

1 John's Contribution To Contemporary Research On Organisational Resilience

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ABSTRACT

While the church is often colloquially described as one of the world's most resilient institutions, a literary review into the concept of organisational resilience reveals a lack of theological reflection about such resilience. Many churches and Christian Faith-Based Organisations operate in vulnerable, uncertain, complex and ambiguous environments where they engage in building community and environmental resilience as part of integral mission. In light of such work, the noted lack of theological reflection on organisational resilience contributes to a further silencing of these organisations' identities in their action and reflection on resilience. Consequently, this article aims to inspire theological reflection on organisational resilience by engaging in a theologising process in which a thematic analysis of the ethics in 1 John is brought into conversation with contemporary organisational resilience research. The article places spiritual and physical life at the centre of the Johannine community's purpose and at the heart of what their organisational resilience, if they had used such a term, ought to protect. The article argues that 1 John's emphasis on love, justice and flexible discernment systems sustained by the Spirit and supported by clear boundary setting against destructive forces fits well with the characteristics identified as contributing to organisational resilience within contemporary research.

Keywords: Organisational resilience, faith-based organisations, Johannine Community

INTRODUCTION

During recent decades, the term resilience has transferred from natural sciences into social sciences and mushroomed to, among other things, also include the concept of organisational resilience (de Bruijne et al., 2010). One explanation for this mushrooming is our need for holistic responses to the global spread of volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) events and contexts (Comfort et al., 2010, p. 4). While the church is often colloquially stated to be one of the world's most resilient institutions, a literary review of organisational resilience research reveals not only a lack of theological reflection, but also a lack of organisational resilience research specifically focusing on faith-based organisations (FBOs). The boom in research on organisational resilience renders these research gaps concerning, as many churches and Christian FBOs operate in VUCA environments where they are not only engaged in building community and environmental resilience as part of integral mission, but also actively identify the need to include spiritual capital in resilience theory and practice¹. Previous research within religion and development research, as well as missiology, shows that FBOs operating in secular development cooperation and social services often risk becoming instrumentalised within secular development cooperation frameworks. The result is a mutedness of their faith-based identities and internal secularisation or mission drift (Clarke, 2008; Clarke & Jennings, 2008; Deacon & Tomalin, 2015; Gregg, 2000; Lin, 2018; Toll, 2025; van der Merwe, 2021). One of the solutions suggested in previous literature to solve this problem points to the need for increased bilingualism between the theological and secular languages and narratives these FBOs use, both in relation to their operational fields and their management (Deneulin, 2009; James, 2009; Freston, 2015; Wilson, 2017; Toll, 2025). In light of these findings, there is a real risk that the noted lack of theological reflection on organisational resilience further contributes to the silencing of these organisations' faith-based identities and observations, rather than bilingually empowered action and reflection on organisational resilience.

As a contribution to a more bilingual approach to organisational resilience, the aim of this article is consequently to inspire theological reflection on organisational resilience. By placing a New Testament Theology (NTT) based on 1 John in dialogue with the results of 21st-century research on organisational resilience, a theologising process is initiated with the aim of exploring how the former can contribute to the latter, at least as far as Christian faith-permeated FBOs are concerned. It is hoped that this will not only contribute to further theological reflection on organisational resilience, but also to an increased FBO bilingualism between the languages of theology and the, often secular, languages of organisational management within the area. As a second step for further research after such initiation, such theological reflection could potentially also contribute to relevant areas within practical, systematic and public theology.

After an initial description of methodology in section two, this article introduces 1 John together with a thematic analysis of the letter's ethics in section three. In section four, a framework of organisational characteristics identified as important for organisational resilience within 21st-century management research is presented. Section five provides a theological reflection of organisational resilience informed by a thematic critical reading of 1 John as well as

¹ I base this observation on my professional experience as advisor on freedom of religion or belief at the [SMC-Faith in development](#) and the organisation's involvement in the community of practice network [Kenya 4 Resilience](#) and email conversations with Dr. Silva Ferreti, independent consultant and development practitioner, responsible for the further development of a resilience framework including spiritual capital after workshops with e.g., Caritas in the Balkans as well as Kenya 4 Resilience.

contemporary resilience research. Section six offers a summary, conclusion, and some suggestions for further research.

METHODOLOGY

Positioning within New Testament Theology

Within recurring academic debates about whether academic NTT is only historically descriptive and agnostic, or both historically descriptive and also theologically proscriptive, Dunn (2009) suggests that at its core, NTT is the process of theologising rather than simply reflecting on and theoretically discussing matters of doctrine. According to Dunn, the theologising carried out by the New Testament's authors is now frozen in the texts. Such frozenness should, however, not be seen as an historical endpoint to be described, but as a beginning where contemporary theologians are invited into the ongoing stream of "theologising that flows from (and through) the NT to the present day" (Dunn, 2009, p. 14). It is in this sense of allowing a descriptive interpretative study of 1 John to flow into the hermeneutical task of applying the text's message to our circumstances (in our case, the need for organisational resilience) that the term theologising will be used throughout this article. Consequently, I aim to provide an imaginative hermeneutical contribution to theological reflection on organisational resilience nurtured by both a thematic exegetical analysis of 1 John and modern-day research on organisational resilience.

Marshall and Via concur with Dunn that NTT can never be reduced to a historical project, as all historical interpretation is hermeneutical. Consequently, a key to valid NTT is a conscious awareness of the ongoing interpretation and reconstruction carried out by every researcher (Felt; (Via, 2002; Marshall, 2004). Via further lists four factors to be included in interpretative situations concerning the New Testament:

1. Historical criticism with an acceptance that the Biblical text will be situated in a tissue of uncertainty.
2. Literary criticism attending to context, structure and form.
3. Existential interpretation.
4. The creative and constitutive role of the reader, or theologising, in Dunn's (2009) terminology.

Via (2002, p. 132) also emphasises that "no scholar could or should be expected to actualise all - or necessarily many - of the variations". Due to my own background as primarily an ethicist rather than an exegetical expert of the New Testament, I will rely on the expertise of others for factors 1 and 2 (concerning the Greek text) and allow myself to focus more on factors 3-4.

Motivations for choosing 1 John as the biblical conversation partner on organisational resilience

We do not know to what extent the Johannine community was involved in community service. Indeed, we do not even know whether a specific Johannine community ever existed. Another thing we do not know is whether the outbreaks of persecution under Roman Emperor Domitian (Kinzig, 2021, Chapter 4) directly affected the recipients of 1 John (Lieu, 2008a, p. 147). The letter was, however, written to Christians living in a setting of increased security concerns (Lieu, 2008a, p. 175). It is consequently very likely that 1 John was written to Christians who

lived in a VUCA environment. And if a Johannine community did exist, it is also likely that it underwent some form of crisis characterised by internal conflict (Anderson, 2014a, p. 279; Parsenius, 2014, p. 21). If one, with Olsson (2008), takes a pastoral view of the letter, much of its content seems to contain advice about resilience maintenance in the face and aftermath of this crisis (or other crises) aimed at preventing reoccurrences. I also suggest that the letter include themes that link well with characteristics contributing to organisational resilience. Taken together, these aspects have been my main motivating factor for choosing 1 John as a biblical conversation partner on organisational resilience.

For this article, a combined definition of organisational resilience provided by Zolli and Healey (2013, p. 7) and Comfort, Boin and Demchak (2010, p. 9) will be used to provide us with the following definition. *Organisational resilience is the capacity of an organisation to proactively adapt to and recover from disturbances that are perceived within the system to fall outside the range of normal and expected disturbances while maintaining its core purpose and integrity.*²

In the forthcoming theologising process, I will liken the recipient community of 1 John to a faith-permeated FBO. A faith-permeated FBO is founded by a religious group for religious purposes with explicit religious references in its mission statement and vision. Furthermore, it explicitly demands that its steering committee, leadership and staff (including volunteers/members) share the creed of the FBO. Religious rituals and activities play an important role in the everyday life of the FBO and are expected to be integrated into the organisation's outcomes (Sider & Unruh, 2004, pp. 112–115). 1 John's focus lies on the internal dealings of the recipient community. I therefore suggest that the letter, in a specific way, deals with this community's internal capacity to *adapt to and recover from disturbances which it has perceived as falling outside the range of normal disturbances, while still maintaining its core purpose and integrity.*

Methodological Choices

The literature on organisational resilience is vast, with a production of more than a thousand academic works (Zaplata, 2024, p. 715). Due to limitations in time and accessibility, a review of all previous research has not been possible for this article. Instead, the organisational resilience framework presented in the fourth section of this article is based on a literature review of academic works on organisational resilience published between 2010 and 2025. The books, articles and book chapters were selected based on searches in EBSCO and Google Scholar with search terms such as “organisational resilience”, “CSO + organisational resilience”, “NGOs + organisational resilience”, “FBOs and organisational resilience” and “Church and organisational resilience”. The reading of academic sources on organisational resilience stopped when saturation in the types of organisational characteristics contributing to organisational resilience was achieved. This literature review revealed a notable lack of academic studies which pay attention to the religious and spiritual aspects of FBOs in their examination of resilience contributing/hampering factors, as well as a lack of substantial theological reflection on organisational resilience.

² Note bene that the focus on systems and maintained organisational integrity and core purpose sets organisational resilience apart from resilience in individual persons. It is consequently not resilience among groups or people in general that this article is interested in, but organisational resilience as defined by a set of specific criteria. As section four describes, previous research has identified organisational attributes that strengthen this type of resilience as compared to e.g. research into the resilience of individuals.

In the article's third section, a thematic analysis of 1 John is carried out. I undertake this endeavour primarily as a Christian ethicist, more familiar with systematic theology than New Testament exegesis and hermeneutics. My scholarly expertise also lies in other disciplines than Biblical Greek. For this reason, the analysis is based on the English text in the New International Version (NIV) aided primarily by previous research carried out by Olsson (2008), Lieu (2008a, 2008a, 2014) and Bennema (2017) as well as the language resources available at www.biblehub.com. It is through my own in-depth reading of 1 John and a verifying comparison between these expert views that I have distilled the key themes of 1 John, which I identify in the article's next section.

INTRODUCING 1 JOHN

Before we can utilise 1 John as our conversational partner for theologising about organisational resilience, we need to recognise the letter's high disputability among New Testament scholars. The discussions surrounding the letter do not only concern placement, but also interpretation, origin and character. However, according to Anderson (2014a, p. 275) recent research agrees on three things. First, that the Epistles of John were written simultaneously with the production of the gospel. Without further discussing the issue of intertextuality between the gospel and the epistle, I will follow Lieu's (2008a, p. 8) position where 1 John shares the gospel's tradition without necessarily linking its writing to the latter. Second, that the Johannine tradition is autonomous, running parallel with the synoptic gospels. Third, that authorship of 1 John should be ascribed to several individuals and that it usually is dated between the years 90-110 AD (see also Mitternacht & Runesson, 2006, pp. 230–231).

Historical Constructions, Literary and Ethical Interpretations

The disagreements concerning the situatedness of 1 John also concern the historical construction of the opponents described in the letter and the identity of the recipients, issues that have a direct impact on how the letter is to be interpreted (Culpepper & Anderson, 2014, p. 2). Below, I will present four different views found in contemporary research, of which the fourth, with its emphasis on Johannine ethics, will be most relevant for my continued theologising on organisational resilience.

The majority view, which follows Brown (Anderson, 2014b, p. 50), argues that the opponents were former members of the Johannine community who left due to a docetist Christology, partly denying Christ's physical incarnation and suffering (Street, 2011, p. 1). This position has a heterogeneous view of the letters' recipients as representing several Hellenistic Jewish and Christian groups in exile from Jerusalem and sees dogmatic sectarianism as a weakness of the letter (Anderson, 2014b). A minority view, held by Olsson (2008), Street (2011) and Andersson (2014b), argues that 1 John rather addresses a community mainly consisting of Christ-believing Jews. Those leaving had returned to the Jewish community, potentially due to pressure from Jewish and Roman authorities.

A third view is taken by Lieu, who adopts a literary approach. She argues that the various historical constructions risk blinding interpretations to what the text and its structure say in itself (Lieu, 2008b, p. 805). Drawing on the explicit author anonymity of 1 John and its remarkably unified audience without social stratification, Lieu identifies a circular letter, rather than one sent to a specific community (Lieu, 2014, p. 131,140 with; Anderson, 2014b, p. 70). While seeing 1 John as deeply rooted in contemporary Jewish thought, Lieu sees little value in

constructing the exact ethno-religious mixture of its recipients. Neither does she see reason to interpret the letter in light of specific threats of persecution, even if she recognises a general context of increased security concerns and potentially implied challenges to the emperor cult in 1 Joh 4:14's naming of the Son as saviour (Lieu, 2008a). Lieu's approach does not mean there were no opponents; only that we cannot know anything about them nor benefit from attempts to construct their identities (Lieu, 2008b).

A fourth way of dealing with 1 John focuses on the letter's ethics. The Johannine corpus has been criticised for sectarianism and a lack of explicit ethics. This view is now changing through a broader application of social science criticism, and a search for implied, rather than explicit, ethical content, combined with a critical examination of previous modernistic Western assumptions. A common theme in this research is an emphasis on imitation as a disciplining ethical norm (Skinner, 2020). Van Der Watt (2014) sees the social dynamics of the ancient family as the matrix within which Johannine ethics must be understood. Ethics in 1 John are thus a product of one's relationship with the trinitarian God modelled on the social and normative system of family reciprocity in antique Mediterranean society. This creates a norm of porous and intimate sharing of spiritual and material goods and relations through fellowship (*κοινωνία*) with God and *within* the community of believers. These relations, and the maintenance of them, not rules, are the guide to correct behaviour. At the same time, this also creates boundaries against those situated outside the community. Van der Watt (2014, p. 209) and Lieu (Lieu, 2008a, 2008b) observe how the rhetoric of 1 John allows for a soft, inclusive, transformative process of the letter's "you" into its "we" and "us", primarily based on a shared belief in Christ tantamount to love in action (1 John 3:18).

Bennema takes this link between faith and action as proof of a virtue ethic whose sole purpose is to ensure physical and spiritual life, ζωή; *zōē* (Strong, n.d.-b) (John 20:31, 1 John 5:13). For Bennema (2017) the achievement of ζωή in Johannine thinking is "a sustained activity over a life time...rather than an instantaneous event" necessitating the need to "remain in him" (1 Joh 2:28). Bennema sees both the necessity and possibility of moral transformation embedded in 1 John. This moral transformation is enabled by the believer's move into God's realm and family through confession of Christ, imitation of Christ's love for the world (imitating God's ditto) and sustenance of the Holy Spirit. Lieu (2008a) supports a reading which prescribes imitation of God's love within the community. She underlines how 1 John addresses a community of believers with the view that their corporate behaviour towards each other, and the quality of their relations, is of higher importance as a reflection of God's love than individual religious experiences, intellectual convictions or a fixed rule-set.

A key tension concerns whether imitation is to be seen as a gradual process or a more instantaneous occurrence. Lieu's conclusion that 1 John invites readers to an imaginary community suggests that she sees its highly dualistic worldview as demanding a more immediate transformation, cf. Bennema. Olsson solves this tension, which he sees as embedded in the text itself, by ascribing it to a continuous and recurring change in the author's temporal perspectives caused by a strong eschatological standpoint. Given the soon coming parousia,

"...it is obvious that the Children of God cannot sin. But as soon as the situation is perceived from the recipient's point of time it becomes clear that a Child of God sometimes sins...this tension is and remains in the letter recipient's situation." (Olsson, 2008, p. 185, my translation)

I view Olsson's solution as reasonable, and if found at fault, I find Bennema's position more apt to a relevant hermeneutical process than Lieu's. I will rely mainly on Olsson, Lieu and Bennema as we continue into a thematic analysis of 1 John, even if I, in difference with Lieu,

will use the construction of a Johannine community for my continued theologising on organisational resilience.

A Thematic Analysis of 1 John

1 John resembles a herringbone braid with different interwoven themes; new nuances and depths added along the way. I suggest that in total eight major themes can be identified: (1) previous or already known/gained experience, (2) eternal life, (3) confession and forgiveness, (4) love, (5) boundary-setting to protect life, (6) children of God, (7) the not yet known, and (8) knowledge and testimony through the spirit. My detailed analysis of how these themes are introduced and interwoven throughout 1 John is depicted in this article's appendix.

I also suggest that themes 1 and 8 can be treated as a twofold pedagogical tool in line with Lieu's observation that "readers [of 1 John] are brought into a process of shared reflection on the faith and experience that they already acknowledge" (2008a, p. 48). Consequently, reminders about previous experience and knowledge gained through the testimony of the spirit braids the letter's themes together. This concerns 1 John's repeated encouragement to remain/abide in him (1 John 2:6, 2:24, 2:27-28), confirmations that this already is the case (1 John 1:3, 2:14, 2:27, 3:24, 4:13, 5:10, 5:20b) and reminders of previous experiences and commands, their renewal through the spirit (1 John 3:19-24) and already gained knowledge (1 John 1:1-5, 2:7-8, 2:13-14, 2:21, 2:24, 3:9, 3:11, 3:14, 3:22 4:14, 4:19, 5:18). These passages also constitute a constant prompting of the letter's central focus that only God, through his active love expressed in Christ, provides physical and spiritual life. It is confession of Christ and love for one another that makes this visible.

Below, I account for themes 2-5 in more depth and in an edited order as per their centrality to a thematic reading of 1 John. Given that this article aims to construct theological reflection on organisational resilience, themes 6 (children of God) and 7 (the not yet known) will be treated as sub-themes to the other major themes, which relate more directly to contemporary research on organisational resilience.

Life in Full

Olsson (2008, pp. 94–95) sees "life" and "to live" as framing the content of 1 John through their placement at its start and end. While Olsson does not explicitly identify a virtue ethic in 1 John, he concurs with Bennema that the insurance and safeguarding of life constitute its purpose and encompass both physical and spiritual restoration. According to Olsson (with Lieu, 2008a), the way eternal life is used in 1 John has a clear Jewish background, echoing Jer 31:31-34 and Ezek 36:25-28 as well as a common longing and belief during the 2nd temple period in a restoration of the covenant between God and the Jewish people. Covenant restoration included an internalised presence and knowledge of God, his spirit and will, as described in the Jeremiah and Ezekiel texts. Lieu is silent on the explicit broader understanding of ζωή but emphasises that life, as part of what it means to belong to the realm of God, including by being his children, throughout 1 John is to be understood as a communal rather than an individual experience.

Love as That Which God Prefers

In 1 John, love is seen as even more central than life and is mentioned forty-six times, constituting two-thirds of the term's usage in the New Testament (Olsson, 2008). The Greek word used stems from the verb "Ἀγαπάω, ἀγαπάω: means actively doing what *the*

Lord prefers, *with* Him (by His power and direction)” (Strong, n.d.-a, last visited 2026-05-18). In 1 John, love between believers is reciprocal, originating in God’s love for the world expressed through Christ (Olsson, 2008, p. 231). This life-giving love is meant to be imitated (Bennema, 2017) within the community in an equal manner (1 Joh 2:6 echoing Lev 19:18 and Deut 5:10, 6:5, 30:6-8,10-11,16 and Isa 56:6 following Lieu, 2008a).

Lieu (2008a) emphasises that practical love for one another (1 John 3:17-18), even at risk of life (1 John 3:16), becomes the true test and essence of God’s indwelling (1 John 3:19, 24, 4:12). While the letter uses the masculine language of brothers, this would also have included female community members. In 1 John, Christ, the one who came in the flesh (4:2) and was the saviour of the world (4:14), is the model and key to God’s love which is to take form and shape so that God can be “seen” within the community of believers (4:12). While 1 John often is described as a highly dualistic text, it also sees the universe in a cosmically holistic manner. There is no division between spiritual and non-spiritual life. Faith without practical action becomes as impossible as divine love without confession and testimony of Christ. Love is here not based on emotion or mystical individual experiences of the divine, but on loyal faithfulness translated into action. Lieu highlights how love in 1 John 2:29, 3:7 and 3:10 is impliedly connected to *Dikaiosuné*, *δικαιοσύνη*: righteousness/justice, which she translates as justice (Lieu, 2008a, p. 122). Love and justice, measured against the quality of inter-communal relations (Bennema, 2017) and ethical discernment (Koester, 2013), empowered and sustained by the Spirit (Bennema, 2017), rather than preformulated expectations or rules (Lieu, 2008a; Koester, 2013), thus become essential expressions of eternal life.

A study of love in 1 John demands something to be said about the letter’s focus on love *within* the community and apparent antagonism and silence regarding *surrounding society*. Apart from 1 John 4:14, there is no indication that either God or the community should love the surrounding world. The world, *Kosmos κόσμος*, is in 1 John’s dualistic perspective associated with opposition to God and fundamentally a negative reality (Lieu, 2008a; Olsson, 2008). The exclusive focus on the recipient community can be dealt with in three ways.

- A. The epistle encourages sectarian dynamics among Christians, moral bankruptcy and hateful attitudes towards opponents (Koester, 2013, pp. 96–97; Anderson, 2014b, p. 53; Bennema, 2017, p. 2; Skinner, 2020, p. 281).
- B. By using the bridge of implied ethics created by Bennema (2017, 4.3.5; see also Olsson, 2008, p. 289), 1 John 4:14 could be seen as an opening for extending the love of God and the Christian community to the surrounding society.
- C. By seeing 1 John as primarily a pastoral letter which deals with the challenges facing the community of believers without generating hatred for opponents, outsiders or exclusive doctrinal teaching. Lieu (2008a) takes this approach, and Olsson (2008) takes it in combination with b). Such a reading can also work as a reminder that resilience to challenges must be nurtured from within rather than draw its energy from hatred towards the other.

Boundary Setting to Protect Life

As we have seen, in 1 John, love and justice embody the life that God brings humanity back into. The dualistic character of the letter means that a strong adverse stance is taken against everything which threatens such life. A key aspect of 1 John’s boundary setting is found in 1 John 4:1-3, where the test for prophets and spirits alike is whether they confess Jesus Christ in human form. Drawing on Bennema (2017), I argue that the incarnated Christ is key to 1 John’s ethics. In 1 John’s holistic worldview, the incarnation becomes pivotal not only for eternal

salvation but also for morality and as a bridge between God's realm and Kosmos. Imitation of Christ needs to include those aspects of human suffering and joy that only the incarnation allows. To protect and redeem humanity's full life as created in the complete image of God, Christ also had to participate in the life of the fallen image so that he could lead by example and show what ought to be imitated, allowing the continued restoration of life to flow from within.

When we as Christians live to serve in the protection and restoration of full life, we also need to be prepared to embrace the whole experience of life. If Christ had not been incarnated, but so to speak excused from the most painful experiences of, e.g., the cross (cf. the arguments of the docetists) or those parts of life seen by surrounding society as of low status (e.g., childbirth and childhood), then his followers could easily be excused in the same way. The full incarnation provides no such backdoors either for Christ or for his followers. Even without a view of the opponents in 1 John as docetists, this remains a true aspect of the incarnation. 1 John's demand for confession in Christ as the one who has come in the flesh, the one to be followed and imitated also when we meet or endure low-status suffering, is, therefore, something else and more than potentially sectarian dogmatics. It is the text's litmus test for preparedness to exercise love and justice for the protection of all life in full, not only that perceived as being of high status. 1 John's view of insiders and outsiders through confession in Christ is, at the end of the day, a question about what one is prepared to do, meet, embrace and protect as part of God-given life, physical and spiritual, rather than a question of correct dogmatics.

Confession and Forgiveness

As mentioned in section 2.1, the polarity of the letter creates tension between expectations to live free from sin and its repeated emphasis on the need to confess and receive forgiveness. This bipolar movement concurs with Bennema's (2017) description of imitation as gradual sanctification and Olsson's analysis of the children of God as simultaneously unable and able to sin depending on which temporal perspective one takes. The letter's seventh theme and its emphasis that we do not yet know the fullness of what it means to be the children of God (1 John 3:2) also support this reading.

Striking in 1 John is also the egalitarian nature in which all community members are empowered to intercede for sinners. I will here go with Lieu (2008a), who chooses to focus on this egalitarian aspect rather than attempts to define what was meant by sin leading to death in 1 John 5:16. Once the recipient "you" of the letter has been included by the "we" into one "us", there is no longer any room for a religious elite in 1 John. In line with this, Koester (2013, p. 97) argues that "1 John gives self-criticism an integral place within its ethical vision."

A FRAMEWORK FOR ORGANISATIONAL RESILIENCE

In the previous section, I accounted for a thematic analysis of 1 John. In this section, I briefly summarise a framework of six organisational characteristics promoting organisational resilience before I present the theological reflection that has emanated from my cross-analysis of these two topics.

The framework for organisational resilience presented below aligns with research that takes a process-oriented approach towards organisational resilience (Stevenson, 2014; Bhamra et al., 2015; Zapłata, 2024; Kołodziej et al., 2025; Mitansha & Potangaroa, 2025).

Organisational resilience is consequently regarded as something that can be increased or decreased over time, depending on factors both internal and external to an organisation.

First, a resilient organisation needs a certain resource *flexibility or slack*. Such slack can relate to readily available or easily convertible tangible resources (de Bruijne et al., 2010; Mitansha & Potangaroa, 2025; Santos & Spers, 2023; Zaplata, 2024), but also to immaterial resources such as relations and institutional memory about how previous resilience-demanding situations were handled.

Second, resilience demands the maintenance of a *culture of reliability* by ensuring, e.g. a unity of purpose and reliable leadership, but also functional risk management systems, proactive planning and context awareness (de Bruijne et al., 2010; Dong, 2023; Kolodziej et al., 2025; Kutsch, 2023; Mitansha & Potangaroa, 2025; Santos & Spers, 2023).

Third, there needs to exist an organisational *capacity to arrive at an authoritative definition of the situation*. This includes, e.g. dynamic sense-making through the collection, analysis and real-time sharing of information; but also the identification and acceptance of doubt concerning the continued relevance of chosen courses of action or sense-making models (Boin & Eeten, 2013). Closely related to this is the fourth capacity, which concerns *organisational learning*; i.e. the ability to transfer knowledge between individual and organisation (Kolodziej et al., 2025; Mitansha & Potangaroa, 2025) as well as between instances of system shock (Santos & Spers, 2023; Wijkström et al., 2020); to nurture critical thinking and doubt to double check mission reliability (Pinheiro et al., 2022). Organisational learning also demands decentralised improvisation and possibilities to depart from enshrined rules (Boin & Eeten, 2013; de Bruijne et al., 2010; Kolodziej et al., 2025; Kutsch, 2023; Mitansha & Potangaroa, 2025); as well as an ability to live outside the comfort zone and accept certain types of failures (van Eeten et al., 2010).

Fifth, previous research shows that organisations that are well-connected and have what Stevenson calls relational resilience (Stevenson, 2014) within their formal and informal, external and internal *networks* before, during and after a resilience-demanding period manage better (Kim et al., 2021; Sovner, 2025; Stevenson, 2014). Good networks enable mutual learning, the sharing of resources and analysis of contextual changes in a way which facilitates coordination and joint hazard mitigation (K. Eisner, 2010; Kim et al., 2021; Stevenson, 2014). Networks with external actors can also provide social capital and protection against, e.g. external political pressure (Sovner, 2025).

The sixth, and last, characteristic that enables organisational resilience is a *holistic outlook* on the world and individuals, both inside and outside the organisation. Today, a range of studies emphasise the need to see organisational resilience as embedded in organisations' overall context sociologically, economically and environmentally (Comfort et al., 2010; Kolodziej et al., 2025; Mitansha & Potangaroa, 2025; Stevenson, 2014; Williams et al., 2021), as well as linked to the already mentioned capacity to nurture relations and networks. Since the COVID pandemic, there has been an increasing research focus on the interdependency between individual, team and organisational resilience, which supports the importance of taking a more holistic approach to organisational resilience (Bhamra et al., 2015; Kolodziej et al., 2025; Mitansha & Potangaroa, 2025; Roos et al., 2025). Linked to the interconnectedness between individual and organisational resilience, as well as the high importance of holistic approaches, is the observation that organisational resilience may come at a considerable cost (Comfort et al., 2010, p. 10). The desirability of resilient organisations, if separated from holistic approaches, can undermine healthy working conditions (Boin & Eeten, 2013; Pinheiro et al., 2022), hold unrealistic demands on the resilience of individuals, and fail to see systematic challenges (van Breda, 2018; Suslovic & Lett, 2023). Like all other organisations, faith-permeated Christian

FBOs need to ensure that their desire for organisational resilience does not include the cost of breaking people.

As stated earlier, there is a notable lack of organisational resilience literature which takes the specific theological, religious or spiritual dimensions of FBOs' identities and work into account. One exception is a study carried out by Wijkström et al. (2020) on the Church of Sweden's (CoS) management of the COVID pandemic, in which the authors state that the church's more holistic approach increased its capacity for organisational learning. Wijkström et al. do not specifically mention the church's rich narrative tradition and spiritual practices as part of this holistic attitude. I do, however, argue that both are important contributors to any faith-permeated FBO's holistic approach. As we saw in section three and shall see in the next section, 1 John has much to offer when it comes to anchoring these aspects of a holistic approach in a theological reflection on organisational resilience.

A THEOLOGISING DISCUSSION ON ORGANISATIONAL RESILIENCE AND THE THEMES OF 1 JOHN

In section three of this article, a thematic analysis of the ethics embedded in 1 John was presented, and in section four, a framework of six characteristics which promote organisational resilience was introduced. It is now time to theologise about organisational resilience by allowing the thematic analysis of 1 John to dialogue with the organisational resilience framework. I do this in order to discern how 1 John can contribute to our understanding of organisational resilience in a Christian faith-permeated FBO.

Previous experiences, the spirit's testimony - institutional memory and narrative capital

As mentioned, Wijkström et al (2020) do not spell out narrative capital as part of the knowledge and skill embedded in the CoS holistic approach and increased capacity for organisational learning. I do, however, argue that the key narratives of any organisation form part of its institutional memory and consequently constitute important parts of its organisational learning. As such, narrative capital could also be seen as contributing to an organisation's indefinite slack. When the author of 1 John constantly reminds the recipients of their already gained knowledge, previous experiences and the testimony of the Spirit or knowledge conveyed by the Spirit, I suggest that this both draws on, and restimulates, the community's narrative capital and indefinite slack in a holistic manner. In the case of Christian FBOs, their narratives about previous experiences and already gained knowledge about God's actions (in the Biblical narrative or as perceived by individuals within the FBO as also happening today) could also have a similar potential to nurture the spiritual and theological aspects of the organisation's resilience. While there is a need for more definitional work on the term spiritual capital, this could potentially also be a response to the requests from Christian FBOs for the inclusion of their worldviews and identities in resilience theory and practice. I suggest that when handled with due discernment and wisdom, such experiences and biblical narratives could become narrative capital, providing certain indefinite slack from which strength and inspiration can be drawn as Christian FBOs seek resilience.

Life in Full - A Holistic Approach

1 John's view of eternal life as a communal life in full, branching out from the community to the world in imitation of God's love, echoes well with the organisational resilience framework's emphasis on the need for a holistic approach to the world. I suggest that full and communal life was the *core purpose* which the original recipients of 1 John needed to safeguard to remain resilient in crisis. That purpose is equally worthy of safeguarding for any faith-permeated Christian FBO faced with a crisis to this day. The understanding within contemporary organisational resilience research that organisations are nested in bigger socio-economic and environmental contexts where they also need to foster relational resilience also links up well with a theologically anchored understanding of organisational resilience aimed at safekeeping love as loyal faithfulness to that which God prefers translated into action. By using Benemma's previously mentioned bridge of implied ethics and Olsson's view of 1 John as primarily a pastoral letter (Olsson, 2008, p. 289; Bennema, 2017, 4.3.5), 1 Joh 4:14 can be used as an opening for extending the love of God and the Christian community to the surrounding society while refuting resilience which draws its main energy from opposition and competition to the other. Organisational resilience in a Christian faith-permeated FBO can therefore not be about keeping the organisation alive at the cost of the holistic relational, social, spiritual and environmental ecosystems in which it exists.

Love as That Which God Prefers – Authentic Situation Analysis

In the thematic analysis of 1 John, we saw how big the letter's emphasis on love as equivalent to doing what God desires is. Equally, we also saw how this meant a practical and reciprocal love between believers originating in God's love for the entire world as expressed through Christ. Furthermore, in 1 John 2:29, 3:7 and 3:10, love was implicitly connected to *Dikaioσūnē*, δικαιοσūνῆ; justice. Consequently, love and justice, measured against the quality of inter-communal relations and ethical discernment, empowered and sustained by the Spirit and the example of Christ, rather than preformulated expectations or rules, were to be the essential expressions of eternal life in the Johannine community. While the focus in 1 John is on the internal dealings of the recipient community, 1 John 4:14 provides a link also to the surrounding world and its inclusion in God's saving actions.

1 John's emphasis on situation-bound and spirit-led ethical discernment fits very well with the demands for dynamic sense-making needed to boost an organisation's capacity to come to authoritative situational definitions. The letter's focus on qualitative internal relations with reciprocal love and justice as the main yardstick, rather than preformulated expectations or rules, also allows for decentralised improvisation and decision-making that constitute important aspects of organisational learning. The importance of love and justice in 1 John further speaks to the need for organisations to invest in their internal and external network relations both before and during a crisis. At the same time, 1 John's dual focus on horizontal love and justice in combination with ethical discernment could also function as a vaccine against the various risks identified as associated with being a resilient organisation and goes well with Stevenson's (2014) emphasis on contextual and relational resilience.

Boundary Setting to Protect Life – Ensuring a Culture of Reliability and a Safeguard Against Destructive Organisational Resilience

1 Joh 4:1-3 has contributed to the accusations of polemics (Lieu, 2008b, p. 805) and sectarianism (Anderson, 2014b, p. 53; Koester, 2013, p. 96) within the letter. However, if we see the letter's strict boundary setting as an effort to maintain the community's *core purpose and integrity*

in the face of the world's destructive forces, the picture changes. Lieu observes (2008a, p. 204): "1 John offers the challenge of holding together confidence in God as the ultimate creative and procreative source, with a serious recognition of the sources that oppose and that deny any confession of God's love." I suggest that such boundary-setting in Christian faith-permeated FBOs could contribute to a culture of reliability and the capacity to come to authoritative situational definitions needed for resilience. Apart from relating to demands for a culture of reliability and the encouragement of critical thinking needed to ensure mission reliability, 1 John's litmus test of prophets' and spirits' confession of Jesus Christ in human form in 1 John 4:1-3 also relates to the need to safeguard that organisational resilience is not achieved at the cost of holistic care for humans and creation alike.

Confession and Forgiveness – Organisational Learning

As we saw in the organisational resilience framework, organisational learning improves organisational resilience when it allows for critical thinking, which in turn enables double-checks on mission reliability. However, organisational learning is not only about being critical, it also demands psychological safety and acceptance of certain types of failures to enable an ability to live outside the comfort zone. Building on Koester and Lieu, I suggest that 1 John's normalisation of the need to include self-criticism and confession as well as the need to receive and give forgiveness, and its egalitarian intercession instruction (if handled with love and justice) can provide a foundation for the psychological safety and prestigelessness demanded for organisational learning within Christian faith-permeated FBOs.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In response to the notable lack of theological reflection on organisational resilience, the risk that this contributes to a loss of voice and identity, and the need to empower Christian FBOs to become more bilingual between theological reflection and secular management theories, this article has attempted a theologising process which brings 1 John into conversation with research on organisational resilience. The thematic study places spiritual and physical life at the centre of the Johannine community's purpose and at the heart of what their resilience ought to protect. This is a worthy goal for faith-permeated Christian FBOs. 1 John's emphasis on love, justice and flexible discernment systems sustained by the Spirit and supported by clear boundary setting against destructive forces fit well with contemporary organisational research's recommendations that organisational resilience is strengthened by holistic approaches which use dynamic sense-making for authoritative situational definitions, decentralised improvisation and decision-making while still maintaining a culture of reliability within the organisation. Wisely managed, this could function as a vaccine against the risks of resilient organisations. While 1 John's internal focus is a reminder that resilience must be nurtured from within, 1 John 4:14 forms a bridge enabling both the relational resilience needed for network management and the holistic approach to the world that organisational resilience research increasingly has emphasised since the COVID-19 pandemic. The letter's egalitarian normalisation of the need to confess and receive forgiveness offers a theological foundation for the psychological safety demanded for organisational learning. Finally, the reminders in 1 John to "remain in" as well as its emphasis on the incarnated Christ as the one to be imitated could boost narrative and spiritual capital with potential contributions to indefinite slack and a holistic approach to the world and the individuals in and around the organisation.

In this article, I have likened the Johannine community to a Christian faith-permeated FBO. I have shown how a New Testament theology based on the ethics found in 1 John has much to offer in terms of theological reflection on organisational resilience within Christian faith-permeated FBOs even today. A next step would be to extend the discussion to other FBO typologies, but also to the broader setting of public theology. I have also suggested that 1 John's reminders to "remain in" could boost narrative capital and contribute to indefinite slack. Spiritual capital and indefinite slack are, however, relatively undefined concepts in need of further exploration and definition, which provides a second option for further research. If one, against Lieu, opts for a historical construction that places the Johannine community within a context of persecution, a third route could be to explore how the effects of VUCA environments and group trauma might have affected 1 John's theology and consequent results for the letter's contributions to theological reflection on organisational resilience. Social identity complexity theory could likely be a useful heuristic tool for those who choose to explore such a path.

Appendix

Table 1

<i>Thematic analysis of 1 John</i>		
Section of 1 John	Theme	Thematic Repetition or Braiding
1:1-3	(1) <i>Previous experience:</i> What we heard, seen, looked at and touched.	
1:4	(2) <i>Purpose relates to goal: life</i> So that you may have fellowship with us – > our joy complete.	
1:5-2:2	(3) <i>Confession and forgiveness (1)</i> God is light – walking in light -> fellowship with God. Claims to be without sin = deception, confession -> forgiveness. Jesus Christ's atoning sacrifice.	
2:3-12	4) <i>Love and referral to that already known (1)</i> Knowing God = following his commands -> God's love made complete. God's command = love your brother. Not a new command but an old one, already visible both "in him and you".	1:1-3, 1:6
2:12-13	Already (1) Recipients already forgiven, do already know, have already overcome.	
2:15-19	(5) <i>Boundary-setting to protect life</i> Do not love the world. Doing will of God -> eternal life (2). Warning against anti-Christ, those who went out from us but who were not of us.	
2:20-21	Already (1) Recipients already have anointing.	1:1-3, 1:6, 2:12-13
2:22-26	Boundary-setting to protect life (5) and rereferral to that already known (1). Anti-Christ = the one who denies the Father and the Son, Jesus as Christ. Ensure that what was heard from the beginning remains (1) -> eternal life (2).	2:18-19 1:1-3, 1:4,
2:27-28	Already and referral to that already known Recipients already have anointing – remain in it (1).	1:1-3, 1:6, 2:12-13
2:29-3:2	(6) <i>Children of God</i> = everyone doing righteousness/justice = recipients.	
3:2-3	(7) <i>Not yet</i> Fullness of God's children not yet revealed.	

3:4-8	Boundary-setting to protect life (5) and forgiveness (3). To sin = breaking the law/doing/being unrighteous, no one who lives in him keeps sinning, but he takes away sin, but those who continue to sin have not seen or known him. The sinful are of the devil – but the Son of God destroys the devil's works.	1:5-2:2, 2:29-3:2
3:9-10	Children of God (6) and love (4) Can not sin as God's seed remains in them. No one who does not practice righteousness/justice or who does not love his brother is not a child of God.	1:1-3, 1:6, 2:3-12, 2:29-3:2, 2:20-21, 2:29-3:2
3:11-19	Love (4) and referral already-known (1) The message heard from the beginning: Love one another. The one who does not love remains in death. The one who hates his brother is a murderer. Recipients know what love is because Christ lay down his life – encouragement of imitation. Share material possessions with those in need. Love = action	1:1-3, 1:6, 2:3-12
3:19-24	(8) Knowledge through the spirit. (3) Confession and forgiveness, love (4), knowledge through spirit. Even if recipients' hearts condemn them – they can be confident before God because they follow his command to love one another and to believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ.	1:1-3, 1:6, 2:3-12, 3:11-19
4:1-3	Boundary-setting to protect life (5) Test the spirits – do they confess Christ as having come in the flesh?	2:15-19
4:4-6	Already (1) and boundary-setting to protect life (5) Recipients come from God and have already overcome the spirit of the antichrist, because God is greater; those who come from God will listen.	2:12-13, 3:19-24
4:7-5:3	Love (4) and forgiveness (3) God is love – therefore love one another. To not love is to not know God. To know God is to love. Recipients and author know God is love because he sent his one and only son into the world as a sacrifice for sin so that they might live and the world be saved. By loving one another and acknowledging Christ as Son of God. God lives in them and his love is made complete – all because God loved first and has given them their spirit. No fear in love.	1:1-3, 1:6, 2:3-12, 3:11-19
5:4-5	Already (1) and boundary-setting to protect life (5) Everyone born by God overcomes the world, only the one who believes that Jesus is the son of God overcomes the world.	2:12-13, 3:4-8, 4:4-6, 4:7-5:3

5:6-12	Testimony and boundary-setting to protect life (5) Spirit and God testify about the Son (8). To not believe in the testimony is to make God into a liar. God has given eternal life (2) available through his son.	
5:13-15	Goal: life (2) So that recipients may know they have eternal life. If they ask anything according to God's will he will hear.	1:4, 2:15-19, 2:22-26, 5:6-12
5:16-20	Forgiveness (3) and life (2) Intercession in case of sin -> life If anyone sees a brother commit a sin not leading to death – pray for him and God will give him life. As children of God, recipients and author are in Christ, who himself is eternal life, protected from the evil one.	
5:21	Boundary-setting to protect life (5) Keep yourselves from idols.	2:15-19

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