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

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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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