

Resilience in a Troubled World

Proceedings of the Malta International Theological Conference III



JOHN ANTHONY BERRY
EDITOR

Resilience in a Troubled World

Design & layout by Kite Group
www.kitegroup.com.mt
info@kitegroup.com.mt

First Published in 2023 by Kite Group, Malta.

Publication copyright © Kite Group
Literary copyright © John Anthony Berry (editor)

Contributors:

Ambrogio Bongiovanni, Joel Burnell, Dorianne Buttigieg, Charló Camilleri, Mariella, Catani, Marie Louise Coleiro Preca, Eamonn Conway, Nadia Delicata, Nikki Felice, Joshua Furnal, Juan Pablo García Maestro, Kerry Greer, Tyrone Grima, Tomáš Halík, Mirosław Mróz, Piotr Roszak, Carl Scerri, Hector Scerri and Mark Joseph Zammit.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the author and the publisher.

ISBN 978-9918-23-110-2

Resilience in a Troubled World

Proceedings of the
Malta International Theological Conference
III

John Anthony Berry

Editor

Kite

Table of Contents

Introduction <i>John Anthony Berry</i>	9
1. Opening Speech <i>Marie Louise Coleiro Preca</i>	25
2. Resilience in an Age of Uncertainty <i>Tomáš Halík</i>	29
3. Braving a Troubled World. Theological Explorations of Resilience <i>John Anthony Berry</i>	37
4. Sources of Resilience in Thomas Aquinas <i>Piotr Roszak</i>	61
5. Kierkegaard as a Theological Resource for Guardini's Resilience in his Time and Ours <i>Joshua Furnal</i>	75
6. Romano Guardini, Virtue Ethics and Resilience <i>Mirostaw Mróz</i>	87
7. The Nature of Religiosity in Our Time. Being Resilient through the Courage of Interfaith Encounter <i>Ambrogio Bongiovanni</i>	103

8. Nothing Can Stop God from Reaching Us. Transcending Aggressive Popular Sovereignty: Romano Guardini and Raphael Tjihuis, O.Carm <i>Charló Camilleri</i>	119
9. Resilience in an Age of Screens. The Challenge of Online Presence <i>Nadia Delicata</i>	133
10. Learning to Sail on the Open Sea. Bonhoeffer on Resilience <i>Joel Burnell</i>	151
11. Kenosis and Hiddenness. A Paradox for the Christian <i>Hector Scerri</i>	169
12. Resilience of the Marginalised. Exploring the Future of Christianity <i>Juan Pablo García Maestro</i>	179
13. The Commodification of Resilience. Rediscovering the Virtue of Christian Hope for a Troubled World <i>Eamonn Conway - Kerry Greer</i>	197
14. Thomas Merton. A Man for his Time A Prophet for All Times <i>Dorianne Buttigieg</i>	221
15. Guardini's Concept of 'Living Unity' in the Context of the Liturgical Act <i>Mariella Catania</i>	237

16. C.S. Lewis and Resilience as Key to the Cultivation of Virtue and Christian Identity <i>Nikki Felice</i>	249
17. Nothingness and Absence as a Means of Resilience. A Dialogue between the Spirituality of Simone Weil and Thomas Merton <i>Tyrone Grima</i>	259
18. A Humane and Humanising God. Karl Barth's Foundation for a Christian Praxis <i>Carl Scerri</i>	275
19. The Awakening Church. Resilience and the People of God in Guardini <i>Mark Joseph Zammit</i>	291
Biographies	325
Index	335

Resilience in an Age of Uncertainty

Tomáš Halík

We recall at this conference three great Christian thinkers, who died 50 years ago – Romano Guardini, Karl Barth and Thomas Merton. I want to add the name of another man, – Martin Luther King, defender of human rights and civil liberty, who was murdered in the same year for his great dream about society, in which all people will live in peace, brotherhood, equality of rights and in liberty. The year 1968 was a year of great dreams and hopes, a mixture of ideologies and utopias, a rebellion against traditions and the certainties of the past. Rebellions were suppressed, uncertainty remained.

In 1968 culminated the era of “*the Second Enlightenment*” of the sixties. The awakening of the dreams of that year can be described as “*the end of the Modern Age*,” and the end of a long period of Western history that began with the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Like the year in which Europeans have entered the land of America, we symbolically referred to as the beginning of the modern period, the year 1969 when the first man walked on the moon, we can symbolically call *the beginning of the postmodern age*, the global age – or in the words of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, “planetary age.”

In the same year, a microprocessor was invented, and a new epoch of communication technologies, age of Internet emerged. I often recall Martin Heidegger’s words that the technology has overcome all

distances but has not created any proximity.¹ I have a great dream about the time when the culture of proximity between people and cultures is born, and the process of globalisation will be transformed into a culture of peaceful and mutually enriching *communication*. It seems, however, that in these years we have been far away from the fulfilment of this dream.

The globalisation process is ambivalent and represents both opportunities and risks, so it is necessary to avoid black-and-white interpretations. The globalisation process was the main factor in the defeat of world communism. The societies of “really existing socialism,” based on stated planned economies, ideological monopoly and censorship of ideas were unable to stand the test on the free market of goods and ideas. Does globalisation give rise to serious public discourse about the values, identity, and modes of cultural coexistence, or, on the contrary, does it provoke a reaction in the form of a revival of nationalism, “cultural wars,” or political and religious intolerance, clash of civilisations?

It seems that the process of globalisation *reached its peak*, but instead of a happy end of history brought the fear of entirely different endings. We are witnessing “fluid anger,” and global opposition to the elites and values brought about by globalisation. Nationalism, religious fundamentalism, xenophobia, and prejudices are combined into a growing stream of *a new populism*, and dangerous demagogues come with promises of fast and simple solutions to complex issues.

They can accurately and concisely express what think the people who do not think. The art of critical thinking and the ability to distinguish the quality of information sources is overwhelmed by the tsunami of fake news and primitive emotions of fear and aggression. Much will depend on the reaction of the world’s religions. Will the world’s religions become a tool of ethnic and nationalist controversies, thereby turning themselves into a political ideology? Alternatively, will they try to play an active role in creating a culture of communication? May we expect new confrontation of religions or a new ecumenical age?

Is there anything new in the relation between religion and politics? Ever since the Enlightenment, we in the West have been accustomed

¹ Martin Heidegger, “The Thing,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 166-165.

to regard *separation of Church and State* as the ideal model for the relation between religion and politics. Nowadays the State no longer has a monopoly of political life, and the Church has lost its monopoly of religion. We still have nation states and individual churches, but their influence is considerably reduced. The dynamic of political life is increasingly provided by various new social movements, often operating internationally, while various religious movements more supply the dynamic of religious life, often operating across the boundaries of the different denominations.

The most striking phenomenon that represents a challenge to rethink the relationship between religion and politics is political radicalism in the Islamic world that misuses religious rhetoric and symbolism. However, what we are witnessing in the Arab world is not the *politicisation of religion*, but rather the *sacralisation of politics*. Where emotions are too powerful, secular language is not strong enough to express them. So people – including secular politicians sometimes – *spontaneously reach for religious language*. However, it is a vocabulary that contains symbols, which derive power and energy from the depths of the unconscious. When a political rival is labelled “the Great Satan,” a rational solution to the conflict is no longer possible.

The misuse of religious language in politics can transform political conflicts into an apocalyptic war between good and evil – first in people’s minds and then in reality. However, in such a war the danger is that evil will be victorious. The world these days is full of monsters, chiefly because religion gets dragged into political, social and ethnic conflicts. The philosopher Richard Kearney (1954–) recalls the advice of a psychoanalyst that when people are pursued in their dreams by monsters, they should dare *to look the monsters in the face* while they are still dreaming. They will be surprised to discover that *the monsters are not unlike themselves* very much.²

It is necessary to be aware of our imperfections and negative aspects, *not to project them onto others*, but draw them back. Our Church, we Christians, need humility and repentance. In this way, we can contribute to peace with others and a better understanding of ourselves. Our job is to drive out the demons of hatred and develop the *therapeutic and healing power of religion*. Nowadays, religion is used in many places as

² Richard Kearney, *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters: Interpreting Otherness* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).

a weapon. Very dangerous is the abuse of religious emotions and the phraseology by populists and nationalists. I saw in Warsaw crowds of people with a cross in their hands, screaming anti-Semitic slogans and singing “We want God”! What kind of God do they want? I am afraid that such a god has nothing to do with the One whom Jesus called his heavenly Father.

Populism became a global phenomenon. Not only the post-communist world, but also countries with long and uninterrupted democratic traditions do not have enough resilience to populism and demagoguery – let’s recall Donald Trump’s election or unhappy Brexit. It seems that *populism is an infectious disease*. When the *immunity of the human body is in order*, infectious diseases are not as dangerous. However, how the immune system of our societies is working?

According to Pope Francis, the great prophet of our time, *the Church should serve as a “field hospital”* in today’s world.³ I think this metaphor needs to be further developed. The churches, as well as the university and many communities and initiatives in the civil society, should jointly address the diagnosis, prevention, therapy and recovery of infectious diseases of our civilisation, especially populism that makes people silly and cruel. Our society needs moral resilience. It looks as if European Christianity stands on the threshold of another of its historical metamorphoses.

John Paul II and Benedict XVI brought to a dignified end a long chapter in the history of Christianity. The central theme of the previous epoch was *coming to terms with modernity*. However, the modern age is over. Perhaps a particular type of Christianity is indeed coming to an end in Europe. With Pope Francis, a new stage is beginning. It seems the beginning of, with new emphases. Alternatively, to put it more cautiously: The pontificate of Pope Francis could open a new chapter of the modern history of the Church in certain circumstances.

The reforms of the Second Vatican Council would have been unthinkable without the efforts of the great theologians of the 20th century. It strikes me that the reforming pontificate of Pope Francis also urgently needs the support of the painstaking work of today’s theologians. It needs a renewal of theology and a deep renewal of

³ See Pope Francis, Message to mark International Nurses Day (12 May 2020), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200512_messaggio-giornata-infermiere.html

spirituality. I am deeply convinced that the thinkers who died 50 years ago brought a prophetic inspiration for the postmodern Christianity of our time. I see Thomas Merton to be a pioneer of spirituality for a new ecumenism, for a broader and deeper exchange of gifts between East and West, between Christianity and the Eastern spiritual tradition.

Romano Guardini was a prophet of the end of modern era and the beginning of a new period in human history. The civil courage of Karl Barth and Martin Luther King brought an inspiration for a future public theology, for resilience in the hard times of seductive power of dangerous ideologies. I propose as an important part of the theology for today and tomorrow a “kairology” – the art of reading the signs of the times, theological hermeneutics and a critical interpretation of the events in current history and culture.

Our moral duty is to seek and find in the crisis of our time opportunities, to understand and to interpret the current events as a challenge, as a message from the Lord of history, to see crisis in the Church and in society as *kairos*, as the time to think deeply and to act courageously. When my non-believing friends ask me, what faith is and what it’s good for, I reply that faith gives one the strength to accept reality entirely and, in its entirety, because it is based on the conviction and experience that there is a meaning to reality, that our life is not a succession of accidents nor – in the words of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* – “a tale told by an idiot... signifying nothing.”⁴ Faith is the confidence that in every life situation there is meaning, opportunity, and hope.

So, we do not have to despair and flee from reality however complicated and harsh it may be. Nor do we need to dress it up in illusions. That is why I believe that faith is the ally of realism and critical thinking and the enemy of superstition, prejudice, and an illusion. It is the courage of truth. So, what can we do? The first thing that strikes me is to consider anew the cultural and political implications of what we profess when we recite the Apostles’ Creed – and put it into practice.

I am afraid that many Christians these days say the creed as if they were informing God and their neighbours about their religious opinions. However, the creed is not so much about our beliefs, our religious convictions – it more about accepting specific *commitments* and existential attitude. If I confess my belief in one God, I commit myself

⁴ See William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* (London: Hadder and Stoughton Ltd, 1974), Act 5, scene 5, lines 16-27.

to struggle against the idolatries of our time, against the sacralisation of power and against the false gods in the public space. In the name of monotheism, the belief in one god, we oppose the money-theism, the idolatry of money.

“I believe in God the Father” means that I promise to accept all people as my brothers and sisters, as sons and daughters of the same father; I intend to relativize and overcome all frontiers between people and that I will reject all discrimination based on nationality, race, sex or religion. I want to relate a Hassidic story to you: Rabbi Pinchas asked his students how one recognizes the moment when the night ends and the day begins. “Is it the moment that it is light enough to tell a dog from a sheep?” one of the pupils asks. “No,” the rabbi answered. “Is it the moment when we can tell a date-palm from a fig tree?” the second asked. “No, that is not it, either,” the rabbi replied. “So when does morning come, then?” the pupils asked. “It is the moment when *we look into the face of any person and recognize them as our brother or sister,*” Rabbi Pinchas said. “Until we can do that, it is still night.”

“I believe in God the Creator” means: I promise to protect creation from the destructive power of humankind. “I believe in the Church,” means that I promise to do my best to help my Church to become “an institution for the peaceful utilisation of religious energy.” The Church should offer a positive alternative, in contrast with what happened in the past and what we still encounter in various parts of the world today: in contrast with the “mis-utilisation of the religious energy” and the coupling of religion with violence, nationalism and political power. Here Jesus’ words apply: “Let it be not so with you!” Do we live in a “post-secular Age”?

Unlike those who talk about the return of religion (“God is back!”), I prefer to speak about *the global transformation* of religion. It is not a matter of returning to “good old-time-religion.” The transformation of religion has surprised and shocked both the proponents of secularisation theories and the representatives of traditional religious institutions. We cannot behave as if modernity never happened. We cannot just enter the world of the past. Even the fundamentalism of the representatives of the “Religious Right” is also *a modern phenomenon* that only plays at traditional religion. A fundamentalist is a human being whose faith is too weak to sustain doubts and critical questions.

Resilience in an Age of Uncertainty

In my books, I am trying to consider *faith and doubt as two sisters who need each other* and can complement and correct each other. Faith without any doubt would lead to fanaticism, while doubt without faith would lead to cynicism. The chief message of my book *Patience with God* is this: There are moments in the history of humanity, as well as in the history of the church and in our own lives, when we are confronted more than at other times with God's hiddenness, with the silence of God. Silence is not the absence of communication. Silence is communication that can have many meanings, and which is, therefore, subject to many different interpretations.

Atheism interprets God's silence by the sentence "God does not exist," or "God is dead." The traditionalists do not hear the gentle music of God's silence but instead, go on repeating the old formulae. Emotional piety drowns out God's silence with its ardent alleluias. Agnostics shrug their shoulders uneasily. However, a mature faith is capable of enduring God's silence and hiddenness. The dark nights in our personal lives and in history are *kairos*, an opportunity to purify our faith from naïve religious illusions and ideologies.

Faith as I understand it is the courage to enter the cloud of Mystery and live with mystery. Faith, hope and love are three arts of our patience with the silent God. Let us not expect "certainties" from faith, in the sense of simple answers to complex questions, but have the courage and perseverance to live with mystery and with open questions amidst the paradoxes of life. In the temple of our world, we must preserve the light of hope, even when the oil is running out. Faith, hope and love are three arts of our resilience in an age of uncertainty.