

# Editorial

## Anthropology of Hope<sup>1</sup>

The articles in this issue of *Communio Viatorum* are all expanded versions of papers presented at a conference held in Prague in May 2023, with the theme “Anthropology of Hope”. This was the final conference of a six-year Charles University Centre of Excellence Research Project, directed by Professor Ivana Noble of our Protestant Theological Faculty, involving people from that faculty and also from the Catholic Theological Faculty.<sup>2</sup> The project dealt with Theological Anthropology in Ecumenical Perspective, and each year a conference was held dealing with some sub-themes of the topic, with speakers from different Christian traditions sharing their expertise. The final conference was no different in this respect.

This issue is the first of our journal to come out since the death of Professor Jürgen Moltmann in June 2024, a very good and already much-missed friend of our faculty and one of the great theologians of the post-war period. This year indeed marks the sixtieth anniversary of the first publication of his highly influential book *Theologie der Hoffnung (Theology of Hope)*, in which he sought to give a Kingdom-centric view of what it means to hope in today’s world. Moltmann’s insistence on openness to the eschaton remains a key contribution, but the question of where and how to find hope persists, and thus it is important to respond to this question theologically.

Around Europe and across the world elections or election campaigns seem to indicate a world in which people are losing hope, in their societies and in their politicians. A number of politicians have tried to use as a backdrop to their campaigns a song from the 1990s by D-Ream, “Things Can Only Get Better”, but many voters are appearing to be saying to them that as far as they

---

1 This editorial and this issue of *Communio Viatorum* are outcomes of the work of the Charles University Research Centre programme No. UNCE/24/SSH/019, “Theological Anthropology in Intercultural Perspective”.

2 Articles developed from other papers presented at the conference can be found in the Catholic Theological Faculty’s journal, *AUC Theologica* 13:2 (2023), available at <https://karolinum.cz/en/journal/auc-theologica/current>.

are concerned at best things might not get a whole lot worse. This is not the place to go in to an analysis of why we are seeing the death of hope, but it does suggest that putting hope in penultimate things (whatever slogans one chooses to believe in) will always fail to provide the ultimate eschatological hope of which Moltmann wrote so profoundly.

And yet, despite all the societal indications of hopelessness, most people most of the time do cling on to some form of hope, because most people have in their own actions and in the actions of others caught a glimpse of the good, of transcendence, of another possible world. Like the sun in our part of the world over the past few months, glimpses of this may be very fleeting, but it is enough to serve as a reminder that behind the clouds and the greyness and the suffering, there is light. In this sense, human beings are hopeful and hope-filled. And because human beings are imbued with hope, any theological anthropology must engage with the topic.

The theme of hope is not easy to deal with from an academic perspective, since it roots itself in the present with an eye to a future which is necessarily indeterminate. Hope is not the same as naivety, a specious belief that, in the classic words of Voltaire's Pangloss, echoing Leibniz, all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds.<sup>3</sup> Hope can be as easily in spite of, rather than because of experience. Again as Moltmann insisted, it is a refusal to be reduced to the immediate, and a recognition of the presence of transcendence, thus of God. It was with this struggle between often very difficult situations and a belief in the transformative power of God that many of the papers delivered in our conference dealt. They were not trying to escape from reality, with the blinkers of an unfounded hope, but asking what it means to hope in situations of despair, of violence and abuse and oppression.

We begin with an article by Lenka Fílová, who works with the parents of adult disabled children, drawing on the psychotherapeutic approach of the Austrian founder of logotherapy, Victor Frankl. Although Frankl does not explicitly deal with hope very much, the article argues that in his search for meaning, there are implicit signs of hope. When meaning is found or assigned, then there is the possibility of hope.

The second article by Professor Peter De Mey of KU Leuven presents us immediately with a challenge to any too easy move to hope. Through an

---

3 Pangloss is a character in Voltaire's satirical picaresque novella *Candide*, with a Leibnizian optimism.

analysis of some recent literature on the subject, he considers the child sex abuse crisis that has rocked the Roman Catholic Church, in Professor De Mey's native Belgium and in so many other countries around the world. To speak too quickly of hope in such circumstances can appear yet another form of the Church ignoring the survivors. The article looks at what theological possibilities there are for speaking of hope in a way that takes seriously and includes the survivors.

One of the questions implicit in Peter De Mey's article is about what would be necessary to offer hope for these survivors. The next article does not seek directly to answer this question, but perhaps suggests one way forward. The article is by the Swedish ecumenical theologian Sara Gehlin, and it takes up the Constitution of UNESCO, produced only a few months after the final end of the Second World War. In that constitution, there is the declaration that just as war begins in human minds, so must the defence of peace. Over against the construction of "imagined enemies" (something we sadly see only too clearly in the Russian invasion of Ukraine), the article suggests that hope can be formed in and through the development of an empathetic imagination.

Our fourth article is by a Serbian Orthodox theologian based in Sweden, Fr Milutin Janjić, who examines the sermons broadcast through Radio Liberty by the noted Orthodox theologian Fr Aleksander Schmemmann, focusing in particular on Fr Schmemmann's analysis of a poem by Joseph Brodsky. The article suggests that the sermons offer a unique form of hope (not least because it was impossible to know if anyone ever heard them). It also looks at the power of language to convey the experience of God that lies at the heart of any Christian hope.

The final article in this issue of *Communio Viatorum* is by a Romanian Orthodox theologian, Viorel Coman. In his text he deals with the most pressing issue facing the world today, the need to restore the world in which we live so we and other species will be able to continue to dwell in it. He does this through an investigation of the contribution of the well-known Romanian scholar Fr Dumitru Stăniloae, especially his theology of the sacramentality of creation. The article argues that this theology can help in developing a Christian ecology whose central idea is of non-possession or non-domestication of the world by human beings.

These articles, which challenge us to think about what we understand by hope and how we can practice it, form this first issue of a new year of

our journal. This new year sees some changes for us too. Most notably, the journal will now be published by Carolinum, the press of Charles University, and it will become open access, thus expanding the possibility to read the articles in our journal to a still wider public. But of course as often change comes with a tinge of sadness. For the editorial team it marks the end of a long and uniformly excellent cooperation with Petr Kadlec, who expertly dealt with all the different fonts and scripts and tight deadlines in setting out the journal for publication. This work, because it was always so well-done, perhaps passed most of our readers by, but we would like to take this opportunity to express our deep gratitude to him for all that he has done for us. It also marks a change in our relationship with ATLA, who have hitherto been the main source offering online access to our journal. This too has been a beneficial collaboration, and we are glad that they will continue to host the back numbers of our journal, allowing access to articles for scholars and other interested readers around the world. And we look forward with hope to the next phase in the long history of our journal, and to you, our readers, accompanying us on that journey.

**Tim Noble**

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

DOI: 10.14712/30296374.2024.2