

# Resilience in a Troubled World

Proceedings of the Malta International Theological Conference III



**JOHN ANTHONY BERRY**  
EDITOR

# **Resilience in a Troubled World**

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III

**John Anthony Berry**

Editor

**Kite**



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# Introduction

John Anthony Berry

The Faculty of Theology at the University of Malta hosted an international conference over three days, with the purpose of delving into the subject of resilience in a world facing a myriad of challenges. The ultimate objective was to encourage partnership and facilitate the establishment of a more empathetic and responsible society and Church.<sup>1</sup> The conference aimed to initiate dialogue and collaboration with society, acknowledging that the issues faced by our world are a shared adversary that necessitates a joint effort in response. Moreover, the subject was examined within the context of a person's journey through the sea of life, where one encounters turbulence not only from external factors like winds and tides metaphorically speaking, but also from internal factors, i.e. within oneself.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Faculty of Theology, in collaboration with the Archdiocese of Malta, held a conference at the University of Malta Valletta Campus from 7 to 9 November 2018. The inaugural address, entitled "Resilience in an Age of Uncertainty," was delivered by Professor Tomáš Halík at The Oratory located in St. John's Co-Cathedral, Valletta.

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis in a recent discourse addressed to members of the Religious Association of Social and Health Institutes (ARIS) on 13 April 2023 emphasised the importance of remaining vigilant and alert, as allowing bitterness and sourness to permeate one's heart can cause significant harm.

## Resilience in a Troubled World

The primary aim was to prompt contemplation on a significant topic and to seek answers to stimulating questions: What is the definition of resilience? Would you describe yourself as resilient? Have you been inspired by individuals who embody resilience, or conversely, those who lack it? Which factors, institutions, or entities have contributed to your personal resilience? Are you currently offering support to someone who is facing formidable challenges and needs resilience to persevere? Certainly, many factors are worth considering, including family and friends, faith communities, nature, spiritual practices, art, and others. In summary, the purpose of hosting this conference was not just to pose inquiries and uncertainties, but rather to offer solutions in an ongoing pursuit of presenting a brighter future, especially for those who may feel unsure about their own prospects.

The term “resilience” embraces a plethora of connotations across a diverse array of fields, spanning biology and engineering to business and sports. Yet it is precisely this multifaceted nature that emphasises the significance of a word capable of serving as a valuable asset for society, the Church and Theology in general. However, this term must be safeguarded from the insidious influence of “emptiness” that can often accompany it.

Resilience can be met with a wary eye from a considerable swath of individuals, particularly when analogous expressions gain popularity, ultimately transforming into little more than a slogan. Such a circumstance results in the term being overused and exploited to the point of being violated by the very trends that once sought to endorse it. Frequently, the word is devoid of any authentic spirit, appearing insipid and trite. It merely serves as a hollow utterance, a means of showcasing one’s relevance to others. Although it may be repeated with great frequency, the true essence and soul of resilience often remain unexplored.

This volume features the proceedings of a conference that sought to examine ‘resilience’ while proposing a fresh interpretation in reference to three towering theological figures: Romano Guardini (1885–1968), Karl Barth (1886–1968), and Thomas Merton (1915–1968) on the fiftieth anniversary of their passing. One here learns that although resilience is commonly linked to the virtue of hope, manifested through perseverance and determination, a theological interpretation of the

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term prioritises its fundamental relation to faith. It is the latter that propels and inspires change and transformation.

Resilience in this light is not simply resistance or endurance, but a catalyst for change through discernment and transformation. The conference endeavoured to explore the significance of incorporating resilience into theological discourse and reasoning as well as to exercise resilience in society, in the Church and in theological discourse. In this light, what lies at stake is the ability to adapt and to identify ways of dealing with change.

At the conference, the emphasis was on resilience during an era of unpredictability, where the significance of life was the main focus. Here one recalls the words of the Apostle Paul who in times of difficulty, speaks of finding joy, and encourages the Philippians to “rejoice in the Lord always.”<sup>3</sup> In the context of the Christian faith, joy surpasses a mere emotional state or fleeting happiness. It rather embodies a fundamental inclination and attunement towards the selfless nature of God as demonstrated through Christ. Joy is therefore an essential element in the fabric of life that is formed through placing one’s trust in God, in communion with and through Jesus Christ.<sup>4</sup>

From this perspective, it is incumbent upon all individuals to cultivate a spirit of gentleness and perseverance, as well as the ability to be flexible and versatile. The practice of resilience enables everyone to enhance and refine both their physical and spiritual resources, but also requires recognition of its necessity and consistent training and implementation. Starting with small achievements, resilience can be developed and applied in every challenge encountered. Resilience is characterised by the capacity to confront the shattering of a situation or path, and the willingness to confront one’s own wounds. In other words, resilient individuals also exhibit patience, recognising the futility of seeking immediate restitution for losses or injuries.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Philippians 4:4. New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition. All subsequent citations are from this version.

<sup>4</sup> See Søren Kierkegaard, *The Gospel of Suffering and the Lilies of the Field*, trans. D. Swenson and L.M. Swenson (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1948); Clive Staples Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1954).

<sup>5</sup> On this theme, see Mary Jane Ryan, *The Power of Patience: How to Slow the Rush and Enjoy More Happiness, Success and Peace of Mind Every day* (London: Bantam, 2004); Margaret Whipp, *The Grace of Patience: Discovering the Spiritual Abundance of Waiting* (New London, Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, 2019).

The first day, which included an official presentation of the theme, was held at St John's Co-Cathedral, a striking gem in Valletta, Malta's capital city. The conference commenced with an opening address by the convenor of the conference here undersigned, followed by a welcome speech by Her Excellency Marie Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta.<sup>6</sup> The event continued with Professor Tomáš Halík's inaugural lecture on "Resilience in an Age of Uncertainty." Professor Halík is a distinguished sociologist, President of the Czech Christian Academy, and a Templeton Prize recipient, having his books published in 18 languages.

The venue for the inaugural lecture, the Co-Cathedral's Oratory, was particularly fitting, as it houses Caravaggio's masterpiece "The Beheading of Saint John the Baptist," which depicts both vulnerability and resilience. This artwork is not only the largest canvas Caravaggio ever painted but also the only one signed by him in 1608. The audience was also graced by the presence of His Lordship Monsignor Joseph Galea-Curmi, University Pro-Rector Godfrey Baldacchino as well as other distinguished guests. The performance by the harpist Mr Jacob Portelli was exceptional and simply heartening as he presented three musical pieces, Sarabanda by Nino Rota, Gitana by Adolphe Hasselmans, and Metamorphosis composed by Philip Glass.

Over the subsequent two days, specifically on Thursday, 8 November and Friday, 9 November 2018, the conference progressed with six sessions consisting of established and emerging speakers hailing from Malta, Italy, the United States of America, Ireland, Johannesburg (Africa), the Netherlands, Spain, and Poland providing insights and ideas on the theme. Following each session consisting of two presentations, the audience had the opportunity to analyse, differentiate and exchange ideas regarding the results and explanations related to the concept of resilience. Emerging scholars were also given an opportunity to participate in the conference and present their own research and discoveries on the topic of resilience. The conference concluded with a presentation by Professors Eamonn Conway and Kerry Greer titled "The Commodification

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<sup>6</sup> Marie Louise Coleiro Preca was still holding the position of President of the Republic during the Conference in November 2018. Her term in office ended on 4 April 2019.

## Introduction

of Resilience: Rediscovering the Virtue of Christian Hope for a Troubled World.”

In the first contribution titled “Braving a Troubled World: Theological Explorations of Resilience,” John Anthony Berry (University of Malta) delves into the depths of the human condition and the individual responsibility to confront life’s challenges. Despite acknowledging the daunting nature of predicting the future, humans must avoid the trap of complacency when confronted with adversity. The virtue of resilience, therefore, becomes crucial in empowering individuals to move from passive observers to active agents of change. This paper unfolds in three stages. Firstly, it endeavours to delve into the significance of incorporating resilience into theological discourse and reasoning. Furthermore, it proposes reflecting on the transformative work of the towering theological figures Romano Guardini (1885–1968), Karl Barth (1886–1968), and Thomas Merton (1915–1968) in their respective contexts, and the invaluable lessons we can draw from their teachings. Finally, the paper puts forward faith as a form of resilience that can be cultivated through theological inquiry and contemplation. Essentially, the paper seeks to address a series of pertinent questions that arise in this context, offering a thoughtful and insightful exploration of the topic.

Piotr Roszak (Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń) sought to explore Thomas Aquinas’ sources of resilience. After having distinguished related concepts including adversities (*adversitas*), difficult tasks (*arduum opus*), trials (*perturbatio*), or afflictions (*tribulatio*), Roszak affirms that Aquinas’ reflection on resilience was contained in his view of the virtue of fortitude, which is characterised not only by attack (*aggredi*), but also by resistance (*sustinere, resistere*). The paper analysed two types of resilience in Aquinas’ thought, its resources, and its manifestations. On the one hand, moral resilience is based on the aforementioned virtue of fortitude, which regulates human behaviour in the face of great evil and fear. Here, resilience mainly consists of “accomplishing tasks” and “overcoming fear.” On the other hand, the focus was on showing how grace contributes to the increase of “power in/through weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9) thanks to the theological virtue of hope, which helps integrate life into a long-term project.

Joshua Furnal (St. Patrick's Pontifical University, Maynooth) discussed Romano Guardini's concept of resilience in relation to Kierkegaard who serves as a theological resource. The paper attempts to establish a constructive link between Guardini and Kierkegaard via Cornelio Fabro, an Italian Thomist who was also a close reader of Guardini. Furnal explains that for Fabro, Kierkegaard reminds people that they search in vain for 'the living and true knowledge of God' when they rely solely upon disinterested abstraction. For Kierkegaard, people only come to know God through Jesus Christ and through the knowledge of their suffering before God in Christ. A suggestion is made here that Fabro's reading of Kierkegaard highlights the importance of the imitation of Christ as the goal of human flourishing, and how following Christ in modern times requires both denying oneself and affirming works of love as the distinguishing mark of one's friendship with God.

Next in line, Mirosław Mróz (Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń) presents his contribution on Romano Guardini and virtues. He argues that despite the fragmented nature of the postmodern world, unity and harmony are still attainable. He situates the discourse on resilience in the light of virtue ethics which provide a safe path to achieve "the perfect life, freedom, and beauty," as it overcomes oppositions, weaknesses, slavery, division, and separation. Mróz examines the definitions of a new notion of virtue by analysing three selected virtues: Courage (*Mut*), Recollection (*Samling*), and Justice before God (*Die Gerechtigkeit vor Gott*). He affirms that Guardini's perspective does not isolate virtues from the traditional approach, but preserves their critical intuition while accentuating their continuity and novelty. Mróz's presentation takes inspiration from Polish theologian Czesław Bartnik's characterisation of Guardini's philosophical system as "the Scholasticism of the living concrete (*universale concretum*)."

Ambrogio Bongiovanni (Pontifical Gregorian University) follows with a presentation on "Religiosity in Our Time. Being Resilient through the Courage of Interfaith Encounter." The objective of the paper is to address Romano Guardini's thought-provoking insight on the nature of religiosity in the postmodern era, as presented in his essay *The End of the Modern World: Power and Responsibility* (*Das Ende der Neuzeit. Ein Versuch zur Orientierung* [1950]). To provide context

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for Guardini's inquiry, the paper examines the current state of religiosity by posing a series of questions and suggesting a possible solution. Specifically, the paper explores how religiosity has evolved in the secular age and how the Christian Revelation can teach us about resilience amidst the prevalence of religious and cultural pluralism, secularism, and fundamentalism on a global scale. While the Church advocates for dialogue as a means of living the essence of Christian faith in today's world, it also requires a fundamental shift in our approach to religious practice and a reevaluation of the meaning of the "person" in relation to the "other," not just as a human being, but also as a subject of faith. Ultimately, the paper seeks to offer insights on how dialogue can help us overcome the challenges of our troubled world and build a new world while trusting in the *eschaton*.

Charló Camilleri (University of Malta) in his paper titled "Nothing Can Stop God from Reaching Us.' Resisting Aggressive Popular Sovereignty" explores resilience as a sign of spiritual strength by investigating the experience of Italian born Romano Guardini and Dutch Carmelite Raphael Tjihuis both living in Nazi Germany. Camilleri explains that Guardini was among the theologians who directly confronted Nazism in his writings during the political crisis, and his Catholic worldview was strongly opposed to Nazi ideology. In 1939, the Berlin University abolished Guardini's position in the Protestant Theological Faculty. Similarly, in 1940, Raphael Tjihuis was arrested by the regime in Mainz for expressing his views on the political crisis in personal letters to family and friends in the Netherlands while preparing for Mass. This paper highlights the resilient personal experiences of both Guardini and Tjihuis in the face of Nazi ideology in their writings. Camilleri explains that while Guardini's academic works differ in genre and style from Tjihuis' diary, this contribution highlights their shared conviction that theonomy instils wisdom and courage to preserve personal freedom in authoritarian systems.

Nadia Delicata (University of Malta) explores resilience in an age of technocracy in which she delves in the challenge of online presence. This paper examines the paradox of whether genuine human encounters and relationships can be formed through screen interactions or whether excessive screen time is contributing to a

crisis in relationships that requires the development of new forms of resilience. These questions are explored not only from a human sciences and philosophical perspective, but also from a theological standpoint, as recent Church documents suggest that Christians can and should witness Christ through their digital presence. As the Church incorporates digital technologies into its pastoral practices, this paper offers guidelines for evaluating the appropriate use of different tools in ministry. It argues that effective evangelisation requires a process of inculturation, whereby the language of the times is learned and spoken well. The act of evangelisation is also a matter of resilience, as the most authentic paths for sharing the Good News in an increasingly ambiguous world must be discerned.

Joel Burnell (Evangelical School of Theology in Wroclaw) in his paper titled “Learning to Sail on the Open Sea” examines Bonhoeffer’s teachings on resilience. This paper discusses two images of resilience presented by Bonhoeffer. The first is Antaeus, a mythological figure who draws strength from the earth. Bonhoeffer used this image to emphasise the importance of living fully in the present, rather than seeking to escape reality. The second image focuses on Bonhoeffer’s search for “solid ground” in the face of the modern crisis. Ultimately, he concluded that the only solid ground is the living person of Jesus Christ, who provides a dynamic environment for believers to live in. This environment, or Christ-reality, is characterised by a dialogical view of providence, where believers participate in God’s reconciling work in the world. Bonhoeffer understood this as a form of practical mysticism, where believers learn to sail on the open sea of life, rather than seeking solid ground. The ultimate goal is a state where life becomes a dance, and the dance becomes life.

Hector Scerri (University of Malta) writes about “Kenosis and Hiddenness: A Paradox for the Christian.” His conference paper explores the paradoxical nature of Christian prophecy in today’s troubled world. Christians, Scerri affirms, are called to be missionary-disciples and spread the Good News through their words and actions, as part of their baptismal vocation. However, this vocation also requires self-abasement, following the example of Christ who was self-forgetful. This paradox of prophecy also involves a certain degree of hiddenness at times. The paper delves into the complexities of this paradox, exploring the tension between the call to be a herald



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of the Good News and the call to emulate Christ's selflessness and hiddenness.

Juan Pablo García Maestro (Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca, Spain) explores the theme of resilience in view of the poor and today's throwaway culture. Referring to Pope Francis' programmatic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, this paper perceives resilience as an ecclesial responsibility. The reflection follows in three sections. The first section addresses the tension between mysticism and social commitment, with the aim of exploring faith in the God of Jesus Christ in light of the world's current state. The author emphasises that those who claim to speak about God and believe in him must also listen to the cries of those suffering in the world, as failure to do so would render their theology as mythology. The second section focuses on demonstrating that the Church's service to the world is directed towards everyone, with a preferential emphasis on those suffering from the throwaway culture and exclusion. The author argues that the Church must consider the marginalised as its treasure, as failure to do so would lead to a mediocre and lukewarm Church. Finally, the third section analyses three prophetic speeches given by Pope Francis to social movements.

Dorianne Buttigieg (University of Malta) writes on Thomas Merton as a man for our times and a prophet for all seasons. This paper explores the contradictions and complexities of Thomas Merton, a contemplative monk who had a talent for communicating with people. Merton's writings earned him a household name and his travels took him as far as the Far East in an East-West dialogue. Through his inward conversion, Merton embraced the complexities of the mundane world and opened up the domains of contemplative life to ordinary men and women. His messages constitute a legacy particularly relevant in the twenty-first century. Merton's response to the eventful and tumultuous world of his days from a contemplative perspective is examined in relation to our contemporary world. The Christian response to the challenges presented by the world is to engage with it in dialogue, embrace it resiliently, and transform it creatively.

Mariella Catania (University of Malta) examines Guardini's concept of 'living unity' in the context of the liturgical act. Romano Guardini, an Italo-German priest believed that worship leads individuals to encounter the Truth, which gives them the power to face the difficulties

of the outside world. Guardini believed that liturgy, as symbolic action, comprises both the spirit and the flesh, and he re-discovered and helped people experience the unity between the two in the liturgical act. He believed that the liturgy was the highest act of the person and a means of transforming personal will into divine will. Guardini was concerned about the individualism and subjectivism prevalent in European society, and he sought to overcome these attitudes both in society and in the Church. The paper outlines how Guardini's approach to liturgy can equip individuals to live-in-the-gaze and contemplate the Truth, while also remaining engaged with the real world and its problems. The paper also asks whether our liturgical action today is helping us encounter the Truth and equipping us to be resilient in our troubled world, fifty years after Guardini's death.

Nikki Felice (University of Malta) explores C.S. Lewis and resilience as key to the cultivation of virtue and Christian identity. This paper explores the Christian apologist C.S. Lewis's view on the purpose of suffering and the cultivation of resilience for the development of virtue in the human soul. Lewis believed that life on earth is a spiritual battlefield where we cultivate either virtue or vice, preparing us for our heavenly reward or disqualifying us completely. As a Christian Platonist, Lewis believed that sensory experience is a mere shadow of the Real that lies beyond the veil. However, he was also in tune with the darkness and suffering that both believers and non-believers undergo. Lewis asserted that every moral choice the Christian makes either affirms the life of Christ within or denies it, and as we choose the good, we become Christ-like. The three theological virtues of faith, hope, and love are essential bridges that keep us clinging to God in times of trouble. Without these virtues, we experience spiritual death. This paper aims to explore how resilience is central to the cultivation of virtue within the human soul and how it is necessary for us to be transformed into Christ-likeness, which is required to enter the kingdom of heaven.

The title of the following paper, written by Tyrone Grima, is "A Dialogue Between the Spirituality of Simone Weil and Thomas Merton: Nothingness and Absence as a Means of Resilience." This paper examines the similarities between the spiritualities of Simone Weil and Thomas Merton within the context of resilience. The authors offer insights that are valuable to contemporary society,

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especially in the face of adversity and hardship. Both Weil and Merton belong to the apophatic school of spirituality, where they believe that the divine can be encountered through the pain and darkness of the mystical experience. They share the notion of the absent God, who is paradoxically present in his absence, and it is through the transformation of pain that resilience is fostered. The methodology of the authors involves withdrawing from the illusions of grandeur that cause social pain and empties the ego to make space for the encounter with God. Weil and Merton were politically involved and applied their spiritual insights in their outreach to the afflicted and the marginalised. This paper will use intertextuality to create a dialogue between the primary and secondary sources of the authors, presenting a theology that is relevant and profound to the contemporary audience. The spirituality of nothingness becomes a tool of healing and wholeness, offering hope to proceed bravely in a world that is still a beautiful gift from the Creator despite being torn apart.

The topic of Carl Scerri's writing is the *esse sequitur operari* axiom in Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*. Specifically, Scerri argues that Barth's work rejects the analogy of being and introduces a new way of being. This paper examines the mentioned axiom's implications for man's role in history. Barth's rejection of the analogy of being marks a turning point for natural theology and theology of history, as he asserts that God reveals himself to man through his actions in history rather than being relegated to a *cognitum* acquired through human intelligence. God's cognoscibility is the effect of his choice to reveal himself, and man has no possibility of knowing God outside of this choice. Barth argues that the knowledge of God follows the *esse sequitur operari* logic, which subverts classical scholastic thought. The paper explores the consequences of Barth's axiom for man as a being in history. Man's reception of a truthful knowledge of his own *esse* through the event of Revelation produces a new mode of being and a new *operari* in history. Man's action and resilience in history are the result of his *esse* being liberated through God's Revelation, which permits him to discover a new mode of being in history as a free and resilient human subject. This paper highlights the historical and existential implications of Barth's axiom, which has clear consequences for man's role in history.

## Resilience in a Troubled World

Mark Zammit (Comillas University, Madrid) speaks about the awakening Church, reflecting on resilience and the people of God in Guardini. This paper explores Romano Guardini's anticipation of the Church being viewed and lived as the people of God, and how his thoughts on this theme enabled him to be resilient in the face of changes in his time. While Guardini did not fully embrace this concept, his theology influenced *Lumen gentium's* depiction of the people of God. The paper examines the societal and ecclesiastical challenges of secularisation and Nazism that influenced Guardini's resilience. It analyses the concept of the people of God as the key to his resilience, rooted in Jesus and the community of believers. Guardini's vision of community participation within the Church is a significant contribution to this image of the Church. Finally, the paper shows the relevance of Guardini's ideas to Pope Francis' contemporary vision of the people of God, and how they address present-day ecclesial challenges in society.

In the concluding lecture, Eamonn Conway and Kerry Greer (Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick) highlight the role of Catholic educators in building resilience and offer psychological and theological perspectives. This paper discusses the widespread use of metaphors of resilience across various sectors and argues that their adoption may be premature, misguided, or harmful to mental and physical health. It also critiques the current trend of training individuals in resilience as a skill, which presupposes knowledge of human consciousness and cognition that may not be founded. The commodification of resilience as a skill has become a lucrative industry despite the lack of consistent definition, validity, and reliability of the construct of resilience and measures of the effectiveness of resilience training. The paper suggests that an approach grounded in the Christian virtue of hope may be more appropriate than the current emphasis on resilience. Lastly, it seeks to integrate psychological perspectives with theological insights into the virtue of hope as developed by Karl Barth, Thomas Merton, and others to construct a different anticipated future to that of a troubled world.

Upon listening to the various contributions at the conference, it becomes apparent that resilience plays a crucial role in a theological context. First, having resilience is vital for individuals of diverse

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backgrounds to face their fears and challenges and attain purpose in their lives. It is a *sine qua non* for both every day and spiritual life. As Thomas Merton highlights in his book, *The Seven Storey Mountain* (1948), confronting anxiety instead of avoiding it is the first step towards discovering one's purpose in life and fulfilling one's calling. I like the ingenious way the Benedictine monk David Steindl-Rast expresses his views of facing challenges: "People who have faith in life are like swimmers who entrust themselves to a rushing river. They neither abandon themselves to its current nor try to resist it. Rather, they adjust their every movement to the watercourse, use it with purpose and skill, and enjoy the adventure."<sup>7</sup>

Second, resilience in a theological context involves the recognition that it is not solely an individual effort, but rather the result of the workings of the Spirit of God. It is therefore important to explore the interrelated concepts of vulnerability and fragility. Jean-Louis Chrétien, a French philosopher, distinguishes between vulnerability, which refers to the susceptibility to external harm that causes injury, and fragility, which pertains to the unique manner in which a specific object or person may break.<sup>8</sup> Vulnerability necessitates care, while fragility requires accompaniment. Through discernment, individuals can learn to overcome their fears and approach the future with positivity, even in a constantly changing world.<sup>9</sup> Accompaniment is crucial in enabling people to recognise and cope with their fragility, thus promoting their own capacity for resilience.

Thirdly, resilience is not merely a theoretical concept, but a practice of Christian faith. It is achieved through reconciliation – *with oneself* by transcending limitations and daring to move beyond them, *with others* by acknowledging the limitations of humanity, and *with God* by

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<sup>7</sup> David Steindl-Rast, *Gratefulness, the Heart of Prayer: An Approach to Life in Fullness* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984). He is an author and lecturer on contemplative life, having spoken extensively in the United States, Europe, and Asia.

<sup>8</sup> See Jean-Louis Chrétien, *Fragilité* (Paris: Minuit, 2018).

<sup>9</sup> The 15th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *Instrumentum Laboris* for the Synod 2018, # 2: "In discernment, we recognize a way of life, a style, a fundamental attitude and also a working method. [...] Discernment leads us to recognize — and become attuned with — the action of the Spirit, in true spiritual obedience. In this way, it becomes openness to new things, courage to move outwards and resistance to the temptation of reducing what is new to what we already know. Discernment is a truly spiritual attitude."

accepting his love that precedes us. Only through this process can true resilience be achieved – a mending of brokenness to create wholeness, the transformation of shatteredness into unshatterable strength, and a movement from sorrow towards a deep and abiding joy.

These proceedings aim to provide a glimmer of hope to our gloomy world and demonstrate that we can live in the present moment as individuals who are continuously surprised and grateful. Thomas Merton offers solace with his words, stating that if one accepts that God is infinitely greater and that he must reveal himself, they will find peace and rest in him.<sup>10</sup> No difficulty is insurmountable, and no suffering is pointless. C.S. Lewis' words offer further insight in this regard. He says that God speaks to us through our joys and conscience but uses our pains to shout and awaken a deaf world.<sup>11</sup>

In conclusion, I would like to express my gratitude to the Department of Fundamental and Dogmatic Theology for selecting the theme and to the Archdiocese for all unwavering support. I would also like to extend my thanks to Monsignor Victor Zammit McKeon on behalf of the St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation for his kind assistance, and to the Malta Tourism Authority for providing hospitality packs for our international guests. Additionally, I am grateful to Cassar Camilleri Ltd, a joint venture between Marsovin and Master Group, for generously sponsoring La Torre wines for our refreshment. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the contributions of my colleagues, including the then Faculty Officer Ms Gillian Cachia and secretaries Bernardette Azzopardi, Christabel Cassar, and James Bonnici, as well as the International and Erasmus Office, Conferences and Events Unit, Valletta Local Council, Rev. Dr Kevin Schembri, Alda and John Anastasi, Jesmond Schembri, Martin Musumeci and Dr Rebecca Janelle Wellman.

To introduce what follows, I would like to suggest a relevant text on the theme of resilience, taken from the Apostle Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians: "So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), 97: "As long as I am content to know that He is infinitely greater than I, and that I cannot know Him unless He shows Himself to me, I will have Peace, and He will be near me and in me, and I will rest in Him."

<sup>11</sup> Clive Staples Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 91: "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

## Introduction

nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.”<sup>12</sup> This passage can bring joy to our hearts, which can be expressed with a smile. Indeed, sometimes our joy produces a smile, but at other times, a smile can be the source of our joy.

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<sup>12</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:16-18.