the Philokalia to the Present* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015).

13 See Pantelis Kalaitzidis, "Dialogical Ethos of Trinitarian Theology, East and West: Theological and Political Implications," *Journal of Orthodox Christian Studies* 5.2 (2022): 223–51.

the relations of love between the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity. However, an articulation that a human being becomes a person only in relationships belongs to the modern age. It has also served as one of the rationales for the ecumenical dialogue.

Metropolitan Anthony had inherited this idea from the Paris School. However, it remained on the margins of his theological thought and he did not speak on it often. He appropriated dialogical personalism more for the explanation of theodicy, claiming that God had initial tragedy in Godself as the mutual love of three persons demands constant self-denial and remains sorrowful.[14] But, more interestingly, he also developed an idea of differentiation between an individual and a person. For him, the individual is the smallest measure of division. The individual strives for self-assertion and tries to resist absorption. There is a distance between her or him and other individuals. Individualism involves rejection, negation of another or a group.

On the contrary, the term "person" has its roots in Scripture and implies complementarity: "It is characteristic of personality that it does not differ from others by contrast, opposition, self-assertion – personality is not repeatable."[15] The exhaustive image of personality is contained in revelation – it is a unique name given to those who deserve the Kingdom of God. He explained that according to Jewish tradition, name and personality are identical when the name is spoken by God. He then continues:

> We do not know what 'personality' is in the primordial state precisely because of the catastrophe of the human fall […]. In consequence, instead of being a harmony composed of unique but not self-confirming or opposing beings, a consonance, whose key is God, we know personality only through the divisive and tragic prism of individuals.[16]

Only Jesus Christ is the perfect person. But Christians should try to imitate Him, to become "living temples enlivened by the Holy Spirit, to grasp the reality of personality and nature, overcoming the opposition and separation to which separateness leads."[17] Through love, encounters are transformed into relationships where one's self moves from the centre to

14 Antonij Suroz'kij, "13. Buti pravoslavnim hristijaninom, besida 30 travnja 2002 r.", in *Svitlo u temrjavi*, 170.

15 Antonij Surozhskij, "O samopoznanii. Vystuplenie v Zheneve pered molodezhnoj gruppoj 3 nojabrja 1969 g. Per. s franc. T. Majdanovich," in Antonij Surozhskij, *Chelovek pered Bogom* (Moskva: Medlennye knigi, 2019), 136.

16 Antonij Surozhskij, "O samopoznanii," *Chelovek pered Bogom*, 137.

17 Ibid., 140.

the periphery. He concluded that personality is the internal, divine image of the Living God in a human being and it is this that we should strive for. However, this obvious path into more engagement with dialogical personalism made by Bloom did not become a kind of philosophical framework central to his theology. Nevertheless, he shared not only the ideas, but also the open spirit of many of the Paris School and can be regarded as one of its later representatives.

Scientific Approach to Theology or the Two Sides of the One Coin

One of Bloom's most interesting contributions lies in the integral comprehension of science and religion. He was active in a period when science was often thought of as able to replace religion. And, on the other hand, some more fundamentalist ecclesial circles demonstrated a hostile attitude to science. They perceived the rejection of modernity in general and science in particular as a heroic Christian fight against "the prince of this world." Metropolitan Anthony was able to reconcile science and religion in his theological vision. Moreover, he introduced an original and productive "scientific" approach to theology, which justified reconciliation between Christians. What it means and how it works will be discussed in this section.

Trying to get closer to the mystery of God, Metropolitan Anthony resorted to what could be called a scientific method. He did not take the side of either a cataphatic or apophatic way of thinking about God. Instead, he compared theology to the natural sciences, pointing out their common principles of thinking. Having a degree in natural sciences and medicine, he mentioned that no scientific theory is sufficient to describe a phenomenon in its completeness. A physical or natural phenomenon is reality, it actually exists. However, no theory in physics is able to present the full explanation of what it consists in or how it functions. Thus, every theory should be perceived critically and should be questioned. And, it is quite likely that the theory that is now considered to be credible will be soon revised or even replaced. To illustrate his idea, he recalled the lecture of Professor Maurice Curie given in his student years at the Sorbonne, where the former insisted that the atom is the smallest particle of material that could not be split, and that the destruction of the atom would lead to a terrible explosion.

When the time went by, however, the scientists established that neither of these was true.[18]

Thus, scientists have faith and hope that there is a certain scientific secret that they want to discover. Every scientist understands that any theory only approximately describes reality and therefore questions it. It is not the reality that is questioned, but the theory that describes it. Scientists rejoice when they stumble upon a fact that does not fit into their theory, but rather undermines it and forces them to rethink it or make further research.[19]

As every theory in natural sciences should always be questioned, the same, according to Metropolitan Anthony, relates to theology. He stated that God is a reality known not only from religious tradition but also from direct spiritual experience. However, this reality is so much greater than any human comprehension that all theological statements and religious texts are unable to adequately describe it. Here he also loosely quoted Gregory of Nyssa as follows: "if we create a complete, integral picture of everything that we have learned about God from the Holy Scriptures, from Divine Revelation, from the experience of the saints, and imagine that this picture gives us an idea of God, we have created an idol and are no longer able to get to the real, living God, who is all in dynamics and life."[20] So, all theological knowledge gathered together is by no means able to reveal the mystery of God in its fullness. However, based on this provision, Bloom did not opt purely for apophaticism but instead for a constant questioning and reconsideration of one's beliefs.

He insisted that a believer should be honest to him- or herself and should not accept obscure passages from Scripture with false piety, but honestly admit that he or she does not understand them and thus ask questions about them. Moreover, this relates not only to unclear passages. Even the religious knowledge that seems to be obvious to a believer at a certain moment of his or her life might be reconsidered in a process of spiritual maturity. This is because both the growth of closeness with God and life experience may reveal to a believer a new depth and meaning in those articles of faith that seemed to be transparent and clear. As he put it: "At every point our knowledge of God may be true but it may be the truth of this moment which

18 Antonij Suroz'kij, "7. Pro dva shljahi piznannja Boga, besida 21 ljutogo 2002," in *Svitlo u temrjavi*, 88–92.

19 Antonij Surozhskij, "O vere. Serija besed, prozvuchavshaja v russkoj religioznoj programme Bi-bi-si (1972 g.)," in *Chelovek pered Bogom*, 40–41.

20 Ibid., 44.

corresponds to our spiritual width and depth, and growth."[21] Thus, questioning does not testify to the lack of faith but, on the contrary, to its certainty.

A believer should also analyse the Holy Scriptures. As Metropolitan Anthony expressed it: "When we say that the Scriptures are the word of God, yes, they are, but before we can understand them we must grow into communion with God Himself not with a dictionary, not simply by searching the meaning of words but by searching the heart from which they come and the heart into which they fall, that is our own heart."[22] In other words, a believer should distinguish the intentions and meaning of the word of God from its rigid and restrictive formulations, always made in a concrete language and in particular historical circumstances.

In fact, this approach indicates the dialogic nature of the relationship between a human being and God. In comparison to science, and of a believer in some way to a scientist, he or she is presented not as a passive listener and obedient executor of God's commandments, but as a creative and important participant of mutual relations, who remains in a constant search for comprehension and unity. Regarding science itself, Metropolitan Anthony did not advocate for dialogue between it and religion. This was because for him they were too inseparably connected: not only in the similarity of their methods, but also in their common origins.

In his late years, he developed a theory that the tree of knowledge of good and evil from the Garden of Eden opened up a pathway for an experimental comprehension of life. He was deeply concerned with the question of the responsibility of God for the human fall. He insisted that God, having planted in Eden the tree of knowledge, made possible human sin. In such a way, God became co-responsible for the fall of humanity. Seemingly, Bloom found somewhat problematic the standard teaching of the Church that the tree of knowledge guaranteed freedom for humanity, for if there is no free choice to sin or not to sin, there is no liberty as well. As God made people free, he also left them a choice. Metropolitan Anthony coped with this ethical problem developing the idea of Irenaeus of Lyon, which he found in an unattributed article of Olivier Clément.[23]

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21 Antonij Suroz'kij, "1. Pro zapituvannja, besida 4 zhovtnja 2001," in *Svitlo u temrjavi*, 14.

22 Antonij Suroz'kij, "12. Pro trudnoshhi rozuminnja, besida 16 travnja 2002 r.," in *Svitlo u temrjavi*, 153.

23 Antonij Suroz'kij, "6. Pro grihopadinnja, besida 31 sichnja 2002 r.," in *Svitlo u temrjavi*, 68–73.

So, Metropolitan Anthony built on the idea that the tree of knowledge was just another way, although long and complicated, back to God. He presented it as follows. Adam and Eve were innocent in paradise. So, Eve did not have sinful wishes and any desire to resist or act against God. In her naivety, she believed the serpent tempter. Eating from the tree of knowledge seemed to her as just another way to know more about God and something that she could do herself, without God's direct revelation. However, the meal turned out to be a sin and human beings lost their original integrity and started to feel shame. Nonetheless, it was Cain's descendants who built cities and created complex human culture.

In fact, Eve had the right intuition as every knowledge of created things may lead us back to their creator. This is true for an artist and his or her paintings, for the writer and their novels, but this is also true for God and his creature. But the fact of disobedience to God and as a consequence, sin, meant that this knowledge was neither completely clear nor unproblematic. The process of getting knowledge became blurred, darkened by the twilight of God's initial uncreated light. Nevertheless, it is still possible, and the discovering of artistic and natural wonders may still point to the Creator. God did not plant a tree of death, but a tree of *knowledge*.

This theological vision supported Metropolitan Anthony's conviction that art, literature, and, of course, science, should not be disregarded by believers. Quite to the contrary, they might be theologically important and offer deeper knowledge of God. Even if they fail to do so, they at least may bring a sense of wonder about the created world. Thus, the way of scientific or artistic knowledge of the world is just another way to God as compared to religious practices.[24] These two ways are symbolized by trees of life and knowledge from the Garden of Eden. Thus, Metropolitan Anthony did not talk about dialogue of religion and science, as for him they were not opposite sides in dialogue or worldviews, but a complementary reality.

Dialogue of Faith with Secular Society

Instead, Metropolitan Anthony raised the question of the importance of dialogue between religion and atheism. He maintained that atheism and religion share common ground – a belief in the human being. This means

24 Antonij Suroz'kij, "7. Pro dva shljahi piznannja Boga," in *Svitlo u temrjavi*, 84–86.

a conviction that every human being possesses something good in them, a desire to love, to act rightly, that they have compassion and vision. As he put it: "Every reformer, every person who calls people to something new, bases his call on faith in man; and in small things, in everyday life, everything is based on this faith that there is something kind, something good in man, that can respond to need, to sorrow, to joy, that can serve as a basis for how to build life."[25] It is in some senses similar to the modern notion of "people of good will" that, however, embraces everyone. He further clarified that this belief is not a gullible persuasion that all people are sympathetic and responsive, but a conviction that there is something humanly deeper in every person.

So, Christianity and atheism have already a solid crossing point. Further, they both suggest that a person may be properly educated or intellectually shaped. This may serve as a starting point for a further dialogue on the question as to what exactly does it mean to be a good person, to be fully human?[26] He complained that there has never been a sincere dialogue yet, although there was a promising potential.

Of course, being a devoted Christian, Metropolitan Anthony found atheism problematic. He observed that a person may come to an atheistic worldview for one of two main reasons: either he or she was simply accordingly raised up and educated, or they found atheism comfortable because the assumed absence of God would release them from moral responsibility. As an illustration for the second point, he referred to a life story of an educated migrant from the former Russian Empire. The latter realized that he became an atheist in childhood after stealing some money from a blind beggar to buy himself a toy horse. Prior to this shameful event, he was a pious child who had attended church services with his parents. But after this, he began to doubt the existence of God as this existence made him feel uncomfortable. After a few years, doubts turned into convinced atheism.[27] So, one's atheism may be a weapon against remorse. However, in those cases, where it is not a comfortable shelter for human sins but a sincere worldview, Metropolitan Anthony was optimistic about the prospects of its dialogue with Christianity.

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25 Antonij Surozhskij, "O vere," *Chelovek pered Bogom*, 29.

26 Antonij Surozhskij, "Dialog ob ateizme i poslednem sude. Beseda v Leningrade (15 fevralja 1982 g.) dopolnena fragmentom besedy v Moskve (dekabr' 1974 g.)," in *Chelovek pered Bogom*, 70–71.

27 Antonij Surozhskij, "Dialog ob ateizme i poslednem sude," in *Chelovek pered Bogom*, 67–68.

His contemporary society consisted not only of atheists and Christians, but also of agnostics, of people without any concrete faith, or representatives of other faiths. He held the same respect for all. As he himself admitted, "I understood a very great deal about Christianity and about Orthodoxy through reading and consorting with non-Christians, simply with secular people, with non-believers, who were, if one can put it this way, 'human beings', that is, in whom I saw real people, able to love, to make sacrifices, to feel compassion, to show mercy, to be capable of everything which is spoken about in the parable of the sheep and the goats."[28] He invoked here the idea that people were created as the image of God. So, Jesus Christ was not only the Son of God, but also a perfect human being. If people were free from sin they would be quite similar to Jesus in the manifestations of their humanity. So, there is nothing strange in the fact that some people, who preserved a pure heart, perform God's commandments, even if they do not know about this. However, he was also convinced that modern Western culture had been built on Christian roots and precisely this made it so human.

Openness for the Ecumenical Dialogue

Metropolitan Anthony was slightly critical about official ecumenical dialogue, accusing it of excessive bureaucratisation and politicization. He saw it like a certain illness of growth. He was optimistic about the period right after the Second World War which was marked by genuine Christian zeal and desire to know better about each other. However, in his view the subsequent decades transformed the World Council of Churches into a complicated international organization, pre-occupied too much with political correctness and social issues.[29]

However, he was never opposed to the idea of the unity of Christians and ecumenical movement as such. On the contrary, he believed in the unity of all Christians based on true religious experience and commitment. He was convinced that Christians are divided due to differences in the philosophical languages they used for theological articulation of faith. He held the belief

28 Anthony Bloom, "We Have to Bring Faith to the World – Faith not only in God, but also in Man," interview by Michael Epstein in London in April 1989, in *Encounter*, 28.

29 See Antonij Surozhskij, "Sozercanie i dejateľnosť. Beseda v Moskve, 1971 g.," in his Trudy, kniga 1 (Moskva: Praktika, 2014), accessed on 1 October 2024 at https://predanie.ru/book/70302-trudy-1/.

that the Orthodox Church preserved uncorrupted truth. However, it is the love and respect for God, and also good deeds that make people Christians, not the Creed they proclaim. In fact, the latter does not play an actual role in everyday life. He elaborated:

> If we ask ourselves what it means to be a believer, a Christian, an Orthodox, I think we can say that it is a matter of the heart and of faith, understood not as blind acceptance of a Creed handed over century after century that had become more and more complex and whose very wording is less and less understandable to people, but that the centre of it is our direct relatedness to God. Do we love Him? Do we venerate Him? Do we know Him as a person? Are we faithful to this love of God and to what we call our love for Him? This is the measure.[30]

He gently reminded his readers and hearers that the true believer, according to the Gospel, may heal the sick and resurrect the dead, and asked his Orthodox audience whether they met those criteria. He also pointed to the fact that Orthodox Christians themselves often serve as the worst advertisement of Orthodoxy, and by contrast provided an example of a French soldier, whom he operated during the war. He saved six of his military brothers from the battlefield, having sustained numerous injuries. Metropolitan Anthony described him as an example of true Christian love, although, he definitely was not Orthodox, and possibly even not a practicing Christian. He summed up many of his thoughts in the following lengthy passage:

> [Understanding of the Scriptures] depends on our communion with God, not with the text, not with words, and this is where the tragedy of the dividedness of Christians comes to the fore because it is about words which we fight. When we accuse one another of heresy we accuse the wording but what do we do about the person? What do we do about the way in which this particular person communes with God, lives by God, lives in God's name? It is important for us to remember simultaneously that there is such a thing as the truth. I do believe that the Orthodox faith to the extent to which it can express things is true, but I could not believe anymore after many years of life that someone who does not embrace it cannot find salvation. […] And also, so often, people cannot believe in what we believe to be true because we are to them a proof that our words are not true. When we speak of love and manifest none, when we speak of giving our lives as Christians for others, and I am sure we do not give anything, can anyone believe that this is the truth? So that there is a problem here or rather there is a challenge, that we cannot say that it is enough to proclaim a truth couched in words to be within the truth. We can be within the truth only if we live it.[31]

30 Antonij Suroz'k, "13. Buti pravoslavnim hristijaninom," in *Svitlo u temrjavi*, 163–64.
31 Antonij Suroz'kij, "12. Pro trudnoshhi rozuminnja," in *Svitlo u temrjavi*, 153–54.

He stressed that more important than the confession of the articles of faith are the fidelity of heart and recalled that only the Mother of God and John the Evangelist, who were people of the heart, i.e. loved Jesus the most, stayed steadfast with him near the cross.[32] So, the Christians should follow them seeking for a heartfelt approach. These were the theological grounds for Metropolitan Anthony's open attitude to ecumenism. Now, I will also look at some of his practical advice for the achievement of such unity.

First, referring to Lev Zander's book *Vision and Action*, he compared Christians to friends, who initially loved each other, but then lost connection, because they had started to have different opinions on things. In the process, these friends became too different to each other and ended up as distant people. However, after a while, their original love pierced their heart, so they looked around searching for each other. They noticed each other in a fog and walked tentatively back. And they needed to know each other again, to ask about their experience, the things they had learnt and personalities they had become. Contemporary Christians, Metropolitan Anthony suggested, should do likewise. They should cultivate in themselves mutual respect, fascination, and love. They should first get to know each other on an interpersonal level, to discover in each other human deepness and authenticity and, finally, to know as much as possible about their Christian experience and commitment. He pointed out that various saints of the West and East used different theological terms, but had in common their knowledge of God. So, Christians of different denominations should admit:

> […] We parted at a moment when we were in search of answers, when we were asking questions, we were giving answers that could at times be incompatible with one another because they were rooted in different experiences, in different languages, in different philosophies, now we have begun to understand one another's language, now we have begun to understand that the various philosophies which entranced our ancestors were only human attempts at understanding but there was something greater – God's Revelation and life in God and we can begin to talk on that level. What have you learnt about God? […] He died for me, He died for you and we are killing one another. O, perhaps, not always with a knife or with a gun but with a word – in our heart you are dead and I am dead in yours. Is that compatible with the faith we have in Christ, in a God Who has become man, lived, taught, suffered, died for each of us?[33]

32 Antonij Suroz'kij, "13. Buti pravoslavnim hristijaninom," in *Svitlo u temrjavi*, 168.

33 Antonij Suroz'kij, "14. Pro hristijanstvo ta inshi viruvannja, besida 13 chervnja 2002 r.," in *Svitlo u temrjavi*, 178.

So, he was the proponent of the idea that the achievement of unity between Christians starts from interpersonal contacts, develops through the exchange of good practices, both ministerial and spiritual, and then may somehow lead to the unity on the level of structures.

From the critical point of view, it needs to be mentioned that Metropolitan Anthony reflected in general terms, but did not go deeper in terms of overcoming practical impediments. He stressed the foundational importance of the spiritual and practical Christian experience, but did not touch the question that not every spiritual experience comes from God; in other words, some spiritual experiences may motivate people to do or justify evil. Talking about truth, he did not mention the criteria for distinguishing between truth and delusion. The absence of spiritual and moral discernment seems to be a weakness of his theology. Moreover, in keeping with a more general Orthodox way of thinking, he avoided any attempt to propose specific theological criteria for unity. He merely criticized the World Council of Churches for having establishing as a criterion belief in the Holy Trinity broadly understood, but did not offer anything else instead.[34] He also did not discuss any concrete steps for the achievement of the ecclesial unity of Christians, such as intercommunion, conciliarity, or any other topic present in official dialogues. So, he offered a good direction of thought, an attitude, but did not seek in any way to find a practical solution.

Nevertheless, this approach of invisible unity based on faith in Jesus Christ, proclaimed by the influential Metropolitan, was, and still is, very important in the Orthodox milieu, where either an exclusivist or fundamentalist stance remain very strong. As the contemporary Orthodox theologian Cyril Hovorun observed, denominational identities have become a much more powerful obstacle in the ecumenical movement than dogmatic disagreements, as the latter are more likely to be resolved.[35] So, Metropolitan Anthony's works on the formation of a positive image of non-Orthodox and the restoration of their Christian dignity were a good contribution to the demythologization of Orthodox identity. It is also important in the context of contemporary divisions within Orthodoxy itself.

34 See Antonij Surozhskij, "Sozercanie i dejateľnosť," in *Trudy*.

35 See, for example, Cyril Hovorun (ed.), *Serving the Communion: Re-thinking the Relationship between Primacy and Synodality. A Study by the Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group* (Los Angeles: Tsehai, 2019).

Conclusions

Anthony Bloom represented an open and searching Orthodoxy, which followed strongly in the vein of the spirit of the Paris School. He was theologically self-educated, mainly in the works of Orthodox thinkers, both Russian and converted, who acted in France. Sometimes, he directly continued reflecting on topics they proposed, like the contraposition of person and individual; at other times he dealt with topics of particular interest to him, but always preserving a spirit that was open to Western Christianity and more broadly, to a secular world.

However, the Paris School was only one of the formative influences that shaped his theology. The other two were his education in natural sciences and medicine and his own conversion to the faith due to an immediate religious experience. Original religious experience became a foundational principle, on which he based both his broad theological reflections and his dialogue with the secular world.

Due to his scientific background, he was convinced that doubt in and reconsideration of all established religious thought is no less important than doubt in scientific research. So, he opted for an openness to a reconsideration of faith in the process of spiritual growth. As a result, he developed a theological vision in which God is an objective reality, as he reveals himself to believers, while theology represents human efforts to understand and describe this reality. Consequently, God is constant, while theology is variable. This made his theological vision essentially dialogical – not in a sense of belonging to a concrete dialogue or agenda, but exposing a belief in an ongoing conversation that is able to transform partners.

In particular, he believed in the invisible unity of Christians on the level of spiritual experience and commitment. He perceived the dividedness of Christianity as a tragedy, caused by different philosophical systems, languages and historical circumstances, but not by the essence of their living faith in Jesus Christ. He was also convinced that Christians should take steps towards each other and learn from mutual spiritual experience and practical devotion.

Although he did not provide suggestions on practical mechanisms for the achievement of possible institutional unity, his guiding principles appear no less important nowadays. Moreover, namely this way has become popular in the contemporary ecumenical movement, represented, for example, by the Saint Irenaeus Group on unofficial dialogue between

the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches or the British movement of receptive ecumenism.

This approach also renders hope for the healing of extreme polarization within global Orthodoxy as such. Pointing to Jesus Christ's self-sacrifice for the life of the whole world and to individual experience of God's mercy, metropolitan Anthony opted for a *humanization* of one's opponents and finding common grounds in love and commitment for Jesus Christ. The walls within Orthodoxy that today scare with their strength may fall apart when sides start to see first humans and then brothers and sisters in one another. He completely avoided, however, the issue of human sin that causes divisions. But here it may be added that forgiveness is able to heal it.

He also found a common ground between religion and the secular world through a common faith in humanity. He advocated for active dialogue with atheism and was convinced that discussion about human dignity may bring both worldviews closer. He insisted that Christians were also guilty for the emergence of atheism as they failed to demonstrate the attractiveness of Christianity, proclaiming words without deeds. However, he saw a positive potential in the contemporary society.

He was also concerned with the problem of theodicy and the possibility of sin. He could not accept an easy explanation that evil is a result of human freedom. In this case, according to him, God would be co-responsible for sin. So, he developed an idea that the tree of knowledge from the Garden of Eden was not a tree of death, but a tree symbolizing another way to God – through independent learning from the created world, which again brought his thinking close to a scientific one.

Perhaps needless to say, his theology also had its weak points. Addressing broad audiences often does not allow for giving more precise and nuanced explanations. He spoke on TV and radio broadcasts, both for the United Kingdom and the USSR, and held personal meetings with Soviet intelligentsia and various circles in Britain. So, his audience embraced both believers and secular listeners, much more rarely academic theologians. For this reason, he did not explain theological concepts on an academic level, but tried to appeal to general reason and the emotions of his fellow human beings. That is why he often did not consider details or possible side effects of his ideas. Nevertheless, his attitude and spiritual authority were important against the background of growing fundamentalist sentiments in many traditionally Orthodox countries. His voice is no less important today, in the context of

terrible aggression of one Orthodox country against another. And it contributed to the healthy potential of contemporary Orthodoxy, quite different from the pseudo-religious "Russian World" ideology proclaimed by his mother Russian Orthodox Church today.

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Glen H. Stassen: A Baptist Contribution to Conflict Resolution

Roman Shvets

Abstract: This article focuses on the approach to conflict resolution defended by Baptist theologian Glen H. Stassen. It first offers an overview of this important Baptist figure through his life story, which shows how his interest in peacemaking was formed under specific circumstances. Then attention is paid to Stassen's engagement with the Bible and the foundation for his views on conflict resolution in the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount. There follows an analysis and evaluation of the efficacy of Stassen's approach, where it is claimed that this approach can be applied in concrete situations. However the approach cannot be absolutized, given the complicated nature of conflicts, such as in particular the one happening in Ukraine.

Keywords: Glen H. Stassen; Jimmy Carter; Just Peacemaking Theory; War in Ukraine (2022–).

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Introduction

In this paper I analyze the approach to conflict resolution proposed by the Baptist theologian Glen Harold Stassen (1936–2014), a founding representative of the "just peacemaking" approach. In particular I try to see if the theory he defended can be practical for the situation of war in Ukraine, and offer any solution to this conflict. I intend to show that on the one hand this theory gives practical tools for the resolution of situations of war, whilst on the other hand it cannot be absolutized, since achieving peace is a rather complex task, depending on many factors which cannot so easily be controlled or influenced in order to achieve a positive result.

The article begins with a biography of Stassen, moving on to show the biblical foundation of his views on peacemaking and the efficacy of Stassen's suggestions for conflict resolution. The first part will introduce Glen Stassen to the reader, who may be unfamiliar with him, and helps to show the circumstances which shaped Stassen's attitude to war and peace. The second part shows which Biblical materials influenced Stassen's vision on peacemaking and how he interpreted them. Finally, the third part analyzes

and evaluates Stassen's vision in order to see if it can achieve any success in real life and in particular in solving conflicts such as that in Ukraine.

Biography

Glen H. Stassen, whom his friend, the Christian social ethicist David Gushee described as "arguably the leading Baptist peace theorist-activist of the twentieth century,"[1] was born in 1936 in Minnesota, a few years before the outbreak of the Second World War. As the war started, his father, Harold Edward Stassen (1907–2001), who was Governor of Minnesota, decided to join the US Navy. Consequently Stassen grew up with the emotional stress related to the possibility of losing his father, a reality shared by many people in that time. There was indeed even a period when his father was reported to have been killed. In addition, the news about the use of a nuclear bomb in Hiroshima had an indelible and frightening effect on the child.[2] Later, when Stassen went to the University of Virginia to study nuclear physics, he came to understand even better the destructive abilities of nuclear power.[3]

A few more words are in order about Glen Stassen's father, especially given the influence he had on his son. After returning home safely from the war, he became actively involved once more in the political arena, having an impact beyond the USA. He was among those who contributed to the founding of the United Nations. He strove for peace, democracy, economic justice, civil and human rights. The goals that the father pursued in his life as a political figure then became the son's task to bring to realization during his life.[4] In the context of his father's influence, Glen Stassen recalled his father's words

1 David Gushee, "Glen Harold Stassen (1936–): Baptist Peacemaker in a Conflict World," in *Twentieth-Century Shapers of Baptist Social Ethics* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2008), 244.

2 Michael L. Westmoreland-White, "Glen Harold Stassen (1936–): Follower of a Thick Jesus," in *Ethics as if Jesus Mattered: Essays in Honor of Glen H. Stassen* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2014), 7–8.

3 Glen Stassen, *The Journey into Peacemaking* (Memphis: Brotherhood Commission, 1983), 6–7.

4 Westmoreland-White, "Follower of a Thick Jesus," 8. For more on Stassen's father and his relation to the United Nations, see Tim Brady, "Harold Stassen and the Birth of the United Nations," in *Minnesota Alumni* (Spring 2018), https://www.minnesotaalumni.org/stories/harold-stassen-and-the-birth-of-the-united-nations (accessed 24. 1. 2025).

in relation to war: "Glen, war is so horrible that we have to do all we can to prevent World War III and atomic war."[5]

In terms of Stassen's Christian formation, he experienced his personal conversion to God as an eleven-year-old child in a Minnesota Baptist church.[6] In the church, under the guidance of its pastor, John Wobig, Stassen learnt to live life "not as a passive listener – but as an active witnesser."[7] His Christian formation occurred in the context of contacts with different church traditions and even with non-Christian faiths. Some of them he found close to him and some figures from those traditions influenced him. In particular in his emphasis on peace and a negative appraisal of the use of violence for conflict resolution, he was influenced by the pacifist stream. Already in childhood, when he had visited a Quaker school, he was impressed by one of their teachers who opposed participation in the war and instead carried out scientific work for his country.[8]

An important influence on him from his own Baptist tradition was Martin Luther King who used "nonviolent direct action" in reaching those goals which could not be brought to realization without confrontation.[9] When Stassen thought about the Baptist tradition and its contribution to peacemaking, and describing some Baptist figures in the category of "saints," he could claim Martin Luther King as "the chief of those saints."[10]

In addition we can mention his interest in the Anabaptist tradition. Here he was influenced by John Howard Yoder, with whom he became friends.[11] In one of his analyses of Anabaptists, he defends their attitude to war: "Refusal to participate in killing enemies, however, does not mean withdrawal from practical service in the world, be it the production of musical and artistic culture or participation in economic activity or public service."[12] This argument

5 Glen Harold Stassen, *A Thicker Jesus: Incarnational Discipleship in a Secular Age* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 200.
6 Gushee, "Baptist Peacemaker in a Conflict World," 245.
7 Glen Stassen, *Journey into Peacemaking*, 6.
8 Westmoreland-White, "Follower of a Thick Jesus," 9–11, 13, 15.
9 Glen Stassen, "How Incarnational Discipleship Led to Just Peacemaking," in *Baptistic Theologies* 4:2 (2012), 90–91.
10 Glen H. Stassen, "Baptists as Peacemakers," in *The Fragmentation of the Church and Its Unity in Peacemaking* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 187.
11 Westmoreland-White, "Follower of a Thick Jesus," 13.
12 Stassen, "Baptists as Peacemakers," 190.

was based on Yoder's contribution to *Authentic Transformation*,[13] which he co-authored with Stassen and D. M. Yeager.[14] Stassen shared with Yoder his insights and found support for his just peacemaking theory, which emphasised the efficacy of nonviolent action, something in which Yoder also believed.[15]

In terms of his academic life, Stassen received his PhD in 1967 from Duke University,[16] one of the top universities in the United States, where his interests were in history of theology, ethics, political and social theory. He also carried out post-doctoral work at Harvard, focusing on peacemaking and foreign policy.[17] He taught, among other institutions, at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and Fuller Theological Seminary. The first he joined in 1976, teaching ethics for twenty years, before joining Fuller in 1996, where he continued to teach in the field of ethics.[18] He retired in March 2014 and died one month later.[19] Among other activities, he supervised some 29 PhD students to completion of their doctorates. One of his books, *Kingdom Ethics*[20] has been translated into several languages and has sold around 30,000 copies.[21]

Stassen did a lot for the development of just peacemaking theory, which he actively promoted. As Orthodox scholar Perry T. Hamalis notes, this theory became "best known" thanks to Stassen.[22] One of the features that led

13 Glen H. Stassen, D. M. Yeager, and John Howard Yoder, *Authentic Transformation: A New Vision of Christ and Culture* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996).

14 Stassen, "Baptists as Peacemakers," 190 (see footnote no. 14 in the book).

15 Glen H. Stassen, "Introduction: Jesus Is No Sectarian: John H. Yoder's Christological Peacemaking Ethic," in *The War of the Lamb: The Ethics of Nonviolence and Peacemaking* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 22, 24. As always now when reference is made to Yoder, his behaviour, of which there is no indication that Stassen was aware, especially his abusive treatment of women for most of his academic career, perhaps calls into question the practice of what he wrote, even if some of the ideas retain relevance.

16 Jiyong Lee and Laura Rector, "Glen Stassen: Incarnational Disciple of Jesus," in *A Journal of Christian Ethics Today* 22:4 (2014), 5 [Aggregate Issue 95], https://christianethicstoday.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/CET_Issue_095.pdf (19. 12. 2024).

17 Westmoreland-White, "Follower of a Thick Jesus," 10–12.

18 Ibid., 13, 15.

19 Laura Rector, "Glen Stassen: Friend, Scholar, Activist," in *A Journal of Christian Ethics Today*22:4 (2014), 3 [Aggregate Issue 95]. Accessed at https://christianethicstoday.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/CET_Issue_095.pdf (19. 12. 2024).

20 Glen Stassen and David Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2003).

21 Rector, "Glen Stassen: Friend, Scholar, Activist," 3.

22 Perry T. Hamalis, "Just Peacemaking and Christian Realism: Possibilities for Moving beyond the Impasse in Orthodox Christian War Ethics," in *Orthodox Christian Perspectives on War* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017), 340.

him to this position was the concept of "transforming initiatives," discussed already in a small book *The Journey into Peacemaking*.[23] A more extended and focused discussion on these initiatives is found in *Just Peacemaking*.[24] Stassen himself considered this book as an important step in the process of development of just peacemaking theory, leading to *Just Peacemaking: Ten Practices for Abolishing War*,[25] a collaboration between 23 scholars, edited by Stassen, who also wrote one of the chapters and co-authored another.

The book was later reissued as *Just Peacemaking: The New Paradigm for the Ethics of Peace and War*,[26] with contributions from a further seven scholars.[27] Just peacemaking theory is usually discussed in the context of two other theories, pacifism and just war. These are seen as stuck within a debate on "legalistic absolutes," while the new theory tries to point to the importance of practical "peacemaking action" that should be taken to prevent the conflict.[28] Showing the weakness of the other theories, just peacemaking theory does not try to replace them, but to cooperate with them. Therefore there are pacifist and just war followers among those who support just peacemaking theory. Not all conflicts will be stopped and people will still need guidance from these two other theories in terms of the possibility of killing the enemy.[29]

Stassen was not just a theoretician, but someone who tried himself to put the theory into practice. So, for example, he participated in the work of the committee of the Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign. In particular he was involved in the preparation of a "successful strategy for the removal of medium-range nuclear missiles from Europe."[30] Jiyong Lee and Laura Rector, speaking about this aspect of Stassen's life, use the category of "activism."[31]

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23 Glen Stassen, *The Journey into Peacemaking* (Memphis, TN: Brotherhood Commission, 1983).

24 Glen Stassen, *Just Peacemaking: Transforming Initiatives for Justice and Peace* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992).

25 Glen Stassen (ed.), *Just Peacemaking: Ten Practices for Abolishing War* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1998).

26 Glen Stassen (ed.), *Just Peacemaking: The New Paradigm for the Ethics of Peace and War* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2008).

27 Ibid., 9.

28 Glen H. Stassen, "Introduction: Jesus Is No Sectarian," 24.

29 Pamela Brubaker et al., "Just Peacemaking as the New Ethics for Peace and War," in *Just Peacemaking: The New Paradigm*, 9.

30 Westmoreland-White, "Follower of a Thick Jesus," 13–14.

31 Lee and Rector, "Glen Stassen: Incarnational Disciple of Jesus," 6.

Another example of Stassen's attempts to practice theory relates to an interesting episode when he participated in a discussion with the President of Iran.[32] He asked him if there was any possibility of reaching agreement between the USA and Iran based on which there would be an expectation of no threat from Iran in relation to Israel, if Iran could have confidence in no threat from the USA.[33]

Stassen died at the age of 78, leaving a remarkable record behind. Paul Vitello characterized him in *The New York Times* as a person "who helped define the social-justice wing of the evangelical movement in the 1980s and played a role in advancing nuclear disarmament talks toward the end of the Cold War."[34] And, for his students, Stassen was a person who tried to live as an "incarnational disciple of Jesus," as one "who showed that theological ethics can be incarnated into our lives."[35]

The Biblical Basis of Stassen's Views on Peacemaking

In this section I will examine Glen Stassen's engagement with the Bible in relation to the theme of peacemaking. This examination will show how Stassen's interpretation of specific Biblical materials shaped his position. Just peacemaking theory proposes ten practices to try to prevent conflicts:

Peacemaking Initiatives

1. Support nonviolent direct action.
2. Take independent initiatives to reduce threat.
3. Use cooperative conflict resolution.

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32 Ibid.

33 Laurie Goodstein, "Ahmadinejad Meets Clerics, and Decibels Drop a Notch," in *The New York Times* (Sept. 27, 2007), https://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/27/world/middleeast/27clerics.html (20. 12. 2024).

34 Paul Vitello, "Glen Stassen, Theologian, Dies at 78; Championed Nuclear Disarmament," in *The New York Times* (May 7, 2014), https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/08/us/glen-stassen-theologian-who-champion-nuclear-disarmament-dies-at-78.html (10. 9. 2024).

35 Lee and Rector, "Glen Stassen: Incarnational Disciple of Jesus," 5–6. To see Stassen's thoughts on incarnational discipleship, look at his "By Their Fruits You Will Know Them: Incarnational Discipleship Stands the Test," in *Baptistic Theologies* 4:2 (2012), 7ff. Cf. also, *A Thicker Jesus: Incarnational Discipleship in a Secular Age* which Michael Willett-Newheart describes as Stassen's "magnum opus." Michael Willett Newheart, "Stassen on the Mount: The Ethicist as Exegete," in *Ethics as if Jesus Mattered: Essays in Honor of Glen H. Stassen* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2014), 22.

4. Acknowledge responsibility for conflict and injustice and seek repentance and forgiveness.

Justice

5. Advance democracy, human rights, and religious liberty.
6. Foster just and sustainable economic development.

Love and Community

7. Work with emerging cooperative forces in the international system.
8. Strengthen the United Nations and international efforts for cooperation and human rights.
9. Reduce offensive weapons and weapons trade.
10. Encourage grassroots peacemaking groups and other voluntary associations.[36]

Stassen saw these ten practices as rooted in Jesus's teachings in the Sermon on the Mount. The practices from the first group are connected with the passages from the Gospel of Matthew in this way: the first two steps depend on Mt 5:38–43; the third step is based on Mt 5:21–26 and the fourth on Mt 7:1–5. The second group is built on Mt 6:19–33, while the third returns to Mt 5:38–43 (in addition reference is made to Mt 26:51–52 for the ninth practice and 5:1–2 in addition to 7:28–29 for the tenth).[37]

From Stassen's perspective the teachings proclaimed in the Sermon can be presented as having "a triadic structure" in contrast to the more common "dyadic structure." In an article defending this thesis, he noted fourteen such triads.[38] Speaking about this article, Michael Willett Newheart says that it was where Stassen first presented his exegetical analysis, to which at least some experts in the field responded positively.[39] One, Willard M. Swartley, speaking about Stassen's treatment of the structure of different parts of the

36 Glen H. Stassen, "Resource Section on Just Peacemaking Theory," in *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 23:1 (2003), 69–70.

37 Glen Harold Stassen, *A Thicker Jesus*, 198, 212–13. The connection of practices with passages can be found also in Stassen's article, "How Incarnational Discipleship Led to Just Peacemaking," 102.

38 Glen H. Stassen, "The Fourteen Triads of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:21–7:12)," in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122/2 (2003), 267–308.

39 Michael Willett Newheart, "Stassen on the Mount," 21–22, 28–29.

Sermon on the Mount, says that "His structural analysis is impressive and persuasive…"[40]

Stassen noted that many people prefer to look at the teachings of the Sermon dyadically, and thus speak about the presence of antitheses. As an example, the Old Testament teaching prohibits killing humans, but in contrast Christ gives his teaching/call not even to be angry.[41] Thus Jesus's calls are seen "as high ideals, hard teachings, impossible demands."[42] On the one hand people can "praise them for being so idealistic," but on the other hand they do not see how they can be fulfilled in normal life and as a result "adopt another ethic that comes from somewhere else." Therefore the better approach in Stassen's view is to see the triadic structure in Jesus's teachings in the Sermon where the emphasis is on transforming initiatives.[43] I have already mentioned these initiatives in the first section as a foundation for Stassen's development of just peacemaking theory.

In this section I will concentrate further on the third practice, which suggests that those interested in just peacemaking "Use cooperative conflict resolution." According to those involved in development of just peacemaking theory, this practice should be seen as one that "emphasizes active coworking by parties in conflict."[44] As this article starts to examine if Stassen's suggestions concerning the way to reach peace can be practical and helpful to the war situation in Ukraine, the third practice seems the most relevant at the moment. The negotiations are considered as the best solution to this war by the President of the United States of America, Donald Trump.[45]

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40 Willard M. Swartley, *Covenant of Peace: The Missing Peace in the New Testament Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 65.

41 Glen H. Stassen, "The Fourteen Triads," 267–68.

42 Ibid., 269.

43 Glen H. Stassen and David Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 133.

44 Steven Brion-Meisels et al., "Use Cooperative Conflict Resolution," in *Just Peacemaking: The New Paradigm for the Ethics of Peace and War*, New Edition (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2008), 71.

45 As some examples from Ukraine, see Liliana Oleniak, "US President's Future Advisor: Trump Wants to Bring Ukraine and Russia to Negotiations," in *RBC-Ukraine* (November 14, 2024), https://newsukraine.rbc.ua/news/us-president-s-future-advisor-trump-wants-1731576004.html (accessed 30. 12. 2024); Dmytro Basmat, "War Will Be 'Resolved in Next Few Months,' Trump's Ukraine Peace Envoy Believes, Plans to 'Listen' Ahead of Peace Talks," in *The Kyiv Independent* (December 13, 2024), https://kyivindependent.com/war-will-be-resolved-in-next-few-months-trumps-ukraine-peace-envoy-believes-open-to-listen-ahead-of-peace-talks/ (accessed 30. 12. 2024). Abroad: Rigels Lenja,

This has been happening at a time when this might have some possible traction in Ukraine itself. A poll from the end of 2024 indicated a significant inclination among Ukrainians (52%) to negotiate with Russia, even if it would mean the loss of some territories.[46] In particular the supporters for the negotiation can be found even among military personnel.[47]

As to the passage that is connected with the third practice, namely Mt. 5:21–26, the one dealing with anger already mentioned, its triadic structure divides the verses in the following way: 1. v. 21; 2. v. 22; 3. vv. 23–26. The headings for the parts of this division are: 1. "Traditional Righteousness"; 2. "Vicious Cycle"; 3. "Transforming Initiative."[48]

The logic for Stassen to abandon seeing a dyadic structure or antithesis in the text is strengthened by the Greek text. As Stassen says when we look at this text we can see that formally the teachings about killing or anger (vv. 21–22) are not formed grammatically as imperatives. The prohibition of killing is formally phrased as a verb in the future indicative,[49] though it definitely plays the role of command. This prohibition is seen as traditional teaching. Jesus's condemnation of anger is formed as a participle in the text. It is seen as a counterpoint to the traditional teaching (antithesis). The real grammatical imperatives are in verses 23–26.[50] This part, which Stassen calls the "climax,"[51] speaks about five imperatives which Matthew used in his Gospel. Stassen translated them from Greek as: "leave," "go," "be reconciled,"

"Can Trump Broker Peace in Ukraine? History May Hold the Answers," in *Social Europe* (December 9, 2024), https://www.socialeurope.eu/can-trump-broker-peace-in-ukraine-history-may-hold-the-answers (accessed 30. 12. 2024); Sean Monaghan, "Can Trump Persuade Putin to Make Peace in Ukraine?", in *Center for Strategic and International Studies* (January 29, 2025), https://www.csis.org/analysis/can-trump-persuade-putin-make-peace-ukraine (accessed 14. 6. 2025).

46 Benedict Vigers, "Half of Ukrainians Want Quick, Negotiated End to War," in *Gallup* (November 19, 2024), https://news.gallucom/poll/653495/half-ukrainians-quick-negotiated-end-war.aspx (accessed 25. 1. 2025).

47 Ben Hall et al., "Ukraine Faces Its Darkest Hour," in *Financial Times* (October 1, 2024), https://www.ft.com/content/2bb20587-9680-40f0-ac2d-5e7312486c75 (accessed 3. 10. 2024).

48 Glen H. Stassen and David Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*, 135.

49 See this noted, for example, in Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 189.

50 Stassen, "The Fourteen Triads," 272, 275.

51 Glen H. Stassen, *Living the Sermon on the Mount: A Practical Hope for Grace and Deliverance* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 68.

"offer" and "make friends." In the dyadic structure this part is seen as simply offering illustrations related to the prohibition of anger and other similar acts. However from Stassen's perspective it does not make sense even to see the passage as illustrating something. For example, we see no illustration of anger. Therefore the section with imperatives should be separated and regarded as the most important element in a triadic structure. It would be illogical for a reader to follow the dyadic structure.[52]

In interpreting vv. 21–26, Stassen speaks about Jesus who first starts from a "traditional teaching" on the prohibition of killing (v. 21). Then he continues and goes deeper into the problem of human existence, turning to the issue of anger (v. 22). Here Jesus's goal is not to condemn anger in itself, for he himself became angry from time to time (cf. Mt. 21:12–17). To become angry is natural for humans. Jesus's goal is to give "a diagnosis" of a dangerous condition (described through the image of a cycle in which we can be captured), in which "being angry" is a condition which can lead then to further negative acts.[53] The biblical text (v. 22) warns us against "murder," "insult,"[54] calling someone "fool." The end for someone who commits such acts will be judgment.

But this can be avoided, as demonstrated in vv. 23–26. Stassen sees verse 22 as Jesus's comment about human "illness," while verses 23–26 are his words on "treatment."[55] If there is a tension between you and another person who can be either from your church community (vv. 23–24) or from outside (in particular the Romans; vv. 25–26), you should go to that person and try[56] to reach peace with them. This is exactly the model of behaviour we find through observation of Christ's first followers. The Romans were invaders for them and it might be expected that those followers would seek

52 Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 134–35.

53 Stassen, *Living the Sermon on the Mount*, 64–65.

54 Concerning the translation of the Greek word ῥακά, there are a number of suggestions. For example, "stupid," R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 201; 1st option: "idiot," 2nd option: "blockhead," Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13* (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 116; 1st option: "empty-headed," 2nd option: "worthless," Craig S. Keeder, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2014), 57.

55 Stassen, "The Fourteen Triads," 270, 272–73.

56 Sometimes others can be more successful in bringing peace in relations between conflicting sides. Stassen refers in this connection to Matthew 18:15–17. Stassen, *Living the Sermon on the Mount*, 69–70.

to "knife Roman soldiers," but they applied a different approach, practicing love to enemies and "Rome eventually became mostly Christian."[57]

At the same time it can be noted that Stassen's vision of someone trying to speak to the opponent about peaceful resolution is not about being completely soft in order to reach peace. Stassen says: "Jesus doesn't only talk sweetness and light, but often confronts and calls to repentance, in direct line with the prophets of Israel."[58] For Stassen, the right model of confrontation with evil/injustice can be seen in the figure of Martin Luther King Jr.,[59] whom, as noted above, Stassen valued highly. King was a figure Stassen described as one who "drew on a tradition of nonviolent resistance."[60]

When Stassen looks at Matthew 5:21–26 he also sees its message as a contribution to better understanding the story about Cain and Abel in Genesis 4:3–7.[61] It is possible that Jesus had this story in mind in the verses from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew.[62] The story in Genesis tells us that Cain was upset with his brother, whose offering to God was accepted, whilst his was not. God called Cain to deal with his negative emotions. In Matthew we hear in some sense the strategy of how to act in such a situation. Cain had to go to his brother in order to reach reconciliation. Stassen even imagined that it could lead to Abel helping his brother to become more successful in farming. Cain's step towards reconciliation with his brother would give him "an alternative to staying stuck in the powerlessness of being angry and trying to farm without knowing how."[63] Also the emphasis on peacemaking from Matthew directs us to see in the story about Cain and Abel God's example of one trying to reach reconciliation with Cain, breaking relations with Abel as well as with his Creator.[64]

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57 Glen H. Stassen, "An Introduction to Part Two: Just Peacemaking as the New Paradigm for the Ethics of Peace and War," in *Formation for Life: Just Peacemaking and Twenty-First-Century Discipleship* (Eugene, Oregon: PICKWICK *Publications*, 2013), 141.

58 Stassen, "How Incarnational Discipleship Led to Just Peacemaking," 93.

59 Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 170.

60 Stassen, "Baptists as Peacemakers," 187.

61 Stassen, *Living the Sermon on the Mount*, 66–67.

62 Glen H. Stassen, "Incarnational Discipleship Restores a Realistic Understanding of Sin," in *Baptist Theologies* 4:2 (2012), 22. Cf. R. T. France, who speaks of a possible connection of this passage with the story from Genesis: "The wording of this pericope may carry a deliberate echo of the story of Cain […] who, because he was angry […] murdered his brother […]." R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 199 (n. 76).

63 Stassen, *Living the Sermon on the Mount*, 66–67.

64 Stassen, "Incarnational Discipleship Restores a Realistic Understanding of Sin," 22.

Stassen notes four of God's attempts/initiatives to push Cain to reconciliation, expecting his transformation in relationship with God. First, God drew Cain's attention to his anger in relation to his brother, pushing him to look for peaceful resolution; second, after Cain killed Abel, God tried to push him to reconciliation with God himself, helping him to understand his sin and repent (the idea of confronting). This intention is presented in the question "Where is Abel your brother?". Third, God continued with a more direct question "What have you done?", at the same time hoping again for Cain's repentance or turn to God; and fourth, God took the initiative to show his care for Cain, protecting him from possible danger coming from others (Gen. 4:15). Thus we see all these merciful initiatives from God, but as for Cain we do not see him "in abject remorse for his terrible crime." Sadly his decision was "not to struggle with the resentment in his heart." Cain turned from God and chose life without his presence.[65]

Efficacy of Stassen's suggestions for conflict resolution

In this section I will ask if Stassen's approach to conflict resolution (with especial focus on the third practice mentioned above) can be practically effective. In particular as we think about the situation in Ukraine which is at war with Russia, we are interested to see the solutions which can be proven as working for conflicts/tensions between different countries.

In regard to the efficacy of Stassen's vision on conflict resolution, I will look at his reference to the former USA President Jimmy Carter (1924–2024) and his achievements in the field of peacemaking. Carter was, among other things, awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002.[66] He belonged to the same church tradition as Stassen, being a part of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.[67] Reacting to his death, the Baptist World Alliance described him as

65 Ibid., 23–24.

66 D. Jason Berggren, "I had a Different Way of Governing: the Evangelical Presidential Style of Jimmy Carter and His Mission for Middle East Peace," in *FIU Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 1624 (2007), 271, https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/etd/1624 (accessed 9. 1. 2025).

67 Brian Kaylor, "What Kind of Baptist Was Jimmy Carter?," in *Word&Way* (January 8, 2025), https://wordandway.org/2025/01/08/what-kind-of-baptist-was-jimmy-carter/ (accessed 9. 1. 2025).

a "seasoned Baptist lay leader," noting "his remarkable work for justice and peace around the world."[68]

We know from D. Jason Berggren's analysis that during his government Carter tried to build the foreign policy of his country on the teachings from the Sermon on the Mount.[69] We remember that the Sermon was the foundation for Stassen's vision on peacemaking. Carter can be described as a supporter of the just war tradition.[70] At the same time he approached very critically the need to use weapons. His vision was that not all wars can be described as just, even if they are proposed as such. He suggested seeing war as "*a last resort, with all non-violent options exhausted*."[71] Carole Cadwalladr describes Carter as being "proud of" the fact that the USA under his leadership did not participate in any war "legal or illegal," finding other ways to solve the tensions in relations with other countries.[72]

When Stassen speaks about Jimmy Carter in the context of cooperative conflict resolution, one of Carter's successes that he mentions relates to the tensions between Egypt and Israel.[73] This led to the Camp David Accords that were reached when Carter was president of the USA.[74] This agreement is seen as an authoritative source for all discussions related to Middle East negotiations[75] and has been called "one of the great diplomatic triumphs of the 20th century."[76]According to William B. Quandt, the Camp David

68 Baptist World Alliance, "Baptist World Alliance Mourns the Death of Jimmy Carter: Global Baptists Honor His Life and Legacy," (December 29, 2024), https://baptistworld.org/news/bwa-mourns-jimmy-carter/ (accessed 9. 1. 2025).

69 Berggren, "I had a Different Way of Governing," 270–71.

70 Ibid., 300.

71 Jimmy Carter, *A Call to Action: Woman, Religion, Violence, and Power* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 53–54.

72 Carole Cadwalladr, "Jimmy Carter: "We Never Dropped a Bomb. We Never Fired a Bullet. We Never Went to War," in *The Guardian* (September 11, 2011), https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/sep/11/president-jimmy-carter-interview (accessed 23. 1. 2025). The piece can be also found republished in *Conversations with Jimmy Carter*, edited by Tom Head (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2023), 127–38, at 133.

73 Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 171.

74 Jesse Greenspan, "How Jimmy Carter Brokered a Hard-Won Peace Deal Between Israel and Egypt" (November 1, 2023), in *History*, https://www.history.com/news/jimmy-carter-camp-david-accords-egypt-israel (accesssed 30. 9. 2024).

75 Anthony Dobbs, *Jimmy Carter: 99 Remarkable Tales From 99 Extraordinary Years* (Columbia: no publisher, 2023), 39.

76 Terry Gross, "13 Days Of High Emotion That Led To The Egypt-Israel Peace: Interview with Lawrence Wright," in *NPR* (September 16, 2014), https://www.npr.org/transcripts/348731640?ft=nprml&amp%3Bf=348727793 (accessed 17. 1. 2025).

Accords have their supporters and opponents, but they all "recognize the importance of what happened at Camp David."[77] In relation to the impact the agreements had on Egypt and Israel in particular, Jesse Greenspan says: "Since then, Israel and Egypt have not once come to blows, even as tensions between them remain high."[78]

In terms of Carter's involvement in the negotiation between Egypt and Israel, we can see Stassen's suggestion based on Matthew 18:15–17 at work. The USA represented by Jimmy Carter played a third-party role, helping to bring peace in relations between Egypt and Israel. The task of enabling negotiations between Egypt and Israel was not an easy one for Carter, whom Imad K. Harb calls "the father of Arab-Israeli normalization."[79] The two countries had long been enemies. Several military conflicts had happened between them after the modern country of Israel was formed in 1948, one of which was the War of Attrition (1969–1970).[80] During this period Egypt tried to regain the territory that it had lost as part of the Arab coalition that fought with Israel during Six-Day War in 1967. The war claimed the lives of thousands.[81] And even in the process of negotiation the situation was complicated by reaction from other Arabs to Egypt's openness to peaceful resolution with their enemy Israel. Thus, Israel experienced a terrorist attack from Lebanon (also known as the Coastal Road Massacre), which caused it to retaliate.[82]

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77 William B. Quandt, "Camp David and Peacemaking in the Middle East," in *Political Science Quarterly* 101:3 (1986), 357.

78 Greenspan, "How Jimmy Carter Brokered a Hard-Won Peace Deal Between Israel and Egypt."

79 Imad K Harb, "Jimmy Carter: The Father of Arab-Israeli Normalization," in *Al Jazeera* (December 30, 2024), https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/12/30/jimmy-carter-the-father-of-arab-israeli-normalisation (accessed 17. 1. 2025).

80 Greenspan, "How Jimmy Carter Brokered a Hard-Won Peace Deal Between Israel and Egypt."

81 David Rodman, *Combined Arms Warfare in Israeli Military History: From the War of Independence to Operation Protective Edge* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2019), 19, 35; Ahmed S. Khalidi, "The War of Attrition," in *Journal of Palestine Studies* 3:1 (1973), 60–61; *War of Attrition (1969–1970)* (October 10, 2008), https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3611617,00.html (accessed 20. 1. 2025).

82 Greenspan, "How Jimmy Carter Brokered a Hard-Won Peace Deal Between Israel and Egypt"; Michael Omer-Man, "This Week in History: Israel's Deadliest Terror Attack," in *The Jerusalem Post* (March 11, 2011), https://www.jpost.com/Features/In-Thespotlight/This-Week-in-History-Israels-deadliest-terror-attack (accessed 20. 1. 2025).

As to the elements which made success achievable, Jesse Greenspan notes that the leaders of Egypt and Israel were both in a position of dependence on the USA. They were interested in development of friendly relations with the USA as each expected to get support for their financial and military sectors.[83] In particular, the Egyptian turn to the USA happened in the context of broken connections with the Soviet Union.[84] Another element was Carter's approach to develop friendly and trust-based relations with the leaders of both sides, not least through talks about faith/religion which Carter saw as "the healing source." It worked quite successfully with the President of Egypt Anwar Sadat, who Carter described as his "closest personal friend" or "beloved friend."[85] In general, in relations with the leaders of other nations Carter believed it would be right to apply as criteria for success in developing such relations not military or economic power, but truth and honesty.[86] At the same time, where it was necessary, Carter could confront the other party, speaking from a positon of power. Anthony Dobbs speaks about the episode, told by Jimmy Carter, when the leader of Egypt, Sadat, "froze at the seriousness of his tone and voice" at a time when Sadat was ready to refuse to negotiate further.[87]

Success came in the end and Carter could say: "Let history record that deep and ancient antagonism can be settled without bloodshed and without staggering waste of precious lives."[88] This can be taken as a statement on the effectiveness or worthiness of negotiations, especially if one values the lives that can be saved from death.

The negotiation was obviously a compromise and its results cannot be seen as ideal. Positively, Egypt regained the Sinai Peninsula, while Israel got in return the normalization of relations with one of the Arab countries. Negatively, the President of Egypt paid a costly personal price for the negotiations with Israel, seen by many Muslims as an improper step. He was killed

83 Greenspan, "How Jimmy Carter Brokered a Hard-Won Peace Deal Between Israel and Egypt."

84 Jimmy Carter, *The Blood of Abraham: Insights into the Middle East* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 2007), 11.

85 D. Jason Berggren, "Sadat, and Begin: Using Evangelical-Style Presidential Diplomacy in the Middle East," in *Journal of Church and State* 56:4 (2014), 732–56, at 732, 734, 743–44.

86 Berggren, "I had a Different Way of Governing," 10–11.

87 Dobbs, *Jimmy Carter: 99 Remarkable Tales*, 38.

88 Greenspan, "How Jimmy Carter Brokered a Hard-Won Peace Deal Between Israel and Egypt."

by some of those displeased at his decision that went against a perceived Arab opposition to Israel. In addition there remained unresolved tensions (also discussed by Egypt and Israel) related to the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the Israeli territories in that moment shared both by Jews and Palestinians. There was expectation that Israel would stop the growth of its settlements in those areas, but it refused to do so.[89]

In regard to conflict situations, positive developments towards peaceful solutions, according to Stassen, depend on governments deciding to be open for negotiations and for meetings with their enemies. Next the governments should "develop imaginative solutions that show they understand their adversary's perspectives and needs."[90] It can be noted in relation to this last element that, when it comes to conflict resolution, there needs to be the expectation that in the case of negotiation the two parties will be able to speak equally and not only the one which can be seen more precisely as victim in a particular situation. The first step is to hear all voices and only then to pass judgment. It would be good also to find space for recognition of mutual sinfulness and responsibility for the conflict.[91] The idea of mutual sinfulness in relation to conflicts is strongly emphasized in Miroslav Volf's book *Exclusion and Embrace*, in particular in the section on "Contrived Innocence."[92] Volf considers it in the context of his claim that "the perpetrators are guilty; they are guilty by definition."[93]

In terms of the discussion around Ukraine and Russia, we can note that Fox News aired an interview with the USA President who, in addition to Russian guilt, pointed to the Ukrainian President Zelenskyy's guilt for not preventing this war. From President Trump's perspective it was necessary for Zelenskyy to have put an emphasis on negotiation from the beginning, not letting the war start with the result of many deaths on both sides.[94] In general as Alan Geyer and Donald W. Shriver note in relation to nations

89 Ibid. For Arab reaction to the Israeli settlements approach that is seen in the context of Israel's "expansion and colonization," see Joseph Algazy, "Israeli Settlement Policy in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip," in *Arab Studies Quarterly* 7:2/3 (1985) 62–73.

90 Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 171.

91 Steven Brion-Meisels et al., "Use Cooperative Conflict Resolution," 72–73.

92 Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 79–85.

93 Ibid, 80.

94 Fox News, Trump Says Zelenskyy Is "No Angel" (January 23, 2025), https://www.foxnews.com/video/6367602293112 (accessed 23. 1. 2025).

and their possible repentance, it is quite difficult for nations to think of the possibility of accepting any mistakes on their own side. To accept wrongness is seen as impermissible, showing their weakness before others, and thus something to be avoided.[95]

Each party in a conflict is free to choose to forego any attempt to negotiate for peace. This can be caused, for example, by the role of national elites who may see their nation in the positon of "superiority" (either moral or military) in relation to others with whom there is nothing to talk about. Talks are unwelcome as they can also show one's own wrongs, destroying one's own spotless self-image. Thus the goals are left to be reached by force in relation to others.[96] Stassen saw such an approach as unproductive. He shows the contrast between two USA Presidents, George W. Bush and Jimmy Carter and the results they achieved in solving international tensions, in particular with North Korea. George W. Bush was President of the USA at that time.[97] As for Carter, he acted during President Clinton's government.[98]

In the case of North Korea, Carter opened negotiations with its leadership and stopped the North Korean nuclear program. As for Bush, he decided to act by power through breaking the North Korean access to oil. Consequently, North Korea doubled down on its development of a nuclear program.[99] Christine Ahn saw a similar approach to Bush's in the government of President Biden, contrasting it again to Carter's. Ahn is not persuaded by the USA authorities' logic in which North Korea should show first the steps to denuclearization and only then would peace negotiations be possible. Presumably North Korea looks at this differently and no less logically, expecting first to get solid guarantees of its security. At the same time it will

95 Alan Geyer and Donald W. Shriver, "Acknowledge Responsibility for Conflict and Injustice and Seek Repentance and Forgiveness," in *Just Peacemaking: The New Paradigm for the Ethics of Peace and War*, 99.

96 Brion-Meisels et al., "Use Cooperative Conflict Resolution," 90–91.

97 Stassen, "An Introduction to Part Two," 141.

98 Dobbs, *Jimmy Carter: 99 Remarkable Tales*, 68. It is interesting to note in relation to this negotiation that Carter's involvement was asked for by North Korea. The then USA leadership was quite strict on North Korea and Carter "had a hard time getting permission" from it for playing a role of "third-party mediation." Jimmy Carter and Shirin Sinnar, "Unorthodox Approach: Conflict Resolution in a Changing World: An Interview with Jimmy Carter," in *Harvard International Review* 18:3 (1996), 58–59, at 58. This article can also be found in Head (ed.), *Conversations with Jimmy Carter*, 95–101, at 95–96.

99 Stassen, "An Introduction to Part Two," 141.

be necessary for Americans to be patient, giving North Korea time to check these guarantees in real life.[100]

In relation to Biden's approach in comparison to Carter's Ahn says: "the Biden administration should take the lessons from his predecessor, Jimmy Carter, who made the most progress with North Korea to finally end the Korean War and usher in a new era of peace."[101] Obviously not everybody was pleased with Carter's approach to negotiation in which he tried to be neutral. Some called Carter "an appeaser" instead of a peacemaker,[102] someone who "cozied up to tyrants,"[103] showing "moral indifference."[104] Carter refused to accept such rebukes, saying that he would continue to follow moral principles and his opponents knew it. But such meetings were a good way for moving from tensions to reconciliation/peace.[105] Looking at Carter's approach, Douglas Brinkley describes it as "results"-oriented, which for him was the most important and therefore he can be seen as a person "more interested in healing and forgiveness than retribution and bloodshed."[106]

It can, then, be concluded that the strategy proposed by just peacemaking certainly has the potential to achieve positive results and it would not be illogical to see the approach of negotiations applied in relation to the war in Ukraine. This is a possible option, especially in the context of Donald Trump's government, which places more emphasis on negotiations and on the necessity to save people's lives. Here however it is important to note that to declare that one stands for moral values and sincerely believes in them and on the other hand following moral standards in one's life are very different things. Therefore the President of the USA will have to prove the wrongness of the claims about "immoral Trump" or as someone with "dark talents … seen before in dictators throughout history."[107]

100 Christine Ahn, "When Jimmy Carter Went to North Korea" (Feb. 22, 2023), in *Responsible Statecraft*, https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2023/02/22/when-jimmy-carter-went-to-north-korea/ (accessed 28. 9. 2024).

101 Ibid.

102 Douglas Brinkley, "Jimmy Carter's Modest Quest for Global Peace," in *Foreign Affairs* 74:6 (1995), 96.

103 Brion-Meisels et al., "Use Cooperative Conflict Resolution," 86.

104 Shirin Sinnar, "Unorthodox Approach: Conflict Resolution in a Changing World: An Interview with Jimmy Carter," 59; 97 in *Conversations with Jimmy Carter*.

105 Ibid.

106 Brinkley, "Jimmy Carter's Modest Quest for Global Peace," 96.

107 Jim Simon, "Opinion: 10 of the nastiest cons Donald Trump has tried to pull on America," in *The Columbus Dispatch* (October 23, 2024), https://www.dispatch.com/story

Moreover at least some of his actions in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war call into question his morality. We hear about the USA policy "to put pressure on the victim, Ukraine, rather than the aggressor, Russia".[108] Additionally, on the one hand it might be understandable to see the USA attempts to omit the usage of sanctions against Russian in order not to worsen the relations with this country. On the other hand it can be heard from Trump's circle that "additional sanctions against Russia would hinder business opportunities and the president wants to maximize economic opportunities for Americans".[109] This sounds quite mercantile and it is definitely far from the argument about the need to save people's lives in war; it is more about fostering one's own economic benefits.

As for the leader of Russia, Vladimir Putin, after Trump became the USA President he started to assert his interest in negotiation, while blaming the Ukrainian President for being against this. At the same time it was relatively clear that his expectation was simply to bring about Ukrainian capitulation.[110] The Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was not sure about joining such a negotiation, at least without, for example, expectation for a "just" step from Russia to restore the borders to the state of 2022 and having "security guarantees" from world leaders that Russia would not come back again. Zelenskyy also thought that Putin was not serious about peaceful negotiation.[111] In Zelenskyy's eyes Putin's plan was in particular simply to "manipulate the President of the United States of America's desire to achieve peace."[112] Zelen-

/opinion/columns/guest/2024/10/23/donald-trump-10-most-destructive-immoral-cons-election/75736792007/ (accessed 24. 5. 2025).

108 David E. Sanger et al., "Trump's New Position on the War in Ukraine: Not My Problem", in *The New York Times* (May 20, 2024), https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/20/us/politics/trump-ukraine-russia.html (accessed 13. 6. 2025).

109 Ibid.

110 Pjotr Sauer, "Putin 'Ready for Negotiations' with Trump on Ukraine War," in *The Guardian* (January 24, 2025), https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jan/24/vladimir-putin-ready-for-negotiations-donald-trump-ukraine-war-russia (accessed 24. 1. 2025).

111 Bloomberg Podcasts, *Ukraine Needs US, China Assistance for Peace: Volodymyr Zelenskiy Full Interview* (January 23, 2025), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g3ISFxdDZcM (accessed 25. 1. 2025).

112 The President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Vluchannja "Shahediv" u Budynky v Brovarah ta Glevasi – Tse Drony, Jaki Vyrobleni Vzhe v Rosiji – Zvervennja Prezydenta [The Hits from Shaheds in Houses Located in Brovary and Hlevakha – These Are Drones That Are Already Produced in Russia – the President's Communication] (accessed 24. 1. 2025), https://www.president.gov.ua/news/vluchannya-shahediv-u-budinki-v-brovarah-ta-glevasi-ce-droni-95701 (accessed 25. 1. 2025).

skyy's reservations concerning negotiations were understandable, especially if attention was paid to predictions that it would probably cost Ukraine all the occupied territories.[113]

Nevertheless, in a few months the negotiations between the two countries started again after all. That has been happening in the time in which this article was at the final stage of preparation for publication. The first of these new talks took place in 2025 on May 16. It showed to Ukraine that actually Russian side demanded the whole territories of three regions (Donetsk in the east of Ukraine, Zaporizhzhia in the south-east and Kherson in the south), which at the time Russian troops had only been able to occupy partially. In addition, the Russian President Putin refused to meet with President Zelenskyy and the latter accused Putin again of having no real desire to stop the war.[114] The second round of talks then took place on 2 June 2025.[115]

In general Russia and Ukraine meantime are focusing on military development, attempting to show their strength[116] and primarily concerned in

113 NV, More European Partners of Ukraine Lean Toward "Land for Peace" Talks Following Trump's Win (November 13, 2024), https://english.nv.ua/nation/more-european-partners-of-ukraine-lean-toward-land-for-peace-talks-following-trump-s-win-50466225.html (accessed 25. 1. 2025).

114 Marek Menkiszak and Tadeusz Iwanski, "Sham Dialogue: the Istanbul Talks Between Ukraine and Russia," in *The Centre for Eastern Studies* (May 19, 2025), https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2025-05-19/sham-dialogue-istanbul-talks-between-ukraine-and-russia (accessed 25. 5. 2025).

115 Marta Vashchuk and Michael Shank, "Why Ukraine peace talks are failing," in *Al Jazeera* (June 12, 2024), https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2025/6/12/why-ukraine-peace-talks-are-failing (accessed 13. 6. 2025).

116 On Ukraine: Ukrainian National News, "Zelensky Announced New Agreements for Investments in Ukrainian Weapons Production" (May 27, 2025), https://unn.ua/en/news/zelensky-announced-new-agreements-for-investments-in-ukrainian-weapons-production (accessed 13. 6. 2025); Kateryna Kuzmuk and Lorenzo Scarazzato, "The Transformation of Ukraine's Arms Industry Amid War with Russia", in *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute* (February 21, 2025), https://www.sipri.org/commentary/topical-backgrounder/2025/transformation-ukraines-arms-industry-amid-war-russia (accessed 13. 6. 2025); in particular the attention is paid to to the Ukrainian President's vision that negotiation for just peace can be reached only through strength growing with more weapons, see Konstantin Katyshev, "Zelenskyy Prokomentuvav Vidhid ZSU z Vugledaru" [Zelenskyy Commented on the Withdrawal of the Ukrainian Armed Forces from Vugledar], in *Korespondent*, https://ua.korrespondent.net/ukraine/4720887-zelenskyi-prokomentuvav-vidkhid-zsu-z-vuhledaru (accessed 3. 12. 2024). As for Russia, see Andrew Osborn, "Putin Orders Russian Army to Become Second Largest After China's at 1.5 Million-Strong," in *Reuters* (September 16, 2024), https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/putin-orders-russian-army-grow-by-180000

not appearing to be weak. The two parties are far from showing compassion to each other, producing what Marta Vashchuk and Michael Shank call "tit-for-tat escalations" which threaten to get "even further out of control."[117] In such a situation it is quite difficult to expect any imaginable talk between the two sides of the conflict where they are ready to speak about their own possible sinfulness or mistakes in relation to this war. In the context of just peacemaking strategy, with such tendencies at work, it is quite difficult to hope for effective reconciliation. However this does not nullify the interest in negotiations, in particular from the side of Ukraine. There are definitely voices in Ukraine emphasizing the necessity of negotiations from Ukraine as we saw in the second section.

One such voice, from the military field, expressed in this readiness "his concern that his son – also a soldier – could spend much of his life fighting and that his grandson might one day inherit an endless conflict."[118] Certainly these people are likely to be far from seeing Ukraine as needing to repent for something that could lead to war. Their approach can be simply a pragmatic step to take in order to stop the war. As for the people who can admit sinfulness on the Ukrainian side, they can be found in Ukraine too (for example, in the Evangelical churches),[119] but this group is not seen for now as an active player pushing for negotiations.

When it comes to the problem-solving ability of negotiations, it needs to be admitted that it is better not to absolutize its efficacy, nor that of the figures involved. There was place for negotiations during the conflict between Russian and Ukraine before the full war started in 2022 and even at the beginning of war. So, for example, there were the Minsk agreements in 2014 and 2015, which nevertheless did not prevent full-scale war.[120] No

-soldiers-become-15-million-strong-2024-09-16/ (accessed 24. 1. 2025); or Katerina Stepanenko et al., "Russian Force Generation and Technological Adaptations," in *The Institute for the Study of War* (June 11, 2025), https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-force-generation-and-technological-adaptations-update-june-11-2025 (accessed 13. 6. 2025).

117 Vashchuk and Shank, "Why Ukraine peace talks are failing."

118 Hall et al., "Ukraine Faces Its Darkest Hour."

119 Oleksandr Kalyna, "Chomu Bog Dopustyv Vijnu v Ukrajini?" [Why God Allowed War in Ukraine?], in *Tserkva "Dim Evangelija"* ["House of Gospel" Church] (n. d.), https://baptist.vn.ua/blog/1259-chomu-v-ukraini-viina (accessed 25. 1. 2025).

120 Lidia Powirska, "Through the Ashes of the Minsk Agreements," in *Epicentre* (May 18, 2022), https://epicenter.wcfia.harvard.edu/blog/through-ashes-minsk-agreements (accessed 26. 1. 2025).

results were achieved during negotiations in 2022, though the sides seemed very close to agreement.[121] In relation to the Minsk agreements, it is worth noting that even Jimmy Carter tried to assist in those negotiations, suggesting, for example, to the USA President Obama not to pour oil on flames through sending weapons to Ukraine.[122] However it is difficult to find that something significant was achieved through Carter's assistance in solving this conflict, which culminated in the war that broke out in 2022. In addition neither have the new talks between Ukraine and Russian in 2025, mentioned above, brought any peace.

In the end future negotiations between Ukraine and Russia could even lead to unfair or unjust compromise, especially for the more suffering Ukrainian side. But maybe in this case success could be measured in terms of saving human lives in the face of ongoing conflict with a bigger power. David Gushee, reflecting on Stassen's possible reaction to such an end, argued that he would have stayed on the side of those deciding to sign such an agreement.[123] And we remember that Stassen valued justice greatly, but would probably give priority to saving human lives.

Obviously not all may believe in negotiations with Russia. There is certainly room to assume that Russia may be interested in destroying Ukraine as a nation[124] and that any compromises in this case would serve more as a temporary interruption before war resumes with Russia trying to accomplish its primary goal. However, maybe this is exactly what should be precluded again through putting more efforts in peaceful dialogues. And the conversations should be more than simply representing an "arithmetical approach" as Vashchuk and Shank note in relation to the most recent talks between Ukraine and Russia, at least at the time of writing in summer 2025. In this case we have sides coming in order to "add a concession here, subtract a demand

121 Anton Troianovski et al., "Ukraine-Russia Peace Is as Elusive as Ever. But in 2022 They Were Talking," in *The New York Times* (June 15, 2024), https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/06/15/world/europe/ukraine-russia-ceasefire-deal.html (accessed 27. 1. 2025).

122 Daniel Schearf, "Carter Pleased with Russia's Embrace of Minsk Agreement," in *VOA* (April 30, 2015), https://www.voanews.com/a/carter-pleased-with-russia-embrace-of-minsk-agreement/2743389.html (accessed 26. 1. 2025).

123 David Gushee, personal email to the author, 14 November 2024.

124 Robert Person, "Why Ukraine Shouldn't Negotiate with Putin," in *The Journal of Democracy* 36:1 (January 2025), https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/why-ukraine-shouldnt-negotiate-with-putin/ (accessed 15. 6. 2025).

there. Each side calculates whether the outcome adds up in its favour."[125] From their perspective there should be place for talks about "trauma, identity, loss" or "justice, accountability and healing."[126] It would also be excellent to find a place for a conversation on the topic of religion, given the fact that both countries profess Christianity for the most part. Here it is possible to recall the words of President Carter, cited earlier in this section, on religion as a "healing resource" for such purposes. Perhaps there was meanwhile an opportunity to think about universal sinfulness and crying over one's own part in the spread of pain in this world.

Eventually the future will show if additional negotiations will be able to produce a positive outcome. Only then will it be possible to make further evaluation of the efficacy of negotiations as tools for bringing peace in such situation as in Ukraine.

Conclusion

In this article I have paid attention to Glen Stassen's vision of how to go about solving conflicts, which served as the focus of his activity. We saw that he discovered the foundation for his vision in the Sermon on the Mount and in a specific way of interpreting the passages from it. Stassen spoke of the triadic structure in which the emphasis is made on the third part. This part gives the solution to different conflicts, speaking about the necessity to look for peaceful reconciliation.

In terms of the efficacy of Stassen's vision in real life, we saw that history remembers very successful cases with emphasis on such reconciliations. In particular for Stassen the inspiring ones were found in the life and activity of another Baptist, the former American President Jimmy Carter. As for the situation in Ukraine theoretically negotiation as a tool could be productive, but time will show if such a tool will work for the situation in Ukraine. At least the emphasis on the necessity of negotiations as the best solution are constantly made after the new USA President Donald Trump came to government and became involved as a third-party in this conflict. Already even the first talks started in 2025 between two sides of war in Ukraine due to the

125 Vashchuk and Shank, "Why Ukraine peace talks are failing."
126 Ibid.

USA emphasis and we will see if there will be any result from negotiations to end the conflict in Ukraine.

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The Concept of the Anthropocene in the Perspective of Contemporary Theological Anthropology and Spirituality

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Abstract: In the following study some ways of working with the concept of the Anthropocene in theological anthropology and spirituality are developed. The article first introduces the concept and its background and then elaborates on five theological perspectives of its possible reception in theology. The first one is the notion of sin as a source of environmental crisis, proposing the term *Hamartiocene*. Then, following Daniel P. Horan, the study addresses the theological challenges of human exceptionalism, a contentious issue in secular philosophy. The third focus consists in the need for a new spirituality in the Anthropocene alongside a renewed hope that emerges only through an acceptance of hopelessness. Building on Pope Francis's "ecumenism of the blood," the article then proposes to establish an "ecumenism of a dying planet." Finally, it considers whether and how our interpretation of the person of Jesus Christ changes in the Anthropocene.

Keywords: Anthropocene; theological anthropology; spirituality; ecotheology; theology of creation

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Introduction

One[1] of the most pressing issues today is the conflict between humankind and nature.[2] Since the Industrial Revolution and the so-called Great Acceleration, humanity has aggressively exploited its resources to sustain its consumerist lifestyle and economic growth.[3] In turn, the increasingly depleted earth – often conceptualized in the humanities (since the 1970s) as

1 This work has been supported by Charles University Research Centre program No. UNCE/24/SSH/019.

2 This binary opposition is of course problematic. The theories underlying the Anthropocene prefer a network-based understanding of the world to binary oppositions.

3 For some basic observations on this development see Clayton Crockett, "Earth: What Can a Planet Do?" in Ward Blanton, Clayton Crockett, Jeffrey W. Robbins and Noëlle Vahanian, *An Insurrectionist Manifesto: Four New Gospels for a Radical Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 21–28.

a subject (Gaia)[4] – seems to be retaliating through rising temperatures and more frequent natural disasters. Jürgen Moltmann recognized this as early as the 1970s when he advocated for peace with nature and the development of new models for cooperation with it.[5] At the same time, it goes without saying, this conflict affects us all – we are, as Bruno Latour puts it, Earthlings.[6] This conflict is also frequently the root of more localized disputes, including resource wars and tensions resulting from climate migration and other related issues.

In this article, I will explore this critical situation through the lens of Christian theological anthropology and spirituality. Drawing on the concept of the Anthropocene, I will present five perspectives on how we might approach it. I will discuss the causal geological transformation of the planet in the context of the theological concept of sin, then the theological reception of criticism of human exceptionalism, spirituality in the Anthropocene, its possibilities in ecumenical dialogue, and in the last section, I will ask if the Anthropocene perspective influences our interpretation of Jesus Christ, the foundational figure of Christianity.

Since the concept of the Anthropocene is relatively young, I will introduce it at the beginning of this paper. Simultaneously, considering that on the one hand, in the Anglo-American context, the first large-scale monographs addressing this concept theologically have already appeared, and on the other hand, it has not yet entered the vocabularies in our Central European theology, I will limit myself to its introduction and the expanding on the five points of inspiration mentioned above that can be further developed in theological anthropology and spirituality. While certain topics in what follows call for a more detailed discussion and others can be sketched more

4 See, for example, Bruno Latour, "Agency at the time of the Anthropocene," *New Literary History* 45:1 (2014), 1. Similarly and prophetically Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 331. James Lovelock, for example, was a prominent proponent of the Gaia concept. At the same time, this concept has been interpreted in very different ways over the years. For a summary of the discussion, see, for example, Toby Tyrell, *On Gaia: A Critical Investigation of the Relationship between Life and Earth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013). See also James Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

5 See Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 331. Moltmann obviously could not have known at that time about Gaia theory or the concept of the Anthropocene, which makes it even more valuable that he was already addressing this topic in this way at that time.

6 Latour, "Agency at the time of the Anthropocene," 15.

concisely, I have kept the uneven scope of the sections to maintain thematic coherence and clarity.

1. The Anthropocene: the origin of the concept and its variants

Firstly, let me briefly introduce the meaning of the much-mentioned word *Anthropocene*. This term or concept, which has become very popular during the last fifteen years in the humanities, was coined by the geochemist Paul Crutzen and the biologist Eugene Stoermer, who published a short article in 2000, arguing:

> Since relatively recent times, humanity has been the dominant geological agent on this planet. This is said to be such a new situation in the history of the earth that it makes sense to define an entirely new geological epoch on the basis of it.[7]

The authors give this epoch the name Anthropocene.[8] Its causes are dated to the so-called Great Acceleration and the invention of the steam engine, associated with the large-scale mining and the use of coal.[9] Humans find that their own activity has already inscribed itself in the deepest structures of the planet,[10] and this gives them a new perspective on their relationship to the world and their conception of themselves. It transforms their anthropology and asks them new questions. The debate takes place on a new playing field.[11] For some, it represents a Jaspersian "spiritual situation of the times,"[12] for others, a catastrophe, and some see it as an opportunity or a political and intellectual challenge.[13]

7 Petr Pokorný and David Storch, "Předmluva: Kde jsme se to ocitli," in Petr Pokorný and David Storch (eds.), *Antropocén* (Praha: Academia, 2020), 19.

8 Some authors document the occurrence of this term even using quotation marks: see Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 40.

9 Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 4; Haraway, *Staying with the* Trouble, 44–45.

10 Zdeněk Konopásek, "Antropocén: Více než jeden, méně než dva," in Pokorný and Storch (eds.), *Antropocén*, 36. The crucial point is the man-made release of CO2. On the geological extent of the Anthropocene, cf. e.g. Jan Hošek, "Geologie lidstva?," in Pokorný and Storch (eds.), *Antropocén*, 220–50.

11 Clive Hamilton, "The Anthropocene Epoch and Its Meaning," in Peter Walker and Jonathan Cole (eds.), *Theology on a Defiant Earth: Seeking Hope in the Anthropocene* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2022), 9.

12 Pokorný and Storch, "Předmluva: Kde jsme se to ocitli," 21.

13 Ibid., 24.

The radical novelty of our current situation can be illustrated by quoting the Australian philosopher and ethicist Clive Hamilton, who argues that the great Abrahamic religions are "Holocene religions" – humans in biblical times and the recipients of divine revelation could never have imagined a situation in which humanity becomes such a powerful geological agent. This factor justifies theology in thinking through a radically new theological anthropology that can and must abandon many of the assumptions that have been valid to this day.[14]

In recent years, however, critics have argued that the Anthropocene does not sufficiently distinguish between the origins of the planet's transformation and responsibility for it, or that this concept does not offer a solution to the crisis.[15] For this reason, various related concepts such as "the Capitalocene, the Technocene, the Econocene, the Anthrobscene, the Misanthropocene, the Mantropocene, the Necrocen, the Plantationocene, the Ecocene, or the Chthulucene" have emerged.[16]

2. Five proposals drawn from the dialogue between the concept of the Anthropocene and Christian theological anthropology and spirituality

2.1 Anthropocene understood as Hamartiocene

The last paragraph of the previous section mentioning different conceptual variants of the name Anthropocene leads us to the first potential theological response. If Jason W. Moore, first of all, speaks of the Capitalocene, because capitalism, according to him, is the source (or culprit) of the geological transformations of the world,[17] theological anthropology has its own tools to grasp this crisis and can introduce, as I suggest, the notion of Hamartiocene. The concept of sin (in biblical Greek ἁμαρτία) becomes relevant again in this context, and even recent publications on the topic cannot bypass it.

14 Hamilton, "The Anthropocene Epoch and Its Meaning," 9.

15 Patryk Szaj, "Antropocen i kapitałocen: w poszukiwaniu fuzji horyzontów," *Porównania* 29:2 (2021), 371–72.

16 Ibid., 371.

17 See Jason W. Moore, *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism* (Oakland: PM, 2016).

Jan-Olav Henriksen, in his book *Theological Anthropology in the Anthropocene: Reconsidering Human Agency and Its Limits*, discusses this topic in the wake of Paul Tillich. Tillich understands sin as both fact and act. Our sins grow out of sin. For him, sin as fact also implies the fundamental alienation of humankind and nature. Human beings' focus on themselves and, especially, their idolatry in the form of consumerism makes them an object of external forces, in which their "agency" (a key concept for thinking about the Anthropocene) in favour of the good is weakened;[18] the idolatry of consumerism then corresponds with the Greek meaning of *hamartia* in the sense of missing the target.

The Australian theologian Peter Walker, in his text *The Serpent in the Garden – Sin and the Anthropocene*, even speaks of the resurrection of the concept of sin.[19] The Genesis 3 narrative, he argues, can be read as an alienation from creation, a decision that led to humans claiming the earth as their own rather than seeing it as God's.[20] Jan-Olav Henriksen also urges caution against flattening the concept: different people and different societies on the planet are responsible for the climate crisis in different ways.[21] This, too, justifies my thesis that we are living in a Hamartiocene rather than an Anthropocene. Henriksen, however, rightly warns against a deductive conception that justifies this crisis in terms of sin in some kind of form of Christian self-righteousness and self-pride.[22]

The Anthropocene, philosophically associated with the so-called *relational turn*[23] and influenced by Bruno Latour's actor-network theory, also underlines the thesis that sin has a social dimension extending beyond personal

18 Jan-Olav Henriksen, *Theological Anthropology in the Anthropocene: Reconsidering Human Agency and Its Limits* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), especially 163–217.

19 Peter Walker, "The Serpent in the Garden – Sin and the Anthropocene," in Walker and Cole (eds.), *Theology on a Defiant Earth*, 164–66. Along with Peter Walker, Clive Hamilton also critically points to a certain hesitancy on the part of the church leaders to speak of land abuse as sin. See Clive Hamilton, "A Climate of Hope? Reflections on the Theology of the Anthropocene," in Walker and Cole (eds.), *Theology on a Defiant Earth*, 196.

20 Walker, "The Serpent in the Garden," 170.

21 Henriksen, *Theological Anthropology in the Anthropocene*, 211.

22 Ibid., 214.

23 In the context of theological anthropology, Tim Noble writes: "It is no accident that relationship is returning to the centre of theological interest." Tim Noble, "Člověk ve vztazích," in Ivana Noble and Zdenko Širka (eds.), *Kdo je člověk? Teologická antropologie ekumenicky* (Praha: Univerzita Karlova, Nakladatelství Karolinum, 2021), 44.

matters.[24] Sin, like holiness, is no more an individual matter in an interconnected globalized world. The Czech Salesian priest Zdeněk Jančařík put it vividly in an issue of the journal *Salve* devoted to holiness:

> It seems that the way of personal example of holiness is no longer enough today. All the personal sins of every person on the planet have become global. My diet, my waste of water, heat, energy, my driving a car with an internal combustion engine to go shopping or to the seaside, my flying on a plane to the beach in Mallorca have become a threat to the whole planet. When I eat beef, I feel guilty because herds of cattle destined for slaughter somewhere in Argentina are overwhelming the entire planet with methane.[25]

Conversely,

> Again and again we canonize lone heroes of the faith, spiritual athletes, victors, while communities 'wipe out.' But contemporary sanctity can no longer consist in just going it alone, in playing 'on our own' and ascending to heaven ourselves, in looking at and contemplating the Trinity of God and rejoicing in personal happiness.[26]

As John Zizioulas writes,

> The protection of the natural environment is a fundamental religious obligation, demanded from humankind by God himself. This means that the Church will have to revise radically her concept of sin, which traditionally has been limited to the social and anthropological level, and start speaking of sin against nature as a matter of primary religious significance.[27]

Sin – leaving aside its metaphysical and spiritual validity – is also a powerful metaphor, and, within the Christian story, it also gives us a possible response to this crisis. Jesus says, "Change your minds and believe the good news."[28] It is no coincidence that Pope Francis speaks of an "ecological conversion,"[29] which is at the same time a communal conversion.[30]

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24 Walker, "The Serpent in the Garden," 164.

25 Zdeněk Jančařík, "Všichni nebo nikdo," in *Salve* 32:4 (2022), 22.

26 Ibid.

27 John Zizioulas, "Foreword," in John Chryssavgis (ed.), *Cosmic Grace, Humble Prayer: The Ecological Vision of the Green Patriarch Bartholomew I.* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2009), viii.

28 Cf. e.g. Mk 1,15. I present here my own translation following the meaning expressed in the original Greek text.

29 Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter: Laudato Si' of the Holy Father Francis on Care of Our Common Home* (Rome: Vatican Press, 2015), par. 217–218.

30 Ibid., par. 138.

This turn to the Hamartiocene also allows us to maintain hope in humanity, made in the image of God. However, we cannot overlook the sins committed not only against the planet, but also, for example, against the colonized nations of the Global South. As I will show below, giving up on any hope in the goodness of humankind and the possibility of its conversion would not be a fruitful outcome of the encounter between theology and the Anthropocene.

2.2 Anthropocene, theology of creation and the criticism of human exceptionalism

As I mentioned in the first part of this paper, the Anthropocene can also be read as an opportunity. Thus, rethinking the question of sin is not the only way to relate to the concept from a theological position, nor does the notion of sin exhaust the need to revise the place of human beings in the world. We now turn to models of the theology of creation that respond to the environmental crisis and the problem of the place of the human in creation related to it.

In his 2018 book *All God's Creatures: A Theology of Creation*, the American Franciscan[31] scholar of theological anthropology Daniel P. Horan explores the shift in theology since the twentieth century from a model of human domination over nature (the dominion model) to a stewardship model.[32] Nevertheless, Horan argues that even the latter model is inadequate.[33] In this model, the non-human parts of creation are seen as God's *oikos* for humanity,[34] and humans are elevated to the privileged role of the Creator's co-workers.[35]

31 Horan left the order in 2024. See Daniel P. Horan, "Always a Franciscan in spirit, but no longer a friar," in *National Catholic Reporter* (October 3, 2024), available at https://www.ncronline.org/opinion/ncr-voices/always-franciscan-spirit-no-longer-friar (accessed 30. 7. 2025).

32 In a specific version of "planetary stewardship" – i.e., a kind of all-encompassing responsibility – this is still held in 2017 by the German ethicist Christoph Baumgartner. See Christoph Baumgartner, "Transformations of Stewardship in the Anthropocene," in Celia Deane-Drummond, Sigurd Bergmann and Markus Vogt (eds.), *Religion in the Anthropocene* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2017), 53–66.

33 Criticism of the stewardship model appears already in the first decade of our century. See, for example, Ariane Conty, "Religion in the Age of the Anthropocene," *Environmental Values* 30:2 (2019), 7.

34 Daniel P. Horan, *All God's Creatures: A Theology of Creation* (Lanham: Lexington Books / Fortress Academic, 2018), 35.

35 Ibid., 39.

According to Horan, Pope Francis continues this stewardship model in his famous ecological encyclical *Laudato Si'*.[36] Horan emphasizes that the key issue lies in the human's relationship with the rest of creation and, ultimately, the theological response to anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism, which secular philosophy has often and strongly criticized.[37]

While the Pope, according to Horan, still singles out humanity over creation (thus creating a hierarchical dualism[38]), Horan himself is advocating a transition to a theology of creation based on a communal or kinship model of creation. Horan views humanity's relationship to the rest of creation as more familial than covenantal,[39] which he illustrates not only with broad biblical material but also with sources from the history of theology and the Franciscan tradition. Similarly, Jan-Olav Henriksen shares this view. In line with the Anglican theologian Richard Bauckham, Henriksen highlights the co-creation of humanity and all life, emphasizing that humanity's relationship with God does not exclude its relationship with the rest of creation.[40]

Humanity's position in creation and the critique of anthropocentrism are also connected to the term *agency*, a key term in Anthropocene thought.[41] It is no coincidence that Henriksen included it in the subtitle of his book (*Reconsidering Human Agency and its Limits*).[42] Human agency is on the one hand weakened by sin, on the other hand, sin is precisely the unwise

36 Ibid., 45–47.

37 See also Hamilton, "The Anthropocene Epoch and Its Meaning," 4–5.

38 Horan, *All God's Creatures*, 56.

39 Ibid., 85.

40 Henriksen, *Theological Anthropology in the Anthropocene*, 115.

41 The debate is mainly shaped by Bruno Latour's article "Agency at the time of the Anthropocene." Latour writes: "No, this time, we encounter, just as in the old pre-scientific and non-modern myths, an agent which gains its name of 'subject' because he or she might be *subjected* to the vagaries, bad humor, emotions, reactions, and even revenge of another agent, who also gains its quality of 'subject' because it is also *subjected* to his or her action. It is in this radical sense that humans are no longer submitted to the diktats of objective nature, since what comes to them is also an intensively subjective form of action. To be a subject is not to act autonomously in front of an objective background, but *to share agency with other subjects that have also lost their autonomy*. It is because we are now confronted with those subjects – or rather *quasi*-subjects – that we have to shift away from dreams of mastery as well as from the threat of being fully naturalized." Latour, "Agency at the time of the Anthropocene," 5. Italics Bruno Latour. With a certain amount of simplification, one could say that his conception of agency is distributive and relational.

42 Latour's understanding of agency is explained by Henriksen, *Theological Anthropology in the Anthropocene*, 41–45.

transgression of the limits of our agency. It is this abuse of human agency that has led from humanity, created for grace, with the freedom to love and enjoy the beauty and goodness of the world, to the Anthropocene world devastated by human activity.[43] Here we find ourselves in a Moltmannian vicious circle.[44] Human action is thus caught in an ambiguity between creativity and destruction, between the image of God and sin.[45]

Even though Henriksen, in line with Latour, postulates the thesis that we are dependent on and interconnected with the environment into which we are born, not only in its social but also in its natural dimension,[46] he considers humans – unlike others – as *responsible* creators of action.[47] According to Paul Ricoeur, to whom the Norwegian systematic theologian refers, humans are responsible for the moral dispositions on which their actions are based too.[48] Even in this context, then, the biblical notion of creation in the sense of the physical world cannot be exclusively understood (only) as the passive setting of the divine-human relationship; the non-human part of creation is also implied in the relationship between God and human.[49] The thesis of panentheism, the Moltmannian *via tertia* between pantheism and deism, tends toward the idea that God is present in creation.[50] As Henriksen writes,

> This understanding means that God is not only transcendent and separate from God's creation but deeply involved in it. It also means that God's agency and the agency of creation are interlinked: Creation not only is the object of God's will and work but participates in it. Non-human nature is not "dead matter" but exerts an agency (in the Latourian sense) that influences human life and God's will for the flourishing of creation. Human nature, with its partially different, specific modes of agency, impacts the rest of creation and its ability to display diversity, goodness, flourishing, and enjoyment.[51]

Similarly, we tend to reduce God's redemptive work in Christ to a reconciliation between God and human beings, thus marginalizing the non-human components of creation, relegating them to the status of mere objects,

43 Ibid., 219–220.
44 See Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 326.
45 Henriksen, *Theological Anthropology in the Anthropocene*, 221.
46 Ibid., 237.
47 Ibid., 228–229.
48 Ibid., 231.
49 Ibid., 257–258.
50 See Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 103.
51 Henriksen, *Theological Anthropology in the Anthropocene*, 258.

inconsequential circumstances. But the person of Christ, as the icon of God and the culmination of his self-revelation, shows us in his story the ways of God's action that also involve the non-human parts of creation. Such ways are care, compassion, and action against sin.[52]

Last but not least, Henriksen understands faith as participation in God, and a key component of that participation for him is the traditional Pauline triad of faith, hope, and love. The active pursuit and cultivation of these virtues should be the starting point and central task of humanity in its relationship to God and creation, especially in the Anthropocene.[53] However, from a theological perspective, God's agency – that is, the capacity to be an agent of action – cannot be bracketed either. Human "acting in faith, hope, and love means participating in God's action with and for the world. […] Faith means participation because it allows humans to relate to and take part in God's intentions for the world."[54] The human person as *imago Dei* is to act in God's way with the world on the basis of this participation. This co-negotiation with God can then lead to establishing what we call the good life.[55] The goal of human agency is thus participation in the life of God and acting in God's ways, through the virtues of faith, hope, and love.

Although Henriksen seeks to include non-human agents into the relationship between humans and God, and also to incorporate human ways of acting into such frameworks (the notion of virtue), so that they are not at odds with creation but instead act for its benefit, he differs from Latourian[56] concepts in his emphasis on humans as responsible and free. This brings us back to the question of anthropocentrism, which is closely linked to the concept of the Anthropocene.

Jürgen Moltmann had already undertaken pioneering work when he highlighted that the climax of the biblical story is not the creation of human beings, but rather the Sabbath of creation – a day of rest and peace between God and creation.[57] In the recent debate, Pope Francis does not overlook this dimension in *Laudato Si'*, in which he postulates a certain moderate

52 Ibid., 271.
53 Ibid., 231.
54 Ibid., 273.
55 Ibid., 274.
56 Ibid., 247.
57 See Moltmann, *God in Creation*, e.g. 5–7.

anthropocentrism or anthropo-relative approach. As Petr Štica writes with reference to Claus Dierksmeier,

> Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* can be said to occupy a kind of intermediate position between a 'despotic anthropocentrism that disregards other creatures' (LS 68) and a rigid biocentrism that tends 'to deny any specific value of the human being' (LS 118). Pope Francis thus rejects both radical anthropocentric and radical biocentric and physiocentric approaches.[58]

In the face of secular discourse, however, it is still an anthropocentric view. The position of humans within creation becomes a pressing theological issue. It is very well addressed by the aforementioned Daniel Horan in his previously discussed communal (or relational) theology of creation.

Horan relates anthropocentrism to the dominion model of creation and dates its origins to the philosophies of Bacon and Descartes.[59] The anthropocentric (or androcentric[60]) view is also present in the stewardship model of creation. While this is declared to be theocentric – it is God who created the world and to whom the world is directed – it is again the human who is entrusted with the role of steward, a kind of appointed viceroy or manager.[61] This is linked to a certain monarchical view of the world, but it is far from unproblematic.[62] Indeed, the non-human part of creation is seen as an *oikos* for humanity. Human beings are certainly responsible, but they are also privileged and thereby separated from the rest of creation.[63] Only human beings are created *imago Dei*,[64] and according

58 Petr Štica, "Péče o společný domov jako naléhavá etická výzva: Uvedení do encykliky Laudato si' papeže Františka," *Salve: Revue pro teologii a duchovní život* 27:4 (2017), 19.

59 Horan, *All God's Creatures*, 11–14. Horan provides an analysis of the primary texts, including highlighting some of the differences between them. For example, according to Descartes, animals not only have no reason, but they cannot even feel anything. Horan, *All God's Creatures*, 12. On this problem, see also Petr Gallus, *Člověk před Bohem: Teologická antropologie* (Praha: Nakladatelství Karolinum, 2024), 78–79.

60 This term is considered by some to be more appropriate; the Greek word ἀνήρ means man (male), and the term thus refers to the fact that in the periods referred to as anthropocentric, human "centrism" was always primarily male dominated. Cf. Horan, *All God's Creatures*, 60.

61 Horan, *All God's Creatures*, 33. Henriksen also criticizes the stewardship model from similar premises, see Henriksen, *Theological Anthropology in the Anthropocene*, 113–123.

62 Horan cites, for example, the criticism of Rowan Williams: see Horan, *All God's Creatures*, 34.

63 This is also the example of the encyclical *Laudato Si'*, as Horan discusses: see Horan, *All God's Creatures*, 45–49.

64 Horan quotes theologians who are trying to revise this concept; see Horan, *All God's Creatures*, 124–134. On this concept, see also Gallus, *Člověk před Bohem*, 496–511. Gallus

to, for example, John Zizioulas, neglecting the task of caring for creation is a sin.[65]

In reality, however, creation is also an *oikos* for God; as Horan points out, referring to other authors, God also dwells in the midst of his creation.[66] Criticism can also be made towards other theses. Humans are not separated from creation; on the contrary, they are dependent on it for their survival. The authors also point out the dysfunctionality of binary oppositions and dualisms[67] or the problematic nature of stewardship metaphors, in which not infrequently God's bestowal of the earth upon humans can become a similar free hand to exploit the earth as in the dominion model.[68]

Horan then, following the Franciscan tradition, postulates the interdependence and harmony of creation. This is because it concordantly – whether human or non-human – emanates from a single source, namely the Triune God.[69] If everything then proceeds from God, everything also returns to him – the whole of creation, which is the subject of Irenaeus of Lyon's famous "recapitulation," is thus included in this eschatological movement.[70] Horan, however, follows above all the concept of *haecceitas*, originally developed by John Duns Scotus. This term denotes the principle of individuation, the basis on which the *individualis* is differentiated from the *natura communis*. This *haecceitas* is not added to the *natura communis* as an appendage, but, according to Duns Scotus, precedes it and is intrinsic to the singular subject. The point is that someone is just someone and not someone else, not something external but something identical with their being. This emphasis on the individuation principle then leads, for Scotus, to foregrounding the

first deconstructs the notion that the concept is originally biblical (496–98) but applies the concept explicitly only to humans (505–06). Henriksen also sees the concept as problematic; see Henriksen, *Theological Anthropology in the Anthropocene*, 89–112. Recently, many have tried to revise this notion and understand it as a category whose disjunctive feature is the possibility of the relationship, which is inherent in the human person and God, but to some extent in all creation. For Henriksen, to be the image of God is to be desirous and vulnerable. See Henriksen, *Theological Anthropology in the Anthropocene*, 92–93.

65 Horan, *All God's Creatures*, 39.

66 Ibid., 36. Similarly Henriksen, *Theological Anthropology in the Anthropocene*, 46–47.

67 Horan, *All God's Creatures*, 57–58.

68 Ibid., 63–64.

69 Horan refers here to Bonaventure. See ibid., 153–156.

70 Ibid., 156.

value and dignity of each individual, for it is his *haec* that God creates out of many possibilities.[71]

Thus, for Scotus, individuality rather than shared nature is appreciated, with the emphasis on God valuing the singular and particular (even the seemingly contingent) more than any overarching concepts and general categories. This *haec* is applied not only to human individuals, but also to every individual, including non-human entities such as animals, plants, grains of sand, etc.[72] Every individual is called into being by God, and if he did not will it, it would not exist, so its basis is God's creative act and relationship to God. This does not mean that a blade of grass has the same dignity as a human being. But it does mean that these entities are not dependent on humans, not derived from them, or required to rely on them. Their value is derived from their *haecceitas*, not from whether they benefit humans.[73] Thus, every tree is recognized by God, worthy of protection and reverence, regardless of whether it serves as fuel or building material, or whether it reveals God's presence in nature to humankind.[74] Horan claims that this way of thinking should be the beginning and the principle of ecological ethics and theology.[75]

Horan and Henriksen's reflections demonstrate that theological anthropology or theology of creation is able to thoughtfully respond to the secular Anthropocene discourse, particularly its call to rethink human exceptionalism.[76] Being connected to Duns Scotus, Horan's kinship model of creation seems resonant and fruitful.

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71 Ibid., 158–159.

72 Ibid., 159. Horan even writes "nonhuman animals".

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid., 160.

75 Ibid.

76 There is a visible tension between the emphasis on human sin and human responsibility and the need to abandon anthropocentrism. Therefore, some theologians and philosophers, such as Clive Hamilton, argue that anthropocentrism as a form of responsibility cannot be deconstructed. See Hamilton, "The Anthropocene Epoch and Its Meaning," 4–5. "The future of the entire planet, including many forms of life, is now contingent on the decisions made by humans. Every scientific study that corroborates human disturbance of the Earth System – including every new report on human-induced climate change – confirms the truth of our special place among life on the planet. Whatever the philosophical attractions of biocentrism, the fact that we have brought about a new geological epoch, and could have acted otherwise, instantiates humankind once and for all as the being at the center of the Earth. Unlike every other creature, we have the power to accelerate or decelerate the change in the functioning of the Earth system. It

2.3 Ecological spirituality, environmental grief and the need for a new spirituality and reimagined hope in the Anthropocene

Beyond the desire for a theologically honest rethinking of the place of the human on a trembling earth,[77] what is constantly emerging in theological reflection on the Anthropocene is the need for some spiritual response to the new framework in which our lives are unfolding. This is directly inscribed in the titles of some theological books, such as David T. Bradford's *Spiritual Life on a Burning Planet: A Christian Response to Climate Change* or the collective monograph edited by Peter Walker and Jonathan Cole, *Theology on a Defiant Earth: Seeking Hope in the Anthropocene*. Nevertheless, the effort to cultivate an internal human response to the new situation is, undeniably, also relevant to secular discourse.[78]

The relationship between ecology and (Christian) spirituality and its reflection has, of course, a long history. For example, ecological spirituality was already discussed in the classic work of spiritual theology, the Italian *Dictionary of Spirituality*, first published in Milan in 1994, with references to "Franciscan conservation" and "Benedictine organization."[79] Sandro Spinsati,

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is far too late to attempt to replace a human-centered understanding with a biocentric one in the hope that the Earth will return to the Holocene. There is no going back to the Holocene – our disruption of Earth system processes is beyond the point of no return – and stepping back would absolve ourselves of the *responsibility* to act in a way that remediates some of the damage now set in train. […] Implicit in what I am saying, and vital to it, is the need to draw a sharp distinction between human-centeredness as a scientific fact and human-centeredness as a moral claim to dominion over the Earth, whether that moral claim be God-given or self-assigned. If human specialness is not so easy to justify in moral terms, the practical and ontological importance of human beings must be accepted if we are to respond to the rupture in human and Earth history that our disturbance of the Earth's governing processes has brought about. Human beings are inescapably at the center of the future of Earth's geological evolution. This power in the Earth System gives humankind greater responsibility than we have ever possessed." Ibid.

77 I take the term "trembling earth" from the eminent Anthropocene theorist Bruno Latour. See Latour, "Agency at the time of the Anthropocene," 1–4.

78 In a secular context, see, for example, Sarah Jaquette Ray, *A Field Guide to Climate Anxiety: How to Keep Your Cool on a Warming Planet* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2020).

79 Sandro Spinsati, "Ekologie," in Stefano De Fiores and Tullo Goffi (eds.). *Slovník spirituality* (Praha: Karmelitánské nakladatelství, 1999), 205–06. According to Spinsati, the Benedictines "by working with God to improve creation, praised the Lord and served the brethren." One must approach nature not only in the spirit of Franciscan "passionate contemplative reverence" but also in the spirit of building up nature. Ibid.

the author of the ecology entry, sets out two main tasks for Christianity in the face of the ecological crisis: healing the causes (Spinsati speaks of "positive intervention at the root of evil"[80]) and creating a new life practice in the face of the present situation. This practice, then, is a spiritual praxis, and will be characterized by the rejection of consumerism and the myth of progress, the integration of a relationship with nature into spirituality, a voluntary and rethought asceticism, and a spirit of beatitudes.[81] The new grasp of contemplation then allows one to "attune oneself to the peaceful breath of nature."[82] The need for meditation that is present in the countries of industrial civilization is then, according to Spinsanti, a sign of the times.[83]

It is significant that, more than 20 years later, Pope Francis in his encyclical similarly not only addresses the theme of creation through ethical or systematic-theological reflection, but also includes a chapter entitled "Ecological Education and Spirituality." Its central theme is ecological conversion: "So what they all need is an 'ecological conversion,' whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them."[84] Thus, for Pope Francis, spirituality precedes ethics. After all, the increase of external deserts is caused by the increase of internal deserts,[85] and human motivations emerge from human spirituality.[86] This ecological conversion has the classic requirements of conversion: it demands confession of guilt and a change of heart. However, all this happens within the context of reconciliation with creation.[87] A significant feature of ecological conversion is its indispensable communal dimension.

This conversion also entails new attitudes and lines of ecological spirituality that Pope Francis wants to introduce.[88] The first attitude is gratitude, which springs from the awareness that the world is a gift and leads to generosity.[89] Another is the recognition that, as human beings, we form with

80 Ibid., 207.
81 Ibid., 207–209. The times call for a "free Lent, a time of fasting, all year round." Ibid., 210. On consumerism in this context, cf. also Henriksen, *Theological Anthropology in the Anthropocene*, 176–187.
82 Ibid., 210.
83 Ibid.
84 Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, par. 217.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid., par. 216.
87 Ibid., par. 218.
88 Ibid., par. 216 and 220.
89 Ibid., par. 220.

other beings a "splendid universal communion."[90] "As believers, we do not look at the world from without but from within,"[91] the pope writes. The meaning of ecological conversion is also made clear to Christians through the theological pillars of their faith, such as creation, the incarnation and the resurrection. In particular, the pope underlines the Christological basis of ecological conversion, since "Christ has taken unto himself this material world and now, risen, is intimately present to each being, surrounding it with his affection and penetrating it with his light."[92] Pope Francis goes on to speak of frugality, humility, political commitment and the contemplation of creation: "Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person's face."[93] In this context, the pope quotes the Sufi mystic Ali Al-Khawwas in a footnote, who writes in a similar vein about uncovering mystery: "There is a subtle mystery in each of the movements and sounds of this world."[94]

As respectable as both texts dealing with ecological spirituality are, the titles of the books cited at the beginning of this subsection clearly refer to the more radical shift that comes with the notion of the Anthropocene. The theologian Sigurd Bergmann names this shift, or rather shaking, as follows: "How can a human be at home on an Earth that is shaken at its foundations by humans themselves? And, how can one, in such a context, continue to believe in God as the Creator and Sustainer of all between Heaven and earth?"[95]

Life in the Anthropocene (or the Hamartiocene, or the ecological crisis), like every alienation, every conflict and every sin, brings us sorrow. The term "environmental grief" has been coined for it. In theology, publications exploring a spirituality for living on a trembling earth, as I mentioned above, are now emerging in response. While this term is disdained by some groups in society, and the persons who experience it are accused of being too sensitive, from a theological perspective, it is necessary to mention the classic place of Catholic theology for relating to the world. That is the first article of the pastoral constitution of the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, which

90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
92 Ibid., par. 221.
93 Ibid., par. 233.
94 Ibid., note 159.
95 Sigurd Bergmann, "Religion at Work within Climate Change: Eight Perceptions about Its Where and How," in Deane-Drummond, Bergmann and Vogt (eds.), *Religion in the Anthropocene*, 76.

reads: "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts."[96] Today, we gradually feel this connection more and more strongly with nature, too.

The more acutely we feel kinship with all creation,[97] the more we feel that we are dying with it. In this context, Douglas E. Christie observes that while most of the debate about the ecological crisis focuses on biological, economic, or political needs, there is little recognition of the profound need for a renewed spirituality.[98] For Christie, dialogue between ecology and spirituality would be mutually beneficial.[99]

He describes how at the end of an academic meeting devoted to the natural world, different academics began sharing stories about places that are dear to them, such as overgrown backyards of buildings, wetlands with rare species of animals, places of connection to nature that have disappeared during their lifetimes.[100] Such sense of loss is expressed in the same chapter in the words of Psalm 121: "I lift up my eyes to the mountains – where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth."[101] With the same intention of loss-expression he quotes one of the Beatitudes from the Gospel of Matthew: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."[102]

The response of Christian theology and spirituality to this environmental grief (Christie connects it to the gift of tears mentioned in Christian monasticism[103]) reminds us of the need for a revived theology of hope and creative theological work in the face of the critical transformations of our world, a search for a "contemplative ecology," a turn to positively

96 Vatican Council II., *Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 1965), par. 1.

97 The term "kinship" is used extensively by the theorist Donna Haraway in her reflection on the Anthropocene. See, for example, Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 99–103.

98 Douglas E. Christie, *The Blue Sapphire of the Mind: Notes for a Contemplative Ecology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3. Christie draws heavily on sources from the tradition of early Christian monasticism to recover this spirituality.

99 Ibid., 4.

100 Ibid., 72–74.

101 Ps 121:1–2.

102 Mt 5:4.

103 Christie, *The Blue Sapphire of the Mind*, 70–101.

articulated values such as peaceful sobriety, care, and tenderness, as Pope Francis seeks it.[104] According to Christie, it is contemplation that not only deepens our consciousness of *koinonia* with our Creator, but also increases our attention and sensitivity to *koinonia* with creation.[105] This opens up new possibilities for a fuller and deeper life[106] in Moltmannian peace with creation and leads to a transformation of the relationship between the human and the world. It can thus become one of the possible spiritual resources for life on a shaken earth.

Similarly, it is an essential task to rethink the theology of hope, to seek "hope that does not lie"[107] in the face of a rapidly warming earth. In this context, maybe for the first time in the history of Christianity, there is a noteworthy new emphasis on hopelessness, among several theologians. Only its acceptance is a sign of inner truthfulness and a real possibility of a subsequent turn to hope. The pastoral theologian and psychotherapist Ryan LaMothe even accentuates a certain violence inherent in the feeling that hope must always exist.[108] LaMothe draws on Miguel De La Torre's book *Embracing Hopelessness*, according to which hopelessness is the beginning of a liberative practice. As LaMothe writes:

> Do not shower me with reminders of God's future promises; show me God's present grace through your loving mercy. Do not tempt me with riches of some afterlife; convince me of your sacrificial agape in the here and now. In the midst of unfathomable sufferings, the earth's marginalized no longer need pious pontifications about rewards

104 See Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, for example, par. 126, 223–226 etc.

105 Similarly, see *Laudato Si'* par. 220. "It also entails a loving awareness that we are not disconnected from the rest of creatures but joined in a splendid universal communion. As believers, we do not look at the world from without but from within, conscious of the bonds with which the Father has linked us to all beings." According to Daniel Horan, as I mentioned above, the earlier turn from a dominion model of the human relationship to creation to a stewardship model is insufficient. He himself proposes a community of creation theological model. In doing so, he performs a successful reception of the postcolonial and deconstructionist philosopher Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. See Horan, *All God's Creatures*, 181–222. Horan even speaks directly of a kinship model of creation. Ibid., 85.

106 Christie, *The Blue Sapphire of the Mind*, 234.

107 Cf. Rom 5:5.

108 For example, Ryan LaMothe, *The Coming Jesus and the Anthropocene* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2024), 177. Or similarly in essay form Ryan LaMothe, "Hope in the Anthropocene Age," in *ROOM: A Sketchbook for Analytic Action* 2 (2022), 27. Available also online: https://analytic-room.com/essays/hope-in-the-anthropocene-age-by-ryan-lamothe/ (accessed 30. 7. 2025).

> of the hereafter. Nor do they need their oppressors providing the answers for their salvation.[109]

Clive Hamilton states that a new future will be born only with the death of old conceptions of the future. Therefore, he argues, we need to allow ourselves moments of hopelessness and sadness over the failure of the ways we have traditionally constructed our future. Only after this period of despair can genuine hope emerge. In his follow-up on Joanna Macy, he argues that we must have the courage to allow ourselves to descend into despair and resist the temptation to rush into new futures too quickly.[110]

Hope, in the spirit of what Moltmann wrote about it, must become a concrete and dynamic response to human experience rooted in the Easter faith in the victory of life over death and in the hopeful anticipation of an eschatological Sabbath of creation which is already taking place where love reigns. It is fitting to turn to the words of the author of the Book of Revelation about the "new earth and the new heaven."[111] These words take on a new and more literal meaning in the Anthropocene perspective, and become a source of new eschatological hope and strength for our actions, without absolving us of our responsibility for the present state of the earth of which we are a part. The shape of the future is already contained in our present.[112]

2.4 The Anthropocene as "the ecumenism of a dying planet"

Lyotard famously diagnosed the end of grand, unifying narratives as a hallmark of the postmodern condition. But with a degree of interpretive liberty, one might argue that in the Anthropocene a new kind of metanarrative is emerging – not one we have invented, but one into which we have been

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109 Miguel A. De La Torre, *Embracing Hopelessness* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 96.

110 Hamilton, "The Anthropocene Epoch and Its Meaning," 13.

111 Cf. Rev 21,1.

112 Hamilton, "A Climate of Hope? Reflections on the Theology of the Anthropocene," 193; "Using Paul Tillich's view of faith as ultimate concern, Moltmann believes that 'without hope for the ultimate' human beings turn violent. Add to this systematic theologian Edward Farley's view that human action is contingent on hope, and we begin to see that for many theologians, 'hope' is a fundamental reality of human existence and Christianity. It is not an accident that these theologians consider hope to be essential to action, because in the Christian traditions hope is considered an existential virtue." LaMothe, *The Coming Jesus and the Anthropocene*, 175.

thrown.[113] The Anthropocene establishes a new, inescapable framework, making it reasonable to anticipate the return of something resembling a grand narrative in the Lyotardian sense. Yet this return would not be the result of deliberate construction, but rather of reluctant recognition – or perhaps such a restoration is precisely what is needed.

This – albeit deeply unsettling – unifying force of the narrative of ecological catastrophe or the Anthropocene era has not gone unnoticed by Christian theology. The Anthropocene framework offers a reassessment of existing inter-denominational, inter-religious and inter-species relations. Pope Francis speaks of an "ecumenism of blood"[114] in the context of the persecution of Christians. Those who kill Christians do not distinguish between denominations. I believe it is possible to speak of the "ecumenism of a dying planet" – its trembling spares no one and can lead us to rethink and foster new relationships. Under these circumstances, existing conflicts have become – or must become – secondary.

This is already occurring in the joint call by Pope Francis, Patriarch Bartholomew, and the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, for ecological conversion.[115] In their 2021 document, they underline the imperative of cooperation. To quote from the document, "Again, we recall Scripture: 'choose life, so that you and your children may live' (Deut 30:19). Choosing life means making sacrifices and exercising self-determination."[116] Similarly, at the level of interreligious dialogue, we can point to the *Declaration Of VII Congress Of The Leaders Of World And Traditional Religions* from 2022[117] as well

113 In his *Einführung in das Christentum*, Joseph Ratzinger, in a polemic with Marxism, argues that the meaning of life cannot be created but only received. In this sense, the Anthropocene is clearly the received story. See Joseph Ratzinger, *Einführung in das Christentum. Vorlesungen über das Apostolische Glaubensbekenntnis* (München: Kösel-Verlag, 1968), 27.

114 See e.g. Pope Francis, *Pellegrinaggio Ecumenico del Santo Padre Francesco a Ginevra in occasione del 70º anniversario della fondazione del Consiglio Ecumenico delle Chiese (21 giugno 2018) – Incontro Ecumenico nella Visser't Hooft Hall del Centro Ecumenico di Ginevra*, 21. 6. 2018, available online: https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2018/06/21/0466/00994.html (accessed 30. 7. 2025).

115 See *A Joint Message For The Protection Of Creation*, 1st September 2021, available online: https://ec-patr.org/a-joint-message-for-the-protection-of-creation2/ (accessed 30. 7. 2025).

116 Ibid.

117 See *Declaration Of VII Congress Of The Leaders Of World And Traditional Religions*, 15th September 2022, available online: https://religions-congress.org/en/page/deklaraciya-uchastnikov-VII.

as many other declarations.[118] A good example of this in practice can also be seen in the ecumenical services held on Earth Day, which are regularly organised by the Roman Catholic Academic Parish of Prague together with other organisations.[119]

2.5 Who is Jesus Christ in the Anthropocene?

In this last section, I want to discuss whether the geological changes to the planet caused by humankind, along with the ecological crisis, in some way impact the core of the Christian faith, namely the person of Jesus Christ and the call to follow him.[120] As Jaroslav Pelikan has demonstrated in his famous book *Jesus Through the Centuries*, we can find a wide variety of images of Christ in Christianity over the centuries.[121] So the logical question is: Is there any change in the interpretation of Jesus of Nazareth in the situation of the Anthropocene? "Who is Jesus Christ in the Anthropocene?," Michael S. Northcott and Peter M. Scott ask similarly in their *Introduction to Systematic Theology And Climate Change*.[122]

It is not without interest that Jürgen Moltmann placed his thesis on the need for peace with nature, which I mentioned at the beginning of this article, at the conclusion of his book on the Crucified God. According to Moltmann, "The memory of the passion and resurrection of Christ is at the same time both dangerous and liberating."[123] The freedom of Christ, revealed through his story culminating in death and resurrection, has the power to liberate humanity from the vicious circles of death. One such circle is the industrial destruction of nature.[124] A similar emphasis is evident in liberation

118 On interreligious dialogue in this context cf. Anthony Le Duc, "Interreligious Dialogue to Promote Environmental Flourishing: An Ongoing Imperative (June 25, 2023)," 20. Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4490844 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4490844 (accessed 31. 7. 2025).

119 See *Ekumenická bohoslužba ke Dni Země*, https://www.farnostsalvator.cz/clanek/3503/ekumenicka-bohosluzba-ke-dni-zeme (accessed 31. 7. 2025).

120 These positions and the question who Jesus is in the Anthropocene will need some time and precise and courageous theological work. I would like to pursue this topic in my future research.

121 Pelikan calculates 18 of them: see Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

122 Michael S. Northcott and Peter M. Scott, "Introduction," in Michael S. Northcott and Peter M. Scott (eds.), *Systematic Theology and Climate Change: Ecumenical Perspectives* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 5.

123 Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 326.

124 Ibid., 334.

theology, which portrays Jesus as the liberator.[125] However, we can also find such concepts in contemporary discourse, albeit not explicitly linked to the issue of the ecological crisis. Lieven Boeve's theology of interruption introduces the idea that God's action in history functions as an intrusion of otherness, shaking up existing certainties. In this context, he describes Jesus as the interrupter par excellence, the one who interrupts our enclosures.[126] Similarly, John D. Caputo, in his book *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?* – a parody of the familiar question What Would Jesus Do? – portrays Jesus as a figure who critiques society, rejects the status quo, and fights for justice.[127]

Directly in the context of the Anthropocene, Ryan LaMothe in his book *The Coming Jesus and the Anthropocene,* depicts Jesus as a model of vulnerability and care open to all, having respect for the earth and abolishing the status quo of superiority and subordination.[128] These attitudes are well illustrated in a poem by the German theologian Dorothea Sölle, specifically in the following line: "Jesus does not satisfy our thirst / but intensifies it."[129] These approaches view Jesus of Nazareth, in the context of the environmental crisis,

125 See, for example, Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993).

126 See, for example, Lieven Boeve, *Interrupting Tradition: An Essay on Christian Faith in a Postmodern Context* (Louvain: Peeters Press, 2003), 147–162; Lieven Boeve, *God Interrupts History: Theology in a Time of Upheaval* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 47–48.

127 See John D. Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct? The Good News of Postmodernism for the Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2007).

128 Ryan LaMothe is heavily influenced by the anarchist tradition in his theologizing. "To continue with the story, the coming Jesus is not focused on loving or worshiping God – sovereign or otherwise – but on loving the world – the Earth and all its inhabitants. Similarly, this coming Jesus, in loving the world, has no interest in being worshiped or in Jesus-and-me relationships. Rather, the coming Jesus is interested in inviting people to develop unique anarchic caring relations with the world. In other words, the coming Jesus represents a form of life to be lived and practiced in all of its innumerable cultural and historical iterations, which means that the coming Jesus himself becomes inoperative with regard to religious ceremonies, narratives, or creeds. The focus of the coming Jesus is instead on practices of care (1) that render inoperative apparatuses of sovereignty and the ontological rift, (2) that recognize and respect the singularities of all living beings, which requires epistemologies marked by interspecific perspectivism and multinaturalism, and (3) that embrace the existential insignificance and impermanence of all living beings." LaMothe, *The Coming Jesus and the Anthropocene*, 173.

129 I have translated these verses from the Czech translation by Magdalena Šipka in the collection of poems: Dorothee Sölle, *Daruj mi dar plačícího boha* (Praha: Biblion, 2019), 51. The original poem titled *Antwort auf die frage der linken freunde warum wir beten* is contained in Dorothee Sölle, *Meditationen und Gebrauchstexte* (Berlin:

as the one who encourages action, the one who criticizes injustice, the one who teaches us to look creatively for new ways, not to fall into passivity and indifference. This represents one approach to interpreting and transforming the understanding of Jesus Christ in the Anthropocene.

The second approach is less focused on the humanity of Jesus but underlines his divinity. It speaks less of Jesus but more of Christ. Rather than the synoptic Jesus, it refers to the words of the letter to the Colossians, "He precedes all things, all things consist in him."[130] (Col. 1, 17) The key concept of this approach is his incarnation in matter (σάρξ) and the participation of all life in God's universal presence in the world. Christology is the place of the union of the creator and the created.[131]

An example of this perspective can be found in Richard Rohr's book *The Universal Christ*, which sees Christ in all things, including the natural world – it is not only the kinship of living creatures that connects us to the natural world, but also the fraternal kinship in Christ that we recognize in it.[132]

Conclusion

In addition to the many political, cultural, but, unfortunately, also military and religious conflicts of our time, humanity's consumerist way of life, particularly the reckless exploitation of the Earth as a resource and tool for economic growth by the people of the Global North, is now rebounding like a boomerang, affecting the entire planet. The term Anthropocene, widely

Wolgang Fietkau Verlag, 1969). The original verses are: "weil christus nicht der trank für uns ist sondern der der unsern durst verstärkt".

130 Cf. Niels Henrik Gregersen, "Christology," in Northcott and Scott (eds.). *Systematic Theology and Climate Change*, 36.

131 Ibid., 38. This author combines both approaches well.

132 Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope for, and Believe* (New York, NY: Convergent Books, 2019), 57. Rohr also, in reference to Bonaventure, notes: "Let us place our first step in the ascent at the bottom, presenting to ourselves the whole material world as a mirror, through which we may pass over to God, who is the Supreme Craftsman." And further, "The Creator's supreme power, wisdom and benevolence shine forth through all created things." "I encourage you to apply this spiritual insight quite literally. Don't start by trying to love God, or even people; love rocks and elements first, move to trees, then animals, and then humans. Angels will soon seem like a real possibility, and God is then just a short leap away. It works. In fact, it might be the only way to love, because *how you do anything is how you do everything.* As John's First Letter says, quite directly, 'Anyone who says he loves God and hates his brother [or sister] is a liar' (4:20)."

used and developed in the humanities, has been coined to refer to the period when these changes penetrated the very geological core of the planet. In this paper, I have attempted to outline several possibilities for a theological hermeneutic of the concept of the Anthropocene.

My intention in this paper was not only to introduce, but above all to develop the possibilities of dealing with it in theology. I have presented some perspectives from recent publications on this topic in the Anglo-American environment, which are not yet very well established in Central European theology. I consider the work of Daniel Horan and his theology of creation without human exceptionalism to be particularly valuable. Similarly, I have presented some inspirations for the search for spirituality on a shaken planet. I consider valuable the observation of the agreement among some mutually independent contemporary theologians on the very notion of hopelessness that must precede renewed hope.

Beyond this, I have tried to bring in some thoughts of my own. The key one is the notion of *Hamartiocene*, which is a theological-anthropological reception of the Anthropocene. Its strength, compared to all other variants (e.g., the Capitalocene), lies in the fact that its resolution is inherently embedded within it – what Pope Francis refers to as ecological conversion. I also draw on the pope's terminology, reformulating his well-known "ecumenism of blood" into the more contemporary and universally applicable "ecumenism of a dying planet." The issue that particularly interests me is the evolving interpretation of the person of Jesus Christ in the Anthropocene epoch. Although I may have touched upon a potential solution rather briefly thus far, I intend to develop this question further, for example in my dissertation, which I hope to complete in the near future.

Given the manifestations of the climate crisis we are facing, and the fact that many governments around the world are rather hesitant or not radical enough in their measures to slow down global warming, it is crucial to recognize that the preceding reflections are meant to inspire both theological thinking and practical engagement.[133] Theology and the churches are called to renew their prophetic voice and confront themselves and the world with their sin, that calls literally from the core of the earth to heaven and dare to make amends. We must become witnesses to genuine hope, striving to

133 A detailed presentation of the practical implications for action inspired by the Christian reception of the Anthropocene and the call for ecological conversion naturally exceeds the scope of this introductory study.

cultivate a spirituality that is responsive to the ecological crisis and the hopelessness that accompanies it. This includes rethinking our place within creation, moving beyond fruitless disputes, and discerning anew how our theological imagination can contribute to life in the Anthropocene.

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The Deeds of God in the View of Process Theism

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Abstract: Process theology based on the philosophy of Alfred N. Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne views the world as a process of becoming composed of moments (actual entities), which occur by way of self-actualizing out of the data available for such an occasion. This presupposes a kind of subjectivity in these entities, as well as their being motivated for such self-actualization which would be a creative contribution to the fact that reality is a "world," rather than chaos. This brings us to the hypothesis of "a God" luring the actual entities to following an aim that is optimal for both themselves and the world in its entirety. Actual entities occur at many levels of complexity. At the human level their data include values. This scheme is believed to be essentially consistent not only with the Biblical view of divine activity and its modern interpretations, but also with the traditional doctrinal layout of the content of the Biblical witness.

Keywords: process; world; God; divine activity; Biblical witness

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It used to be only theologians and philosophers who engaged in thinking about God's acting in the world. A survey of one such debate is offered in the collection *God's Activity in the World*.[1] At the end of the last century and the beginning of this century the theme came to be deliberated in a more extended discussion, one which also included natural scientists. It was primarily these scholars, in particular those who happened also to be theologians (such as Ian Barbour, Arthur Peacock, John Polkinghorne, etc.), who brought a new input into this topic. Of especial importance were a series of five research conferences devoted to the question of divine acting in various natural scientific contexts which took place under the auspices of both the Vatican agency Specola Vaticana and the Center of Theology and Natural Sciences (CTNS) in Berkeley. The papers which were read at these occasions (divided into thematic segments and including both general and special issues) make up the content of anthologies published between the

1 Owen C. Thomas (ed.), *God's Activity in the World* AAR Studies in Religion 31 (Chico: Scholars Press, 1983). Cf. also Owen Thomas, "Recent Thought on Divine Agency," in: Brian Hebblethwaite and Edward Henderson (eds.), *Divine Action: Studies Inspired by the Philosophical Theology of Austin Farrer* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 35–50.

years 1993 and 2001. Jürgen Moltmann was among those who contributed to one of these collections. The main topics included quantum cosmology and the laws of nature, chaos and complexity, evolutionary and molecular biology, the science of the nerve system and the human person, and quantum mechanics. It was primarily the scholars dealing with the theory of chaos and quantum theory who were interested in searching for an interpretation of divine acting that would make sense in the contemporary scientific discourse. Robert J. Russell, then the director of the CTNS, provided a typology of contemporary alternatives in an introductory essay in the collection *Chaos and Complexity* published in 1995.[2]

The Deeds of God in Process Thought

In this article I will, however, limit myself to the issue of divine acting within the framework of a philosophical-theological debate, namely the one that took place among the representatives of what is called "process thought," and the early attempts at using process concepts in the hermeneutics of the biblical message. According to Owen C. Thomas, the editor of the collection *God's Activity in the World*, it was only process philosophy that provided a coherent alternative to the neo-Thomist concepts of God's dealing in or with the world. Among the scientists who were also philosophers or theologians, the American physicist Ian Barbour and the Australian biologist Charles Birch are among those who might be thought of as process thinkers.

Now, what is "process thought"? Process thought (and the same applies also to process philosophy and theology) is, to put it very briefly, a view of reality based on the latter philosophy of the (originally British) thinker Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947) and the philosophy of his younger American colleague Charles Hartshorne (1897–2000). Whitehead's *magnum opus*,

2 Robert Russell, Nancey Murphy and Arthur Peacocke (eds.), *Chaos and Complexity* (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory; Berkeley: Centre for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 1995), 9–13. See also Ian Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science* (London: SCM, 1990), chap. 9; Arthur Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age: Being and Becoming – Natural, Divine and Human* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990); Thomas F. Tracy (ed.), *The God Who Acts* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994); Thomas F. Tracy, "Theologies of Divine Action," in: Philip Clayton and Zachary Simpson (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 596–611.

Process and Reality, published in 1927,[3] was a comprehensive discussion of the principles upon which our universe is founded. It should be obvious from this that Whitehead's basic philosophical query did not issue from the Heideggerian wonder – "why is there anything at all?" – but rather from the wonder at "why what *is*, is the way it is?" How is it possible that things are the way they are, so that we can have a relatively common experience of them? His comprehensive philosophical vision ensuing from this query was thus an attempt to find an answer to this wonder through a thorough genetic and morphological analysis of all experience (starting with the human one) and present the outcome in a consistent and coherent set (or sets) of essential principles (which he called "categories").

We cannot go into any detail here but only summarize the essentials. The basic concepts resulting from Whitehead's analysis were *process* and *relativity*. Everything "that is" happens to be in *transition*, in a process of *becoming*, and everything acquires its identity through its relations to everything else, primarily to its own environment and its own history. In the final version of Whitehead's vision, inspired largely by atomic theories, the world is a process composed of moments of becoming (called "actual entities"), which occur via self-actualizing out of the data available for them. This process, however, presupposes a kind of "subjectivity" in all these entities, as well as their motivation for such an actualization, which would entail a creative contribution to the whole, namely to the fact that the universe is *cosmos* (the term for "jewel" in Greek), rather than *chaos*. This brings us (as it brought Whitehead) to the hypothesis of "a God," i.e., a directing element that is attracting all the actual entities to follow an aim that is optimal both for them and for the world in its entirety. It is a form of "final causation" where the actual cause (the data) cannot be presently active in bringing about the effect because it precedes it in time. There must be "a God" who is contemporary to everything actual and who participates in the becoming of each entity by providing it with subjectivity and purpose. This God happens to be (as Whitehead later realized and admitted) identical with the traditional ultimate source and object of our *religious* intuitions.

The actual entities occur at various levels of unity and complexity and usually form a kind of "society," the smallest of those being "a cell." The data

3 Alfred N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* [1929], Corr. Edition, David Giffin and Derek Sherburne (eds.) (New York: Free Press, 1978).

of their formation are varied and at the human level they include values. The options of each becoming entity are ontologically and historically limited but each entity has a certain degree of freedom to evaluate the offered options and make a choice. In other words, what is objectively optimal for such an entity, in order that it would also enrich the whole, does not have to become its own aim. At some levels of subjectivity, the subjective aim can indeed become the very opposite of what is proposed for this entity by God.

What is essential in the scheme is that the divine influence does not exceed a kind of "persuasion"; it does not involve any coercion beyond the laws of nature that make the whole process possible. God at every moment evaluates and harmonizes within Godself the decisions of the world in order to be able to react to it both sensitively and creatively. While this process involves some changes all the time God's identity does not change, and neither does God's ultimate aim for the world. Only the ways through which God accomplishes this aim are constantly changing.

The process view of the world (the universe) as a whole and process theism, namely the view of God, whose relation to the world is not only conceivable but also necessary, as well as the nonviolent nature of God's dealings with what is happening in the world stimulated the appearance of process *theology*. The concept of divine activity in the world (of the relationship with the world and of the interaction with it) in the interpretation of process *philosophy* is now clear. However, process theologians believe it is essentially consistent not only with the biblical view of divine activity and its modern interpretations, ranging from neo-orthodoxy to existentialism, but also with the traditional doctrinal layout of the content of the biblical witness.

As for Whitehead himself, he arrived at his concept of God as something that was missing in his coherent philosophical scheme of the universe as we experience it. Though he originally studied theology he did not find the predominant theological views helpful. Yet he saw the historical realization of the idea of divine persuasion in the Christian witness to the historical appearance of Jesus of Nazareth. In the concluding chapter of his *Process and Reality* Whitehead laments: "The brief Galilean vision of humility, flickered throughout the ages, uncertainly… But the deeper idolatry, of the fashioning of God in the image of the Egyptian, Persian, and Roman imperial ruler, was retained. The Church gave unto God the attributes which belonged exclusively to Caesar."[4]

4 Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 342.

Whitehead knew that it belongs to the core of Christianity to appeal to Jesus Christ as the revelation of the very substance of God. For him it meant to view God as our "great companion," indeed "the fellow-sufferer" of the suffering creation "who understands."[5] Although he believed that this state of affairs is recognizable even without this revelation, Jesus was for him a unique phenomenon, a turning point of all history. Some Whiteheadian process thinkers saw in Jesus primarily a message of love in its nonviolent power, a kind of "focal point," or a "classical instance" of the God-human being relationship, which can illuminate all other divine work, but not an exclusive revelation. According to Charles Hartshorne, Jesus embodied the conviction that it is nobler to endure suffering than to escape from it. In this he became the symbol of God's own life. This, to be sure, corresponds in principle to the view and conviction of the Christian pacifists, the "peacemakers,"[6] though neither Whitehead, nor Hartshorne thought of themselves as pacifists. Hartshorne was also convinced that the process theological alternative ("neoclassical theism" as he called it) is decisively closer to the biblical tradition of the "living God" than the theism of "classical" (Greek) metaphysics. All process thinkers shared in principle this conviction, but they differed in their theological evaluation of the correspondence between process thought and biblical witness, and in the way they demonstrated it.

The Process Concepts of the Deeds of God and Christology

Schubert Ogden's work in the 1960s was described as one of the first attempts at a fruitful discourse between process theology and biblical theology. It included a criticism of Rudolf Bultmann's theology from the perspective of process theism. Ogden, who was one of the main interpreters (and translators) of Bultmann's work for the American public, tried in the first place to demonstrate, using the example of Bultmann, the impossibility of any rigorous distinction between philosophy and theology. According to Ogden, Bultmann contradicts such a distinction when he wants to propose the constitutive significance of the New Testament message about Jesus Christ for an authentic human existence. His thesis that without a relation to the biblical message of God's decisive acting in Christ, any existential interpretation of

5 Ibid., 351.
6 Cf. Matt. 5:9.

the human situation remains a mere abstraction, is, in Ogden's view, inconsistent with the radical de-historicization presupposed by the program of demythologization. He writes: "On Bultmann's own showing the proclamation of God's decisive eschatological act in Christ is indistinguishable from the original demand to understand one's self as a genuinely historical being and is therefore deprived of any independent validity."[7] Any distinction between a possibility "in principle" and possibility "in fact" is a logical contradiction, for to say that a human being has a possibility that cannot be carried out means to deny it to him or her.

Ogden presented his "constructive alternative" to Bultmann's Christology in his study *Christ without Myth*, published in 1961. The demand of demythologization, he insisted, is justified by the subordination of Christology to the universal aspect of theology. The peculiarly Christian economy of salvation has a definitively subordinate role in the ultimate outworking of God's purposes. Like the other New Testament witnesses, Paul takes for granted that God and God alone is the final source of authentic human life. Therefore, "unless the theocentric basis and sanction of Christocentrism is explicitly acknowledged, emphasis on Jesus can be a snare and a delusion and a mere travesty of authentic apostolic faith."[8] In summoning all humans "to live in radical dependence on God's grace, and so in freedom from the past and openness to the future, the event of Jesus Christ is but the re-presentation in the form of a single human life of man's original possibility of existence *coram deo*."[9]

But how to speak about God's self-presentation in history and not fall into mythological categories? In what sense is the event of Jesus an event of God? Ogden finds an answer to this question in distinguishing between mythology and analogy with the help of the "dipolar theism" of Charles Hartshorne. Dipolar theism, as conceived by Hartshorne, distinguishes between God's general and special relationship to the world. "The same God, who is the subject of an existential encounter in the Word which Jesus both is and proclaims, can become, on the basis of analogy, the object of our thought."[10] Because of this analogy one can speak of God's revelation in the

7 Schubert M. Ogden, "Bultmann's Project of Demythologizing and the Problem of Theology and Philosophy," *The Journal of Religion* 37:3 (1957), 156–73, at 165.
8 Schubert Ogden, *Christ Without Myth* (New York: Harper, 1961), 143.
9 Ibid., 160.
10 Ibid., 147.

world. Ogden discusses this idea primarily in his study "What Sense Does It Make to Say, 'God Acts in History'?"[11] He relies here on Hartshorne's deliberation that God's dynamic relationship to the world could be compared to the way the human self is related to all the components of his/her body. All these partial relations or reactions are contingent expressions of what itself is not contingent.

"*That* God is, in some actual state or other, or in relation to some actual world, is dependent on nothing whatever and is in the strictest sense necessary. The only thing that is contingent (and that only in part) is *what* God is, what actual state of the literally infinite number of states possible for him is in fact actualized."[12] Just as in human public acting the self that already exists is somehow revealed, so also in history can that which transcends the particularities of history be partly revealed. The observance that some of our deeds can express who we really are more than some others is analogically true about God. While God is somehow active in everything, some of God's creative activity can really be a manifestation of *who* God is.

"Whatever or insofar as particular religious symbols appropriately re-present God's action as Creator and Redeemer," Ogden argues, "they actually are or become his act in a sense strictly analogous to the sense in which some of our own symbolic actions are our acts in a way others are not."[13] It is in this sense that the possibility of authentic human existence was not *constituted* in Christ, but radically *re-presented*.

At the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, the search for adequate hermeneutical methods for interpreting the biblical message in its broadest scope influenced much of the American theological debate. One of the topics was dealing with those parts of the biblical witness that indicate divine influence in what is happening in the world. This issue was formulated with pregnancy by the American theologian Langdon Gilkey in his study "Cosmology, Ontology, and the Travail of Biblical Language."[14] Gilkey was dealing primarily with the talk of some Old Testament theologians of "God's mighty acts" depicted in the Old Testament narratives. These scholars

11 Schubert Ogden, *The Reality of God and Other Essays* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1966), 164–87.

12 Ibid., 176.

13 Ibid., 181.

14 Langdon B. Gilkey, "Cosmology, Ontology, and the Travail of Biblical Language," *The Journal of Religion* 41:3 (1961), 194–205.

were talking about "the response of faith" to "divine activity," but a closer look proved that this activity was meant as something that did not interfere in the spatio-temporal causality in a way that would contradict the continuity of our current experience, and thus, in Gilkey's view, as something for which there was ontologically "no place." The concept of analogy cannot, he believed, overcome this ontological deficit, and neither can the Bultmannian reduction of God's activity to "one act" actualized in "interpretation." How has this "one act," supposedly arousing the response of faith, actually occurred, when objectively, as a matter of fact, nothing has happened? How can one then talk about "mighty acts" as the basis of God's self-revelation?

What, according to Gilkey, must replace this "emptied" analogy is a theological ontology which would give the analogical categories of "divine acts" or "divine self-manifestation in acts" an intelligible and credible sense, which would, that is to say, specify how God is related to ordinary events, and how then God could be related to special events. Understanding of the former is a prerequisite for a parallel inquiry into the latter.

> "Unless we have some conception of how God acts in ordinary events, we can hardly know what our analogical words mean when we say: He acts uniquely in this event or that this event is a special divine deed. God's special activity is logically connected with his providential activity in general historical experience, and so understanding of the one assumes a concurrent inquiry into the other."[15]

Without an ontological basis all and any analogical discourse of God's acting in history appear to be only a theological abstraction.

The process theologian David Griffin attempted to respond to this challenge by defending the rationality of revelation.[16] In his *Process Christology*[17] Griffin shows that in the framework of a Whiteheadian cosmological ontology we can conceive the "coherent vision of reality" with which we are confronted in the biblical witness and still make a distinction between the general and particular (or "special") divine activity, as Gilkey demands. The theory of "actual occasions" presupposes God's participation in the causality of all being, for the self-creative "experience" of each occasion (for which Whitehead uses the term "prehension," a derivative of "comprehension") includes God. Because each occasion enjoys some freedom of choice there is no interruption of the *causal nexus*. God acts in the world without interrupting

15 Ibid., 204f.
16 David R. Griffin, "Is Revelation Coherent?," *Theology Today* 28:3 (1971), 278–94.
17 David R. Griffin, *A Process Christology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973).

the cause-effect link presupposed in the process of becoming of each entity or event. This is the ontological basis for conceiving divine activity in both the primary (general) and the secondary (special) sense.

> "God's acts in the primary sense are his self-constitution, in which he responds sympathetically to the past state of the world and at the same time lays the foundation for the next state of its creative advance by providing ideal aims for all its agents. And since every finite act of becoming in influenced by God's aim for it to some extent, every world event can be called an act of God in the secondary sense."[18]

The same ontological basis provides for conceiving God's special activity. An occasion has the status of a special act whenever the circumstances allow that it becomes a manifestation of God's character and purpose and the self-actualization of that occasion becomes a realization of the intended manifestation because the subjective aim is fully congruent with the ideal aim that God had in mind for the given occasion.

This understanding of God's "special act" was the very foundation of Griffin's Christology that was also meant as a counterpoint to the Christology of Schubert Ogden.[19] "The decisive divine act" does not differ from other acts by being most typically *re-presentative* for God but by being what God wanted it to be, by being the occasion of God's self-manifestation. "The decisiveness of the act is partially a function of God's activity, which is in one sense different here than in other places, for the particular ideal aim given here is such as to give particularly apt expression to his being."[20]

This is how God acted decisively in Jesus Christ.

> "In actualizing God's *particular* aim *for him*, Jesus expressed God's *general* aim for his entire creation […]. The aims given to Jesus and actualized by him during his active ministry were such that the basic vision of reality contained in his message of work and deed was the supreme expression of God's eternal character and purpose."[21]

Griffin also contributed to the debate about biblical theology and hermeneutics in his study "Relativism, Divine Causation, and Biblical Theology,"[22]

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18 Griffin, "Is Revelation Coherent?," 289.

19 David R. Griffin, "Schubert Ogden's Christology and the Possibility of Process Philosophy," *The Christian Scholar* 50:3 (1967), 290–303. Reprint in: Delwin Brown, Ralph James and Gene Reeves (eds.), *Process Philosophy and Christian Thought* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1971), 347–61.

20 Griffin, "Schubert Ogden's Christology," 358.

21 Griffin, *A Process Theology*, 218, 220.

22 David R. Griffin, "Relativism, Divine Causation, and Biblical Theology," *Encounter* 36:4 (1975), 342–60.

where he responded to the positions for which the refusal of the supernatural alternative presupposes a one-sided (Bultmannian) emphasis on the subjective (receptive) side of revelation. Some events have, according to Griffin, the character of divine acting in themselves, that is, regardless of whether they would be accepted as such or not, and therefore they deserve (and it is appropriate for them) to be so accepted. This, says Griffin, is not to deny the activity of the Holy Spirit in this regard. In other words, the revelation has both the objective and the subjective components. Whitehead's metaphysics removes, in Griffin's view, the necessity of a rigorous distinction between divine and other causality and thus makes it possible "that biblical theology could be understood as the discipline that attempts to carry out the task that the biblical historian who is a (process) theist could in principle attempt, i.e., of reconstructing the development of the biblical tradition employing 'divine influence' as one of the categories."[23]

Some process thinkers rejected this approach as a kind of Whiteheadian scholasticism. The process philosopher Lewis Ford is critical toward any attempts at an ontological conception and expression of Jesus' historical uniqueness. He believes it is impossible to connect ontology with any specific intention that God would have with Jesus. In Whitehead's scheme of reality all intentions are subject to contingency. All are dependent on historically given possibilities. Jesus' uniqueness is neither metaphysical, nor is it revealed; it is *historical*. Jesus is unique by becoming Christ, the Messiah. It was a possibility for which history provided a semantic framework. Jesus revealed God's uniqueness as a "power of the future." By "drawing all people to himself" (John 12:32) Jesus became the vehicle of divine activity, because in this way he enables God to make a new evolutionary step, the emergence of reality which is "more" than humanness. Through his life, his death and his resurrection he became the mediator of a transformation that is involving all creation. Here history meets its "meaning": Jesus is a Logos expressing in a contingent way the divine overall intention with humanity. He became a Word calling to a form of humanness in which all fragmentation is overcome and the church, of which the Resurrected is "the head," becomes an invitation to participation in a historically contingent form of this transformation.[24]

23 Griffin, "Relativism," 356.

24 Lewis S. Ford, *The Lure of God: A Biblical Background for Process Theism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 127.

The Nature of the Deeds of God

Schubert Ogden discovered in process theism an adequate hermeneutical instrument for dealing with the biblical mythical language in interpreting the Christian message; David Griffin believed he discovered in the same philosophy the ontological basis for conceiving the objective side of the revelation. The philosopher and biblical scholar Lewis Ford contended that the basis of the uniqueness of divine acting is historical rather than ontological. However, all of them were convinced that, in Whitehead's theory of events (of "actual occasions"), God takes part in the causal nexus and we can thus rightfully speak about God's acting. This acting is not uniform; it differs from entity to entity and from one situation to another and thus makes it possible to interpret even the Christology of the biblical witness. Yet, in principle the part God takes is always the same: in its nature it is the "persuasion" or "luring" of the becoming subject to what is objectively (in God's view) optimal for its meaningful and enriching existence, for its self-creation in the direction of the initial aim provided for it by the providence of the Creator.

Around this principle there evolved a broad discussion initiated by the critics of process theism in general and specifically of "process theodicy." These critics believed that process theism collapses the problem of evil because Whitehead's God is limited in his control of what is happening in the world and cannot thus guarantee a final "triumph of good." I will not go into this in detail here, as I have recently published an article about it in this journal.[25] So, I will only mention some of the responses in defence of process theism which appeared in the context of the debate about the relationship between process theism and biblical theism.

I already mentioned Whitehead's comment on the "brief Galilean vision" vis-a-vis the development of much of traditional Christian theism. The traditional concept of divine omnipotence, says Whitehead, is a kind of "idolatry." Any direct influence, whether limited or unlimited, conflicts with the concept of divine perfection and must be excluded. The same concerns the concept of divine coercion. "We may define coercion," says Ford, "generally as any restriction upon the range of real possibilities which would otherwise

25 Petr Macek, "God and Evil in Process Theism," *Communio Viatorum* 66:2 (2024), 94–106.

be available."[26] In his article "Divine Persuasion and the Triumph of Good,"[27] he is more specific:

> Coercive power directly influences the outcome, since the process must conform to its control. Persuasive power operates more indirectly, for it is effective in determining the outcome only to the extent that the process appropriates and reaffirms for itself the aims envisioned in the persuasion […]. Pure coercive power transforms creation *ex nihilo* into *creatio ex deo*, with the world possessing no more independent actuality than an idea in the divine mind would have. To the extent that God exercises such power, creaturely freedom is restricted, the reality of the world is diminished, and the divine experience is impoverished.[28]

Just as there is, on the one side, non-chaotic existence unthinkable without God, so, on the other side, without a certain measure of independence no existence outside God is possible.

Ford admits that a final guarantee of the "triumph of good" is missing in process theism, yet he believes it is not a real deficiency, because this triumph may remain an object of our trust, justified by the present reality which is in principle constantly a form of overcoming "the triumph of evil" in the form of a total destruction of existence. David Griffin comes to a similar conclusion. Process theism is a defence of our general experience. Creation was, so to say, a risk since there is no absolute defence against evil, but because its alternative is only non-existence, it was a risk that was worth taking. The risks that creation is facing are thus risks that the Creator himself had to accept and is constrained to deal with. We can even say with Whitehead that creation was (and still is) a divine "adventure." But it was not anything like "throwing a die," a metaphor that Einstein deplored. This liberates God from rebukes or reprimands which God would have to face – in a symbolic sense – if his role was that of a mere onlooker, waiting to see how things end up. His being a "fellow-sufferer" makes him rather the only source of hope and the addressee of invocation, which puts him in a position which God has traditionally held.

As much as the process theologians are convinced that "dipolar theism" can deal adequately with the biblical witness in its manifold diversity, the

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26 Ford, *The Lure of God*, 17f.

27 Lewis S. Ford, "Divine Persuasion and the Triumph of Good," *The Christian Scholar* 50:3 (1967), 235–50. Reprint in Brown, James and Reeves (eds.), *Process Philosophy and Christian Thought*, 287–304.

28 Ford, "Divine Persuasion and the Triumph of Good," 288, 289.

best informed do not hesitate to admit that many biblical images are not easily reconciled with process theism. As Lewis Ford puts it:

> The Bible is not a doctrine of divine reality but a witness of God's dealings with the world. In the case of the Old Testament, it is primarily with Israel, and the context of interpretation is not a cosmology, but the *Covenant.* No concrete witness should be then viewed as a systematic description of the nature of divine dealing or acting. Israel bore witness to that action of God directly impinging upon the situation at hand, letting the total cumulative context make the necessary adjustments and modifications … By his covenant with Israel all of God's actions could be accepted and understood as expressions of his long-ranged struggle and personal confrontation with his people and nor as mere displays of raw, naked force.[29]

Still, much of the biblical testimony can be interpreted and, in this way, illuminated and appraised in a more universal, even cosmic context, as the one represented by process theism. Divine acting via 'persuasion' is in a sense witnessed in the biblical account of creation. It can be interpreted as responsive activity, as a kind of a dialogue, where the creation responds to the Creator's calling it to a higher complexity. God directs this "calling" but does not have the power to determine it. There is an element of spontaneity, which finally matures in the form and experience of freedom. By the connection of inherited matter and new form, the self-creative activity on the part of creation makes up for emergence of new structures.

The concept of divine persuasion illuminates even our understanding of God's creative Word, as a "structuring principle" safeguarding that the world is cosmos rather than chaos. Thus, the Logos in the gospel of John and the divine calling (or challenge) to creative decisions are principally the same. The specific "divine history," the appearance of Israel, is thus in continuity with the history (or creation) of everything and God's Covenant with Israel can be viewed as a symbol as well as a model of creative reciprocity. God's providence consists in God's readiness to improvise in his reaction to new situations. So, the history of the world is open to contingency, but divine intention remains in play and the development of the world can be viewed as its "intensification." The biblical witness in its entirety confirms the consistency of God's work. The inconsistency of some particular portraits which can be prescribed to the lack of interest of the biblical witnesses in the logic of their testimony cannot disprove this overall impression.

29 Ford, *The Lure of God*, 16.

Ford's hesitation to give all biblical testimony a place in process thinking led to disagreement among some biblical scholars, who were themselves process thinkers, but my record of their exchange is dated. In principle it was (and is, if it still continues) a dispute about the measure of correspondence or congruency of the biblical witness and Whitehead's concept of divine creativity and God's relation to the world. The debate among process scholars concerned the biblical testimony of divine wrath, the issue of miracles, the relationship to the environment (the subhuman nature), the phenomenon and the work of the Holy Spirit, among other themes.[30]

As much as Ford excluded some biblical testimony from a systematic process reflection, his process-philosophical recapitulation of biblical witness was, as I have tried to show, by no means too modest. He sees in biblical witness a contingent history of God's dealing with the world and therefore he believes process categories are a fitting instrument for interpretation of this witness and for appropriating it for our own history. Process theism need not dissolve biblical particularities like the "passage to the promised land," or the "expectation of the Messiah" into symbolic manifestation of universal truth, since it can proclaim a God vitally interested in precisely these particularities whose activity is shaped by their peculiar character. These aims do not lose their particularity in being broadened to embrace all humankind, since from the divine perspective the human being is only one particular form of creation.[31]

The biblical narrative gives the necessary conditions of divine activity expressed in Whitehead's metaphysical theism concrete historical outlines.

30 Cf. J. Gerald Janzen, "Modes of Power and Divine Relativity," *Encounter* 36:4 (1975), 379–406; "Metaphor and Reality in Hosea 11," *Semeia* 24 (1982), 7–44; Lewis S. Ford, "God as King: Benevolent Despot or Constitutional Monarch?," *Christian Scholar's Review* 1 (1971), 318–22; "The Divine Curse Understood in Terms of Persuasion," *Semeia*, 24 (1982), 81–87, George W. Coats, "The King's Loyal Opposition: Obedience and Authority in Exodus 32–34," in: George Coats and Burke Long (eds.), *Canon and Authority: Essays in Old Testament Religion and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 91–109; "The Way of Obedience: Traditio-Historical and Hermeneutical Reflections on the Balaam Story," *Semeia* 24 (1982), 53–79; David J. Lull, *The Spirit in Galatia: Paul's Interpretation of PNEUMA as Divine Power*, SLB Dissertation Series 49, (Chico: Scholars Press, 1980); Theodor J. Weeden, "The Synoptic Tradition: A New Angle of Vision," unpublished study, presented at AAR-SLB, Washington, 1974; Stan Rummel, "The History of Israel: What Place for the Subhuman?," unpublished study, presented to SBL Israelite History Section, 1975.

31 Ford, *The Lure of God*, 27.

But it is exactly this concrete history which concerns us all and gives our experience a decisive sense.

> The biblical drama is the biography of God, whereby the integrity of his values is gradually made manifest in the vicissitudes of the concrete situations of Israel, Jesus, and the church. These values in all of their complex richness cannot be simply given at the outset; they must be temporally emergent as a layer upon layer is added to the account of God's dealings with humans. The concrete character of each such situation needs to be explored.[32]

I want to give the last word to the luminary of process theology, John Cobb who died at the end of 2024, a few weeks before his hundredth birthday. John Cobb will be remembered as one of the most prominent representatives of process philosophy and theology, reflecting and applying the work of Alfred North Whitehead. With his wide interest and knowledge, his readiness to participate in transdisciplinary dialogue and primarily with his effort to make Christian theology open to the new findings of the sciences he influenced not only theology and philosophy, but also ecology, economy, biology, and social ethics. Even with this broad openness he saw in Jesus a unique embodiment of God and therefore the decisive authority.

In the Christological part of his *Theological Reminiscences*[33] Cobb says that "the most needed understanding of who we are, where we stand, and what is needed comes from viewing the whole from the center," which is God's acting in Jesus.[34] The highest authority cannot be what is culturally acceptable. Authentic Christianity must be countercultural; it must look at reality from the bottom up rather than from the top down. Its centre cannot be a teaching that is focused on what is true at all times and places but what calls us to action. Although we may find bits of such calling elsewhere, "its sustained recognition and development is provided by the prophetic tradition of Israel."[35] However, such a calling must be even more inclusive. The prophets did not celebrate Israel's superiority over the rest of the world but remained ethnocentric. They went a long way to overcoming the "we/they" opposition, but they were not able fully to transcend it. Jesus was the first who achieved this goal. His ministry and teaching became inclusive. "His teaching that we should love our enemies and his call for the forgiveness of

32 Ibid., 127.
33 John B. Cobb, jr, *Theological Reminiscences* (Claremont: Process Century Press, 2014).
34 Ibid., 279.
35 Ibid., 280.

those who crucified him went beyond standard prophetic teaching." After his resurrection his disciples still hesitated but the apostle Paul recognized that gospel was equally for Jews and the rest of humanity. "The communities he established were inclusive." Thus, Jesus can be viewed both "as the fulfillment of the prophetic tradition and as the one through whom it entered into the wider stream of human history."[36]

"The ability to love your enemies goes beyond rational beliefs."[37] To follow Jesus, even though only partially, is to centre our life and understanding of what is going on on the One with whom Jesus lived so intimately. This is why we can and should think and speak of God's being and active creativity in Jesus. This is how Whitehead viewed God's causality: as "indwelling." Thus, by saying that while God participates in the constitution of every individual thing and that each entity in its way "incarnates" God, God's presence in Jesus is even stronger, Cobb is combining the view of both Griffin and Ford. Jesus actualized the possibilities God provided for him more fully than anyone else. His responsiveness to God's call was extraordinary but at the same time exemplary and inspiring and became a turning point in human history.

This is what makes Jesus decisive for us. God called Jesus to liberate the prophetic message from the residuum of ethnocentrism, to deepen and enrich it, and make it universally available. Through him a new kind of personal human existence came into being. In this way Jesus also created the possibility for a new kind of human community. Some elements of what emerged in those days exist in some form or another even today. This is what Jesus and the early church called the Holy Spirit. In his case the "initial aim" was transformed into the "subjective aim" that actually determined his decisions. For us who follow Jesus, the God who calls us to do so remains the deciding centre of our "selves." The difference between us and Jesus is that in him God's presence was fully synthesized with who he wanted to be. In this way he could speak for God in a way we cannot.

While nothing created is perfect, a lot may be successfully challenged and inspired. "The role of Jesus in the contemporary world can," according to Cobb, "benefit greatly from an understanding of the reality and the limits of inspiration." While even Jesus was a man of his time like us "the extent to which he was able to transcend and transform everything around him is

36 Ibid., 280f.
37 Ibid., 282.

astounding."[38] Similarly astounding and impressive is the extent to which he lived his own "vision of reality" and was ready to pay the full price for doing so. He was inspired in such a way that the claim that "the Spirit was enfleshed in his life" is not exaggerated. Cobb believes that "in this straightforward sense" Jesus "incarnated God"[39] and could become – through his words and deeds – the divine authority for us.

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38 Ibid., 287.
39 Ibid.

Book Review

Panikos Panayi, **The Germans in India: Elite European Migrants in the British Empire**, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017, ISBN 9781526119339

I was born and raised in a German Lutheran Christian family. My father studied at a German boarding school, so I often heard him talk about German Christian missionaries and their work. Additionally, every October 31st, in commemoration of Reformation Day, my church celebrates Reformation Day, during which I often read passages about Luther's history in a Sunday school programme. This was my first introduction to Germany. After I began my theological studies, I read extensively about German history, the Germans, and German Christian missionaries. As far as I am aware, there are only two publications that give a detailed account of Germans in India. The first one was written by Walter Leifer, *India and the Germans: 500 years of Indo-German Contacts* (Bombay: Shakuntala, 1971), 48 years after the anniversary referred to in the title.

Panikos Panayi's book, *The Germans in India: The Elite European Migrants in the British Empire*, explores the reasons for this migration. According to the author, networks played an essential role. Panayi further examines the everyday lives of Germans in India, exploring the concept of the German community and outlining the interaction between Germans, British, and Indians. He devotes a separate chapter to the impact of the Great War on Germans in India, a feature which got my attention. He illuminates the struggles faced by Germans in India during this period. Within this chapter, he includes a section on Christian brotherhood, shedding light on the difficulties experienced by Christian missionaries. The author drew on limited sources regarding the German Lutheran Mission, which results in some missed quotations. For instance, on page 214, he refers to Carl Paul as the inspector of the Basel Mission in Tiruvallur, but this is inaccurate. Carl Paul was the director of the Leipzig Mission Society and did not work in India, especially not in Tiruvallur.

When I referred to the primary source, Missionary Kannigser was stationed in Tiruvallur and had not been informed by British officials about his deportation. Furthermore, there is no mention of the SMS Emden attack in his 286-page book. I found this surprising, as the attack was one of the main reasons for the deportation of Germans from India. Additionally, the author notes that the period of German rule in India came to an end. He argues

that the Government of India sought to make this situation permanent by attempting to prohibit the entry of further Germans into the country for an additional five years. Following the peace, a policy was enacted to thoroughly cleanse the Empire of all enemy aliens. According to him, the First World War was, therefore, a significant turning point for Germany's position in India. Subsequently, the missionaries worked diligently in various capacities, including as scholars and businesspeople.

The Great War completely altered their position. Partially, I agree with his opinion because as soon as the First World War began, the Germans were not transferred by the British, particularly the missionaries. When the SMS Emden attack occurred, the Germans were suspected of being spies.

Panikos Panayi's research recounts how the war affected the German Christian Missionaries. One discrepancy in his account is that he says that the German Christians' Mission work ended during the First World War. But that is incorrect, for after the war, the German missionaries returned to India. The first German missionary sent to India after the war was Dr Froehlich in 1925. The Leipzig Mission had a firm partnership with the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran church.

The sources for this book are archives from Germany, Britain, India and Switzerland. The materials include personal diaries, mission reports, government orders, and mission journals. It clearly shows the author tried his best to convey the information about the Germans who were living in India.

For those seeking to learn about the historical background of German presence in India, this book is an excellent source, offering scholarly information on the Germans in India. If the author had focused more on cross-checking the German sources, it would be great. Still, I do not understand how he missed the SMS Emden incident, which played a vital role in the deportation of Germans from India, which is one of the historical incidents which happened during the time of the First World War in India. This book also gives a detailed account of Indo-German relations.

Even though the book was published some eight years ago, it remains largely unknown to many. It received very few reviews, and none of them were from an Indian Christian perspective. The finding that I mentioned in this review, concerning the SMS Emden, was not discussed or even noted in any other review. Thus, I have provided this review in order to offer a new perspective and introduce this publication to the world of Christianity. Reading this book will contribute to faculty members and students in the area

of World Christianity gaining an insight into a little-know area of this topic and researchers studying Indo-German and German mission history will find it a helpful resource for their research.

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