COMMUNIO VIATORUM LXVI (2024/3) 201–204

Editorial

Notes from the Coasts of Bohemia or Why We Are Yoked Together with Unbelievers Anyway

Political concerns dominate our lives more than desired. News reports highlight the unravelling of the existing world order. Nearly eighty years of unprecedented peace and widespread prosperity across much of the European continent are now threatened. Suddenly, we question its longevity, as relations between America and Europe have strained considerably, and Europeans face a resurgent Russia. Consequently, rapid rearmament will likely come at the expense of healthcare, construction, and education.

In this context Paul's words "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Cor 6:14) receive new appeal. Sure, they would always have a whiff of sectarianism. Qumran and, in the Czech context, Kunvald, places where a small group of believers withdrew from this sinful world (in the former case, it was a Jewish group from the 2nd century BCE known from the Dead Sea Scrolls, in the latter a Czech group that became the Unity of the Brethren in 15th century CE[1]), have always been viewed as a problematic temptation, a deviation from mainstream church involvement.

J. L. Hromádka, who, along with J. B. Souček, founded this journal in 1958, emphasized, after the Second World War, Christians' responsibility for the world, derived from God's love for it.[2] This was combined with his essentially Hegelian view of history as evolving according to its own laws, with socialism as its next inevitable phase. Therefore, he believed Christians should not stand in principled opposition to socialism, but rather engage with it constructively.

It was in the same vein that many of us considered 1989, with its collapse of the totalitarian socialist regimes in Eastern Europe, a gift from God

---

[1] Ota Halama, "The Unity of Brethen (1458–1493)," in Miachal Van Dusen and Pavel Soukup (eds.), *A Companion to the Hussites* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 371–402.

[2] Josef L. Hromádka, *The Field is the World: Selected Writings from the years 1918–1968,* edited by Milan Opočenský and Paul Lehman (Prague: Christian Peace Conference, 1990).

© 2025 The Author. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

granted to us in and for our lifetime. The involvement of Czech Protestants in building a democratic society in the 1990s far exceeded their proportional representation in the nation[3] We believed the democracy was ours, and that we were finally solely responsible for it, as the conditions in which we live can no longer be blamed on Austria-Hungary, the Nazis, or the Communists. These 35 years of life in a free society have brought the people of Central Europe unprecedented freedom and prosperity, the opportunity to travel, and to integrate into the family of European nations, strengthened by institutions such as the European Union and NATO. Also, we began to discern finer shades than just the dichotomy of dictatorship and democracy. We engaged in the debate between liberal democracy on one hand, and democracy anchored in traditional values on the other hand.

The seemingly idyllic landscape of Western democracy appeared to some to be the final phase of history, having nowhere to improve.[4] However, disruptive voices have always been impacting us, and increasingly so in recent times. The threat of human-caused global warming has become clear to broad public. The end of the last decade, with the COVID pandemic, brought a stark lesson in the fragility of global civilization. Waves of refugees remind us that wars and poverty continue to rage beyond Europe's borders. They also remind us that Western prosperity, built partly at the expense of the rest of the world, cannot be justly distributed without reducing our entitlements.

These crises fuel populist movements, characterized by a nationalistic and isolationist 'ostrich policy.' Furthermore, these crises are causing a disturbingly rapid shift towards unrestrained national egoism and a resurgence of classical imperialism among superpowers. This resurgence disregards post-World War norms of international law; instead, superpowers view the world through the lens of their 'legitimate interests,' which extend far beyond their official borders. Ironically, this fosters unexpected mutual sympathies between them. Rather than the much-criticized bipolar world, we may be heading towards an even more dangerous alliance of superpowers, one that simply divides the world into spheres of influence.

---

[3] David Václavík, Dana Hamplová, and Zdeněk Nešpor, "Religious Situation in Contemporary Czech Society," *Central European Journal for Contemporary Religion* 2018/2, 99–122.

[4] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1992).

Does all this corroborate the claim that “the whole world is in the power of the evil one” (1 John 5:19)? And is Paul correct that we should “not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers” (2 Cor 6:14)? Before we subscribe to these quotations, we should remind ourselves that as Christians, we are followers of Jesus Christ. His title, which translates to “anointed one” or “appointed to a task”, refers to a Davidic king. To confess Jesus as the promised, expected, and ultimately realized “anointed one”, has therefore always been a political confession. Jesus certainly did not fulfil many of the expectations of his contemporaries, and proclaiming him as Christ always requires a significant measure of the Holy Spirit. Yet his mission pertained to the political conditions of his time. To Pilate’s question, Jesus replied that his kingdom “is not of this world” (John 18:36). Although not *of* this world, it is destined *for* this world, encountering, clashing with, and transforming it.

It may well be that we have reached the end of an era. After all, why should the optimistic idea of linear progress and growth be true? Our situation is perhaps much more similar to that in which the Church Father Aurelius Augustine lived and worked. At the beginning of the 5th century, he witnessed the Visigoths sacking Rome, a civilization that formed Augustine’s horizon. In response, he embarked on his major work, *The City of God*.[5] According to it, the community of Christ’s followers lives in the midst of the *civitas terrena*, “a secular city” of this world until the second coming of Christ. The *civitas Dei* often clashes with this world because it neither flees from it nor fully conforms to it. With this work, Augustine formulated a programme that inspired Western Christians for many centuries in their engagement with the world: they do not flee from it, yet whilst remaining in it, they turn their backs on it as it were, because they are fascinated by the Kingdom of God, await its coming and attempt to live already now according to its rules. European civilization was built on the backs of those who did not flee from the dilemmas of their time, but sought God’s face for their hope amidst them.

As the Czech philosopher Václav Bělohradský recently observed, in our media age, it is more true than ever that „whoever controls attention has power.”[6] This simple rule may explain the rise of populism, which weakens democracy by promoting leaders based on their ability to attract crowds, often through theatrical displays, rather than on the merit of their policies. In the visual spectacle of public rallies, the biblical phrase “do not be yoked with unbelievers” takes on a new meaning. It suggests we should consciously limit our attention to the trumped-up performances of politicians. By withholding the attention they crave, we diminish their power. This is not an act of escapism or isolation, but a practical strategy for strengthening our resilience and, ultimately, safeguarding democratic values for future generations.

---

[5] Aurelius Augustine, *The City of God* (Harmondsworth: Viking Press, 1972, translated by Henry Bettenson).

[6] Václav Bělohradský, public lecture at the Václav Havel Library, March 18, 2025, https://havelchannel.cz/cs/2060 (accessed 27. 3. 2025).

March 2025

Petr Sláma
Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University
Černá 9, 110 00 Prague 1, Czech Republic
slama@etf.cuni.cz

DOI: 10.14712/30296374.2025.1