Resilience in a Troubled World

Proceedings of the Malta International Theological Conference III

JOHN ANTHONY BERRY

EDITOR

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Introduction

Over the last decade, Seligman's Positive psychology movement has underpinned an increase in government-level interest in the subjective wellbeing of populations; specifically in the potential health benefits (physical and mental), of complex cognitive-emotional states such as happiness, subjective wellbeing, and related constructs such as resilience. (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Diener, 2000).[1] The focus on resilience, reflected across society, is in part fueled by an explosion in the academic resilience research literature (Bonnanno, Romero and Klein, 2015), aided and abetted by numerous articles, podcasts or similar in the less than rigorous popular media, and mirrored in a tsunami of references to resilience at every level of society and in both private and public sectors.

There are a multitude of definitions of resilience but thematically many focus on individual and/or organisational capacity to 'bounce back' from adversity or stressful events. Individuals, families, public and private sector organisations both small and large, are encouraged to enhance their own or their organisations' resilience and to invest

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[1] This article is written in APA format.

in resilience training with the aim of promoting aspects of their health, happiness, and subjective well-being. Ponzi-like, there are even secondary training courses that 'train the trainers' to pass on valuable insights, knowledge, and practices, such as the manipulation of mental schema via cognitive restructuring (Ellis, 1962,1973; Beck 1963, 1967, 1987, 1993) that the purveyors claim will equip students to enhance their own, and others' resilience *for a fee*. In short, resilience, like some other components entangled with the positive psychology movement, is well and truly commodified and subject to market manipulations.

In the first part of this paper, we argue that the vogue for resilience training is premature and based in part on misplaced confidence by governments and public alike in the completeness, i.e., the integrity, of the current state of knowledge in the scientific fog that surrounds the multifaceted construct of resilience. We are particularly concerned with its prevalence among and influence upon young people in educational settings through state-sponsored programmes.

We therefore exhort consumers of resilience training to take a step back and to consider, or at least acknowledge, the serious, and well-publicised limitations of research methodologies deployed in social sciences in general (Ionnidis 2005; Sheldrake, 1998). These limitations should be made explicit and constrain both the claims made by researchers about the benefits and applications of research into resilience and related topics, and equally inform the inferences that may be drawn by lay users of research. We will refer briefly to a few specific critiques of some of the more common misperceptions about resilience to illustrate our perspective. We would stress that there is no doubt in our minds that some of the people who take resilience training courses get trained in something, and may even benefit in some way by practising coping tactics such those informed by cognitive behaviour therapy, but we are less certain that this training specifically enhances the totality of the complex combinations of cognitive, emotional and behavioural responses to real life events that is simplistically labelled as resilience.

In the second part of the paper we explore the Christian virtue of hope and consider the compatibility of this virtue with current practices in resilience education. We conclude by arguing that formation in the virtue of Christian hope should take precedence over secular resilience education in Christian settings.

The Difficulty Defining Resilience

The label resilience has somehow accrued perceived social and financial value even though as Frank Furedi (2014) argues, "it is a highly contested concept and there is little agreement of its meaning. Definitions of resilience are predicated on the agenda of its promoters." There is a major problem with the psychological literature on resilience in that no-one has developed a 'gold standard' for resilience measurement. How could they? There is no agreed definition of this multi-faceted construct. Many constructive critiques of resilience research highlight the intangible nature of the complex, multi-dimensional construct of resilience; this intangibility is in part the source of the multifarious definitions and confusing findings. Some authors see resilience as a personality trait, set of traits, or attributes in personality, which underscore an individual's ability to rebound from adversity (Block and Block, 1980; Connor and Davidson, 2003; Herzberg and Roth, 2006).

The sheer volume of personality traits purported to be associated with or antecedents of resilience beggars belief: Kashdan (2017) lists 39 ingredients of resilience, many of which are themselves complex trait constructs. Other authors focus on successful outcomes, e.g. Masten's 2001 definition of resilience as a class of phenomena characterised by good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development. Windle (2011) attempted to resolve the unwieldy range and scope of definitions of resilience and concluded that 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" (p. 152). Kimhi and Eshel (2015) argue that psychological resilience is neither a personality trait or an interaction between self and degree of success, nor do they agree it is a process; these authors propose that psychological resilience is *"a state of mind that enables people to readjust and continue their lives despite traumas and adversities"* (p.181).

The Unreliability of Data

The difficulty in defining resilience detracts from the reliability and validity of research studies into aspects of resilience and specifically

resilience training efficacy. As is the case in many areas of Health Psychology and Social Psychology, a considerable proportion of resilience research and resilience training is informed by self-report studies or participant responses to questionnaires. Some of these questionnaires do present as being reliable and valid but only within the constraints of the probably simplistic operational definitions that inform their aetiology (Connor and Davidson, 2003; O'Neill 1999). In a typical self-report study, the participant responds to targeted questions with what are supposed to be honest, factual, and accurate statements about their past, present and future. In the area of 'resilience' questions this might require participants rapidly to rate their agreement with a set of statements about what they have done, do, or think they will do, in response to some stressor(s).

The limitations of such research are well documented (Orne, 1962, 1969; Rosenthal, 1978; Sheldrake, 1998; Ionnidis 2005; Howitt and Cramer, 2011) and have led to much scepticism about claims that arise from the studies. There is a raft of participant and design-based biases that influence participants' responses: for example the social desirability and self-serving biases, which lead people to portray themselves in the most favourable light. Design issues such as how questions are framed, sampling biases, scaling floor and ceiling effects, and cultural differences may distort responses to any questions that require people to recollect or predict their behaviour (Brown, 2014).

The cognitive loads that arise from the superficially simple task of responding to a set of questions about say, your reaction to past stressful events is quite daunting, a load exacerbated by the speed with which participants typically respond: a matter of seconds. Kashdan (2017) illustrates this mental load with the following example, which requires participants to indicate their level of agreement with the statement: "I usually come through difficult times with little trouble."

"Think about the mental gymnastics required to answer this one question. You must recall difficult times. You must remember who you were, what you did, and how you felt before each time. You must contrast the two. And then you must make a mental comparison to some arbitrary reference point of whether the change that occurred can be construed as troublesome and if so, how much. You must do all of this while taking into account the retrospective bias of trying to view the world from how you felt before experiencing

stress, strain, and difficulty. This is no small task to ask of anyone and keep in mind that this is usually one of a dozen questions being asked. Most people answer this question in 2-3 seconds. So, should we trust this approach to studying resilience?" (post in Psychology Today, May 2017).

As is indicated above, it is common practice in resilience research to ask people to engage in mental simulations about hypothetical events and to indicate how they might respond to these events. One example of this is the rich literature on peoples' responses to social dilemmas. Our reluctance to trust the external validity of such practices is certainly justified by research that convincingly demonstrates the disjoin between how people behave in real life and the accuracy of self-reported predictions as to their likely behaviour. In a fascinating recent study by Bostyn, Sevenants and Roets (2018), the responses of participants who were required to make what they believed was a real-life decision to administer a painful electric shock to a single mouse or else allow five other mice to receive the shock were compared with those participants who were asked to respond to a hypothetical scenario in which they had to resolve the same dilemma. The results indicated that participant responses to hypothetical dilemmas were not predictive of real-life dilemma behaviour. Participants were twice as likely to refrain from shocking the single mouse when confronted with a hypothetical versus the real version of the dilemma.

Many resilience training programmes involve positive cognitive restructuring; i.e., shifting the focus and balance of mental simulations from negative to more positive 'outcomes' (Bonnano and Burton (2013)). A number of resilience training programmes still cite claims made about 'Positivity Ratios' (Frederikson and Losada (2005),) which claims were amplified in more general readership literature such as Federicksons's (2009) '*Positivity: Top-Notch Research Reveals the 3-to-1 Ratio That Will Change Your Life.*' Yet these claims have been well and truly trounced in academic circles since 2013. In essence, the authors developed further the ideas embodied in the 'broaden-and-build' theory (Fredrickson, 1998, 2001, 2004) whereby positive emotions are posited to create silos of thought and action that in turn build resilience that act as a buffer against potential emotional stressors.

Frederikson and Losada (2005) claimed they had empirical evidence that individuals with a positivity ratio of between 3 to 12 positive

cognitive-emotional states for every one negative cognitive emotional state will 'flourish,' but those whose ratios of positive to negative states lie outside these limits will 'languish.' The foundations of these claims were dismantled by Brown, Sokal, and Friedman (2013) who not only demonstrated definitively that there was no empirical support for the positivity ratio, they also concluded that Fredrickson and Losada's claim (that they had demonstrated the existence of a critical minimum positivity ratio of 2.9013) to be 'entirely unfounded' and informed by inappropriate and in part erroneous use of the mathematical tools of nonlinear dynamics.

An emphasis on the positive may detract from 'resilience' in the real world. Forgas (2014) in an excellent review of the benefits of negative affective and cognitive states argues that both negative and positive mental manipulations are necessary for realistic appraisals, less ego-centrism, and effective behaviour in the real world. As Forgas states "It is now increasingly recognised that positive affect, despite some advantages, is not universally desirable" (230).

The Commodification of Resilience and the Resilience Industry

Unfortunately, critiques, qualifications and appeals for caution expressed by some of the more sceptical articles on the topic of resilience and resilience training would appear to have limited impact on some of those who peddle training courses in resilience and/or related concepts. The resilience industry is flourishing, and continues to offer a range of products such as self-help books, corporate events, conferences, workshops, online or face to face training, mentors, and life coaches, the value of which in part derives from consumer belief that the products are based on 'science' and thus informed by scientifically rigorous research that demonstrates the efficacy of the products (Coyne, 2017).

Organisations and individuals alike have bought into the lucrative resilience training industry: they have done so in the absence of convincing evidence that such training is effective or warranted. Governments appear to regard the acquisition of resilience by all levels of society as a panacea for societal ills and as a protection against as yet unknown threats. In the UK, resilience training programmes are regarded as cost effective solutions to perceived problems in the diverse

domains of education, crime, health, mental health, and terrorism (Furedi, 2014). To date, over a million US military personnel have been subject to Seligman's Positive Psychology Resilience training techniques (Smith, 2018) and the UK resilience project has resulted in thousands of children being trained in psychological wellness tactics. Universities and Colleges are encouraged to invest considerable resources in promoting resilience in order to cope with an expected hike in mental health problems in tertiary education.

Consumer confidence in resilience products would appear itself to be resilient even in the face of counter evidence or critical analyses that convincingly refute some of the claims on which the resilience training industry is built (Brown, Sokel and Friedman, 2013; Leppin, Bora, Tilburt, Gionfriddo, Zeballos-Palacios C, et al 2014; Wong and Roy, 2017).

Consumer faith in the scientific rigour of some resilience research is most certainly misplaced: the substantive number of recent critical reviews, comments, and analyses of the psychological resilience literature that embody and/or express concern about the applications of resilience research, resilience training programmes, and/or methodological issues that arise from the multiple perspectives and definitions of resilience is overwhelming. (Schwarz, 2018; Davoudi, 2018; Teodorczuk, Thomson, Chan, and Rogers 2017; Tavris, 2017; Coyne, J.C., 2013).

As Wong and Roy (2017) speculate, positive psychology in general has been subject to forms of academic protectionism that may in certain cases have facilitated a breakdown in the academic peer review process. This in turn has resulted in the publication, in both academic and more popular domains, of unfounded claims about resilience by authors who in their enthusiasm may have overstated the benefits of their findings, minimised the methodological limitations of their research, and as we have detailed earlier in the example of the Positivity Ratio, even apply incorrectly techniques borrowed from other sciences.

We stress that our concern is not with the vast body of research that attempts to study resilience. We believe that most academics and professionals who work in this area are in pursuit of genuine understanding of humans' ability to adapt to all manner of adverse events. We do nonetheless condemn the premature commodification

of resilience training products: products that have the potential to dupe consumers into a state of false confidence about their own levels of resilience and with potentially harmful consequences.

Looking at Personality Strengths:
The Statistical Significance of Hope

A promising line of research is that which has looked at *personality strengths* as predictors/promoters of resilience. Personality strengths are "trait-like features of personality, embodied in thought, feeling and behaviour, that promote adjustment and adaptation" (Fallon, Goodman, Disabato, Kashdan and Machell (2016)).

Goodman et al (2016) conducted a well-designed multiwave study that embraced nearly 800 adults from 42 countries in an effort to establish whether any of seven personality strengths (aspects of which have been regarded by previous literature as antecedents to resilience) did in fact promote resilience. The seven personality strengths were hope, grit, meaning in life, curiosity, gratitude, control beliefs, and use of strengths). Interestingly, the authors defined resilience as the distress experienced in response to adverse life events *over the course of 3 months.*

This is very much in line with Kimhi and Eshel's (2015) definition of resilience as "the current psychological outcome of the ongoing conflict between stress-resistant strength and vulnerability of an individual or a community, following a potentially traumatic experience," but goes further in that they explicitly consider pre-trauma levels of personality strengths in order to determine whether possessing a particular personality strength led to resilience. The results are fascinating in that of all the personality strengths studied, only the personality strength of *hope* emerged as having a statistically significant potential to promote resilience. The authors properly bound the validity of these findings with a discussion of the constraints of the research methods, but nonetheless their findings are exciting.

In psychological literature, the construct of hope has long been associated with goals, and goal attainment (Snyder, 1994). In the Snyder model of hope, hope levels are seen as a function of cognitive strategies that optimise the number of pathways by which goals may be achieved, and with the emotional will to effectively implement identified pathways. Everson, Goldberg, Kaplan, and others (1996) explored this construct when they asked 2,428 middle-aged men in

Finland to respond by indicating their agreement with two statements: a) "I feel it is impossible to reach the goals I would like to strive for," and b) "The future seems hopeless, and I can't believe that things are changing for the better."

The participants were categorised as presenting with low, medium or high levels of hopelessness. After a lapse of six years, the researchers studied the death records for this experimental cohort. The mortality rate was a function of that classification, with those highest in hopelessness more likely to have died, even after age and prior health had been taken into account. Given our reservations about all research in social sciences, these results must be treated with caution, but the construct of hope has more potential than most to help deal with a troubled world. In the next part of the paper we will therefore explore theological insights into the Christian virtue of hope.

Contours of a Cultural Crisis
Pope Francis has remarked that despite all our "delusions of grandeur," especially here in the West, we seem to lack confidence about the future (*Laudato Si,*' n. 113). This is because "a certain way of understanding human life and activity has gone awry, to the serious detriment of the world around us" (*LS,* n. 101).

Last year, Irish national television broadcast an investigative documentary (RTE, 30 Jan 2017) entitled "Medication Nation" that gave some insights into what has gone awry. The programme claimed that in 2016 an estimated 1.2 million prescriptions for anti-anxiety medication were issued in Ireland, a country with a population of just under 4.8 million. That's 1 in 4. The presenter of the documentary, Dr Eva Orsmond, commented that an unacceptably large number of people in our country are "hiding behind a wall of dependency rather than facing life's problems."

We would go further and claim that in many instances people are being *encouraged* to hide behind a wall of dependency. This is especially true, we contend, of some of the misguided mental health initiatives in schools and colleges where, according to the Higher Education Authority, some 13% of all humanities students, for instance, suffer from mental health problems. Although mental health initiatives do not generally focus on chemical dependencies they tend to lay the foundations for later medication dependency. As the old adage goes,

'if enough people tell you that you are ill, lie down." It is not surprising that we see an anomalous level (statistically) of reported stress.

The Irish State is now looking to schools and to teachers in the classroom to address this rising tide of mental health challenges in our society. It has been reported recently by school principals (O'Brien 2018) that, "Significant numbers of primary school children as young as four are presenting with serious mental health difficulties such as anxiety, depression and self-harm."

Increasingly, therefore, we see the emergence of what are being referred to as 'new areas of learning' as part of the core curriculum intended to build resilience among children. These programmes draw upon existing curricula such as Physical Education (PE), Civil, Social and Political Education (CSPE), Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), and Career Guidance. Although there is passing acknowledgment of a spiritual aspect to human wellbeing, there is no specific mention in these programmes of a role for Religious Education (RE). When it comes to resilience training, however, religious faith is missing but not missed. It seems it does not meet with current resilience industry standards.

Arguably, the absence of religious education from resilience training programmes in state schools is to be expected, but is it acceptable in faith-based schools, albeit schools that are state-funded? Are these 'new areas of learning' neutral in terms of what they convey to pupils about the role of religious faith in building resilience and promoting wellbeing or are they, however unwittingly, forming pupils in the belief that religious faith and a relationship with God are irrelevant and superfluous, perhaps even detri-mental (deliberately hyphenated), when it comes to a flourishing life? Although resilience training is already extant in faith-based schools, to our knowledge no study has yet been undertaken in regard to the anthropological presuppositions underpinning it and its compatibility, or otherwise, with the Christian vision of the human person. Our preliminary consideration, however, indicates that such training programmes are operating within what Charles Taylor (2007, 543) calls "a self-sufficient immanent order… envisaged without reference to God."

The broader questions this raises we cannot consider here. In what follows we wish to pursue the observation made earlier that the personality strength of hope emerges from psychological studies as

possessing statistically significant potential to promote resilience. We intend to demonstrate that an authentic Christian understanding of hope can contribute to developing resilience and therefore argue that it must be foundational to resilience training in faith-based schools.

Hope: Not the Preserve of Religious People

We have seen earlier that the social sciences support the view that hope can play a key role in building resilience and that it has long been associated with goals and goal attainment (Snyder, 1994). Curiously, however, the concept of hope is not mentioned in the resilience training programmes that we have considered. Yet, as Dermot Lane (2016, 59) argues, hope is not the preserve of religious people and is in fact essential to the flourishing of the human condition. He says it is implicit in everything that we do at least at the pre-reflective level of human awareness and activity. Similarly, Karl Rahner (1973, 244) distinguishes "theological hope" from "hope in general," the latter he considers "a basic 'existential' or essential factor in human living as such."

Drawing upon the work of Gabriel Marcel, John Macquarrie (1978, 4) suggests that "a tacit hopefulness… seems to be diffused through all human existing and acting." He describes this in terms of a pre-reflective hope that becomes conscious in particular moments and activities. He describes hope as an attitude, disposition, posture or stance, we might wish to add, a sensibility, one takes up towards life and suggests that it has emotional, biological, volitional and intellectual dimensions. The volitional and intellectual dimensions of hope as described by Macquarrie closely resonate with the research by Snyder referred to earlier but we cannot explore this here.

It needs to be said that viewed from a theological perspective, pre-reflective hope as described by Lane, Macquarrie and Rahner can be understood to possess religious significance. It can be an act of implicit trust in God's providence and also, even if unrecognised as such, an experience of God's grace in one's life. What follows is an attempt to summarise what we can say about hope from the perspective of Christian faith.

The Eclipsing of Christian Hope: Our Own Fault as Christians?

Pope Francis has reminded us that there have been many damaging, what he calls, "adulterated," forms of Christianity (*Evangelii gaudium*, n.

94) and this is also true in terms of how we have presented the virtue of Christian hope. And so, to some extent perhaps it is our own fault as Christians that those designing resilience training programmes do not see Christian hope as an indispensable component.

In one of his best-known poems, *The Cure at Troy*, the Irish Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney adapts a verse of Sophocles: *History says / Don't hope this side of the grave*. We Christians have, according to Macquarrie (1978, 1), been far too "one-sided" in our way of thinking about Christian hope, presenting it as an "other-worldly affair," thereby validating Marx's critique of religion as "the sigh of the oppressed creature, the opium of the people." Impoverished accounts of Christian hope have, according to Lane (1996, 59), pulled down the blinds on the presence of evil, suffering and tragedy in our world and distracted people from their personal and social responsibilities.

In contrast, Macquarrie urges us to consider Christian hope as a "total hope," touching on all aspects of human life both individual and social. Similarly, Lane calls upon us to demonstrate that hope is a meaningful response to life's negative experiences and a refusal to allow despair to triumph.

Misplaced Hope in God as Rescuer

James Alison (1996, 162) highlights one important way in which Christian hope has lost its 'street credibility.' For many of us who are Christians, our operative spirituality can be such that acceptance of our dependency upon God is, at best, sporadic. We tend to turn to God only when faced with personal turmoil or suffering that we cannot otherwise deal with.

Often, God can be found wanting. Just when we need God, God appears to remain silent, distant, unmoved by our plight, either unwilling or unable to intervene or to hear our anguish. And so, our faith in God falters, perhaps even collapses. Insofar as faith survives, it leaves us with diminished expectations in regards to God's interest in our wellbeing.

The Book of Job is the classic account of human-divine wrestling in the face of adversity but we also find Job-like human-divine encounters portrayed in popular culture. For instance, the TV series *The West Wing* has an episode in which the fictional US President Bartlet, played by actor Martin Sheen, rants against God, whom he describes as "a

son of a bitch, a feckless thug." This is on account of the untimely death of his (Bartlet's) executive assistant and close confidante, Mrs Landringham. Bartlet catalogues all that he has done for God and asks why that "hasn't been enough to buy me out of the doghouse?"

Bartlet's encounter with God is Job-like in part only. It portrays the personal crisis that results when bad things happen to good (or indeed apparently 'bad') people. It differs in that, as we know, Job finds peace in surrendering trustfully to the majesty and mystery of God:

I know that you can do all things,
and that no purpose of yours can be hindered.
I have dealt with great things that I do not understand;
things too wonderful for me, which I cannot know (Job 42: 2-3)

Bartlet, on the other hand, defiantly turns on his heel and walks away, telling God to "grow a pair of horns." The point here is that Christian hope can lose credibility when God seems to fail to hear our pleas.

In the Apostolic period, according to Alison, Christians had to struggle to let go precisely of the misleading notion of God as a rescuer, a 'superman' figure, who would return to ensure that good people are saved and their enemies die a horrible death. Such notions were consoling in time of persecution but they failed to grasp the radical nature of the 'sea change' in regard to hope that occurred in the Christ event (Alison, 1996, 194).

What those seeking a rescuer-type God fail to grasp, Alison says, is that *this side of the grave* death-like experiences are unavoidable: experiences such as suffering, illness, countless injustices and humiliations, daily encounters with a whole range of intimations of our mortality. As Karl Rahner puts it, "we die throughout life" so much so, that death, when it eventually comes, is really only "the death of death" (Rahner, 1961, 85).

Christ's death and resurrection do not absolve us from having to endure such moments. In fact, in a lecture entitled "Christian Pessimism" delivered in November 1983 just months before his death, Rahner argued that perplexity and a sense of being lost are permanent existentials of human life and, although they find new forms, they can never be wholly overcome in history. [As an aside, in this lecture, interestingly, he also criticises *Gaudium et spes,* to which he himself contributed, as "too euphoric in its evaluation of the human condition" (1993, 613).]

God has *Already* Rescued Us

The essence of Christian hope, then, lies not in reliance upon a God who might intervene in our lives if God were to find us sufficiently pleasing or if we were to undertake sufficient acts of penitence that would persuade God of our worthiness. In the wake of the incarnation we come to realise that that's not how God works.

This is because God has *already* intervened. We are *already* rescued. The Christ event presents us with the utterly unmerited, incalculable and unconditional love of God for each one of us, such that we no longer have to be preoccupied with our own goodness, or badness; with our worthiness, or lack of it (Alison, 1996, 168). God's rescuing of us has occurred in history as a free, irrevocable gratuitous act on God's part. The challenge is to accept this reality and to live from and in light of it, such that we actively strive to live lives worthy of such gratuitous love (Philippians 1:27).

We return for a moment to the poem by Seamus Heaney referred to earlier. The full verse reads:

History says, Don't hope
On this side of the grave.
But then, once in a lifetime
The longed-for tidal wave
Of justice can rise up,
And hope and history rhyme.

Heaney wrote this poem in honour of Nelson Mandela and it is a worthy tribute to one in whose life hope and history rhymed at a decisive moment for the people of South Africa. Christians believe, however, that the decisive moment when the longed-for tidal wave arose for all of humanity was in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Christ's resurrection means that death, and all the unavoidable mini-deaths we have to endure as part and parcel of creatureliness, no longer need to hold terror for us. This is because death no longer needs to be considered as the moment of our annihilation. Similarly, in moments of crisis and adversity we can come to know that we are held by a love that is stronger even than death itself. This is why St Paul can say, "Death, where is thy sting; grave, where is thy victory?" (1 Corinthians 15:55-57).

Hope and Personal Responsibility

Let me just add something which may be important in order to avoid a misunderstanding. In claiming that we are already rescued I do not intend to commit the sin of presumption. What I have said is that death and all the mini-deaths we experience through life no longer *need* to hold terror for us. They no longer *need* to be considered intimations of our eventual annihilation. But whether or not they do is a choice for us to make and a decision for us to take. I also said that we are invited and challenged to accept the new reality brought about by the Christ event. We are not compelled to do so. We are free to accept God's rescuing of us, and also free not to.

Living the Virtue of Christian Hope

If we *do* accept to live in accordance with the virtue of Christian hope then when confronted with adversity that we cannot control or overcome, we can 'dig deep' to unearth a level of confident patience and perseverance that will sustain us (Rahner 1973, 250).

Christian hope can help us to be docile in the face of adversity. Where appropriate, Christian hope can also give us the courage to resist, challenge and triumph over adversity. Circumstances that seem hopeless to some people will seem less so to those living in accordance with the virtue of Christian hope. As Jürgen Moltmann (1967, 20) says "hope becomes a passion for the possible (Kierkegaard) because it can be a passion for what has been made possible," made possible, that is, by the death and resurrection of Christ.

John Henry Newman's prayer, entitled *The Mission of My Life* expresses the stance of the hope-filled Christian when faced with adversity:

Therefore, I will trust Him, whatever I am, I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him, in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him. If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him. He does nothing in vain. He knows what He is about. He may take away my friends. He may throw me among strangers. He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide my future from me. Still, He knows what He is about.

Christian hope is hope *for* God and *in* God. As Jones and Barrie (215, 78) note, it provides an abiding confidence that there is a path in and through which we can find happiness. The task of Christian education, they point out, is to deepen young people's trust that their

lives are safe in God's hands, that God has a plan for them and to help them to discern their future according to this plan. This, we suggest, is an excellent description of resilience training should look like from a Christian perspective.

In Conclusion: Can Resilience Education and the Christian Virtue of Hope be Reconciled?

At first glance it seems difficult to reconcile secular approaches to resilience with the Christian virtue of hope. Resilience training generally encourages young people to grow in *self*-confidence and *self*-reliance. In contrast, as Alison (1996, 167) puts it, perhaps a little too starkly, Christian hope can only begin when we learn *not* to hope in ourselves.

That said, there is an emphasis in resilience training on encouraging young people to recognise when they need the help of others and to have the humility to seek it. This can be linked easily to the rich understanding of the interdependency of all creatures we find in *Laudato Si'* (n. 86ff).

Resilience trainers point out that what is particularly damaging to young people is their sense of isolation and that what they value most is connectedness with others. Pope Francis has also identified isolation as one of the most destructive elements of contemporary culture. However, he goes on to show that it is rooted in a flawed notion of personal autonomy, in an immanentism that "allows no place for God" (*Evangelii gaudium*, n. 89). Similarly, Gallagher (2016, 59) speaks of our lives today as "being cushioned within an illusion of autonomy" whereby we mistakenly think we are in control and that everything is functioning smoothly until we have what he calls, "a brush with impotence" and "emptiness invades."

A key question, then, seems to be whether resilience training reinforces or challenges a notion of personal autonomy that is damaging and diminishing of people because it operates entirely within an immanent frame. As we saw, resilience training focuses primarily on developing people's coping tactics and by providing them with insights, knowledge, techniques and practices that enable them to readjust and continue to live their lives despite traumas and adversities. In so doing, the issue is whether such training blocks people from coming to recognise that their lives are ultimately held and sustained by God's unconditional love and this alone. If people already have adopted a

trustful disposition towards God in their lives does resilience training respect this and build upon it or serve to replace it? Whichever way we answer these questions we can conclude the following:

From the first part of our paper we can conclude that much of the science underpinning resilience training is shaky and unreliable. This alone should give pause for serious thought. From the second part of the paper we can see that Christianity has a unique contribution to make to resilience training: not a product or a package but a person, the resurrected Christ.

As Moltmann (1967, 22) says, "hope makes the Church a constant disturbance in society." Christians don't sit around waiting for God to rescue them but rather, knowing themselves already to be rescued, become God's partners in the on-going work of rescuing those who still live without hope in the shadow of death (1 Thess 4:13).

In conclusion, the resilience industry stands both as an indictment of Christianity and as a provocation to it. It is an indictment in that if we Christians were doing our job properly we would put much of the resilience industry out of business. At the same time, it is a provocation, better put, an exhortation to a more authentic form of missionary discipleship whereby we ourselves *become* hope for a troubled world.

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