

# WELCOME TO **St PAUL'S** **ANGLICAN CHURCH**



**Our parish's patron is St Paul the Apostle who was one of the early Church's missionary leaders.**

**A dynamic preacher, he visited communities located around the Mediterranean Sea and in Asia Minor proclaiming the good news of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.**

**In his first letter to the Church at Corinth, Paul tells how he handed on the tradition of the Last Supper to them and it is this sacred meal that we share which makes us one with Jesus and with the Church, both living and departed, today.**

## **WELCOME TO ST PAUL'S.**

**W**ELCOME TO ST PAUL'S. We are glad that you have come to worship God with us today. If you are a visitor from another parish, or worshipping with us for the first time, please introduce yourself to our parish priest, Fr James Collins, or to anyone wearing a name badge, over a cup of tea or coffee in the parish hall after the service. You'll find the hall behind the church.

圣公会圣保罗堂欢迎你前来参加我们的英语传统圣乐圣餐崇拜。

**Sunday 17th May 2020**  
**Sixth Sunday of Easter**

### **Included in this issue ...**

- ~ Acknowledgement of the Wangal of the people Eora Nation p.3
- ~ A message from Fr James p.5
- ~ Coping with coronavirus disappointments: Five lessons from Dietrich Bonhoeffer p.14
- ~ Purim: God is present, even in His absence p.25
- ~ What can the environmental movement learn from the response to the COVID-19 pandemic? p.35
- ~ Are you a new parishioner? p.45

**And Much More...**

# Things you may



## First Aid

First aid kits are located on the wall of the kitchen in the Large Hall behind the church and in the choir vestry.



## Name badges

Name badges help make St Paul's an inclusive community. If you need a new name badge, fill in the form inside the pew sheet, send it to the parish office, and one will be made and left in church for you.



## Toilets

Toilets are available at the entrance to the parish hall, which is located behind the church.

## ?? Still got questions?

Ask a member of the clergy or anyone who's wearing a name badge. We're here to help.

## In case we need to evacuate



As you take your place in your pew, please make yourself aware of the route to the nearest emergency exit. Should there be a fire, leave quickly, turn right, and assemble by the roundabout on Burwood Road.

## Getting inside

People needing wheelchair access can enter St Paul's most conveniently by the door at the base of the belltower.

## Switch it to silent !



Please turn your mobile phone off or on to silent before the service starts. It'll save you much embarrassment later on.

## Children are welcome at St Paul's



Children are welcome in church at any service. There is a selection of children's books and toys at the back of the church near the font and there are also kids' activity sheets and pencils available at the back of the church where the pew sheets and prayer books are.

Children's Church runs during Term Time. Meet at the back of the church at the beginning of the 9.30am Eucharist.

Please feel free to bring your children to the altar rail to receive a blessing, or to receive Communion if they have been admitted to the sacrament.

## Photos



Please do not take photos inside the church or during the services of worship without permission.

# Acknowledgment of Country

## Acknowledgement of the Wangal people of the Eora Nation

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land upon which we meet. In his wisdom and love, our heavenly Father gave this estate to the Wangal people of the Eora Nation. Upon this land they met for generations until the coming of British settlers. As we continue to learn to live together on these ancestral lands, we acknowledge and pay our respects to their elders, past, present, and emerging, and we pray that God will unite us all in the knowledge of his Son, in whom all things were created, in heaven and on earth, whether visible or invisible — for all things have been created through him and for him.

Recognising those who have been custodians of this land is not a perfunctory gesture, but an acknowledgement that many have gone before us and many will come after us—we are but passing through. As King David stated some 3,000 years ago:

We are foreigners and strangers in your sight, as were all our ancestors; our days on earth are like a shadow, and there is no abiding. (1 Chronicles 29:15)

The first inhabitants of this land were created by God to tend this land as stewards of his common grace. With only general revelation in the created order as their guide, they were allotted this land ‘that they should seek God, in the hope that they might reach out to him and find him’, as the apostle Paul declared to his first century Athenian audience, ‘for in him we live and move and have our being’ (Acts 17:27-28).

God says through the prophet Jeremiah that: “For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.” (Jeremiah 29:11)

Because of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord, Christians are a people of hope and because we are a people of hope we seek to work and pray for peace, justice, and love for all, including God’s

beautiful creation, and to devote ourselves to seeing God's kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

We seek to bequeath God's beautiful creation to future custodians in a far better state than what we inherited so that creation itself and all beings may flourish as God intends.

## **Welcome! We are glad that you have found us!**

We affirm that through God's redeeming love for all, we are one in Christ. We respect the inherent and valuable contributions each member makes to the Body of Christ. We celebrate our diversity and recognize the sacred worth and dignity of all persons of any age, gender, gender identity, gender expression, race, ethnic origin, economic reality, family status, sexual orientation, diverse ability, or social status. We believe that through Christ we are being included and welcomed by God and one another. As we journey towards inclusion, we proclaim this welcome to all God's people, especially to those who have known the pain of exclusion and discrimination within the church, affirming that no one is excluded or condemned. We invite all persons to journey with us as we discover the call of God on our lives through the ministries of St. Paul's Anglican Church, Burwood. To that end, St. Paul's Anglican Church commits to the welcome and inclusion of all persons as children of God and declares itself to be a welcoming community of faith.

<b>Bible Readings at today's Eucharist</b>	<b>Year A</b>	<b>Bible Readings for next Sunday</b>
Acts 17:22-31	<b>The First Reading</b>	Acts 1:6-14
Ps 66:8-20	<b>The Psalm</b>	Ps 68:1-10,32-35
1 Peter 3:13-22	<b>The Epistle</b>	1 Peter 4:12-14;5:6-11
John 14:15-21	<b>The Gospel</b>	John 17:1-11

# News from around St Paul's

## A message from Fr James

My Dear Friends,

I hope that you are all well.

Here at St. Paul's we have sought to keep everyone safe, calm, connected to God, and connected to each other through the COVID-19 pandemic.

As of Sunday the 17th of May the State Government is allowing ten people to worship God together in Church.

In consultation with the Fr. Michael, Rosemary, and David, I have decided that worship Services at St. Paul's will continue. We cannot imagine St. Paul's existing without there being the opportunity to worship God together. It is our reason for being, along with our love and care for our fellow human beings and for God's beautiful creation. We will not deny people the spiritual comfort that they need at this time of high anxiety and fear.

After an extensive discussion with Fr. Michael, Rosemary, and David the following measures will be observed to ensure the safety of all who attend these worship Services:

1. The Services for the 17th and the 24th of May, being the Sixth and Seventh Sundays of Easter, will be held in St. Paul's beginning at 8.00 a.m. with Services being held every half an hour (the last beginning at 10.00 a.m.). Services will be held in the Chapel of our Lord's Passion so please enter through the Bell Tower porch.

We hope that we will return to our normal Service times of 8.00 a.m. and 9.30 a.m. for the high holy days of Pentecost (being the 31st of May) and Trinity Sunday (being the 7th of June) and for all Services thereafter. We hope that these Services will be held at the High Altar with a Cantor, if not the entire Choir, and the Organ accompanying the Service.

2. People are quite free to decide not to attend Church or any event and I don't want anyone to feel that they must do something against their will (or if they feel that they might compromise another person's health – which is why we have closed down all of our groups).
3. All risk management obligations will be scrupulously attended to, such as observing the need for hand washing and sanitizing, physical distancing, etc. The Holy Water Stoup has been emptied.
4. The Greeting of Peace will involve bowing reverently to those one is seated close to.
5. Communion will be in one kind.
6. At this stage there will be no morning tea or refreshments after the Services.
7. We will fully comply with all government directives and legal requirements.
8. The pre-recorded Services for the 17th and 24th of May, being the Sixth and Seventh Sundays of Easter, will be available on YouTube for those unable to attend Church along with the accompanying pre-recorded Readings, Reflections, and Intercessions for these Sundays.
9. The devotional material that has been mailed out to Parishioners who don't have internet access will be mailed out for the 17th and 24th of May, being the Sixth and Seventh Sundays of Easter.
10. The mid-week Wednesday Eucharist will resume on Wednesday the 3rd of June at 10.30 a.m.

We will continue to care for all in our community. As Jesus was servant of all so we too are called to serve others. Our love for God necessarily behoves us to love our neighbour and many people are suffering as a result of the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. The unemployment rate in Australia is spiralling upwards. We are now feeding several hundreds of people every week and the number of those in need

grows by the day. Many of our Parishioners are giving their time as volunteers to help at the Parish Pantry, giving their financial resources so that we can purchase food and other supplies, and giving supplies of food and other staples such as items necessary to maintain good hygiene. We can be very proud of what St. Paul's is doing to care for those in need in our community.

Further to this, we have undertaken several capital improvements on our facilities over the past couple of months; including a major re-furbishment of the Small Hall where an entirely new kitchen has been installed and the hall itself has been re-painted. Better use is being made of storage in the hall to ensure that it is no longer so cluttered.

Work has been done under the floor of the Main Hall to take the bounce out of the floor. Piers have been re-built under the floor and drainage has been improved. New curtains will soon be made for the hall.

The Upper Room has been beautifully re-fitted as the new Choir Room in readiness for when the Choir can resume singing in our Services.

All of these spaces are looking loved and cared for.

If the situation changes with reference to the government's directives then we will review matters at that point in time.

I hold you and our community, nation, and world in my prayers.

We are all facing some extraordinary challenges.

May God's peace sustain and surround you at this time.

With my love and prayers.

Peace,

James.

## Plants Pots

Small pots for plants If anyone has any small pots lying around in the garage/garden suitable for potting we would be interested in having them. Thank you. Please see Pam Brock.

## Websites for Morning and Evening Prayer

<https://www.scotland.anglican.org/spirituality/prayer/daily-offices/>

<https://dailyprayer.ampers.x10.mx>

<https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/book-common-prayer/order-morning-prayer>

<https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/book-common-prayer/order-evening-prayer>

## Hearing Australia - Your hearing and well being are our number one priority

It is a scary time for our seniors , isolation can be very lonely for some. During this time its critical people can hear the News to hear what is going on in the world, listening out for the doorbell and hearing the phone ring. Hearing Australia is opened and we are here to help, whether that is helping people that have hearing aids that require more batteries we can post out, repair hearing aids we can come and collect the hearing aids from the persons house and bring back to the centre for repair and deliver back to the person when fixed. We are here to help in anyway, we work very closely with a lot of the Community groups within Burwood, we park our Hearing Bus on Burwood road 6 times a year to give Free Hearing checks to the community. You don't need to come into the Centre if you don't want to, we can help in other ways.

You can contact us on 0416 686 251 or visit our website: [www.hearing.com.au](http://www.hearing.com.au) where we also offer live chat.

*St Paul's Anglican Church*

WARDENS' APPEAL

MARCH, 2020

Dear parishioners,

We are living in very different times, and must learn to do things differently. However, St Paul's has cared for everyone in our community for almost 150 years and we have weathered the storms of World Wars, the Great Depression, the Spanish Flu and any number of other social and financial upheavals and we will come through COVID-19 as well.

To ensure this happens, the Wardens would like to respectfully ask all parishioners to consider continuing their regular giving, even if not attending church. This may be done in the following ways:

**\*Online:**

Account Name: St Pauls Anglican Church

BSB number: 032062

Account number: 250028

**\*Cheque:**

Made out to St Pauls Anglican Church Burwood and posted to

PO Box 530

Burwood NSW 1805

Parishioners might also like to consider making a one-off general donation of any amount, large or small, according to their means.

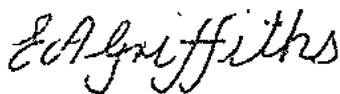
In these ways, we can ensure that St Paul's will remain a strong and comforting presence in the community both now and in the future.

The Wardens thank all parishioners for their kindness and generosity in the past and we hope for your support in the present.



Jane Woods

Rector's Wardens



Elizabeth Griffiths

People's Wardens



Pam Brock

People's Wardens

Pew  
Reflections  
REFLECTIONS  
BGM

~ Acts 17.22-31; Psalm 66.7-19;  
1 Peter 3.8-22; John 14.15-21.

As the song says, *Love changes everything*. In this time of quietness and confinement, how might we express love for others? How about by praying for doctors and nurses as they deal with those affected by Corvid-19? How about calling someone you know who is elderly and shut in? How about doing shopping for someone who cannot do it easily themselves? In these difficult times, *What the world needs now is love, sweet love*, as another song says.

~ Pray that you can change your neighbourhood this week by acts of *love, sweet love*.

~ Give thanks for the work and witness of the Church of the Province of South East Asia.

Text: Robert McLean Partnerships Coordinator, ABM

© Anglican Board of Mission, 2020

**ABM** Anglican Board of Mission - Australia  
**Working for Love, Hope & Justice**

## PARISH INTERCESSIONS

Every June and December we begin a new parish prayer list.

Therefore, during the months of May and November we ask that you let us know which names should remain and any names to be added or subtracted.

So this month, please contact Michael at [mdeasey47@hotmail.com](mailto:mdeasey47@hotmail.com)  
0412 929 227 or the parish office.

Thank you.

## For General Donations

please use this account  
details:

**Account Name: St Pauls Anglican  
Church**

**BSB: 032 062**

**Account #: 250028**

**For Parish Pantry**

**AND For Community Choir  
Donations**

please use this account  
details:

**Account Name: Parish Pantry  
Account**

**BSB: 032 062**

**Account #: 812238**

Please clearly mark whether it is  
for the Parish Pantry or the  
Community Choir.

**Thank you for your generosity.**

## Offertory -

**Collection given at St Paul's  
from 4th May 2020 - 10th May  
2020 and other donations:**

≈ Offertory: \$2270

≈ Parish Pantry: \$270

≈ Building Fund: \$10

≈ Op Shop: \$20

**TOTAL: \$2570**

*Thank you for responding to God's  
generous love.*



*“I will not leave  
you orphans; I will  
come to you.”*



## Donations and Bequests

Over the years the parish has benefited from the generosity of parishioners, not only when they have been active members of the parish, but also at the time of their death. Parishioners are invited to remember the parish in their wills by making a bequest as a thank offering to God and to ensure that generations to come will enjoy worship and fellowship in well maintained buildings.

Those wishing to make a bequest are invited to do so using these or a similar form of words: " I bequeath the sum of \$..... to the Rector and Wardens of the Anglican parish of St Paul, Burwood, to be used at their absolute discretion for the charitable purposes of the parish."

## Donations with Tax Deductibility

If you would like to make a donation to the Parish for the upkeep and maintenance of the Heritage building it can be done through the National Trust.

### **Cheques can be made out to:**

National Trust of Australia (NSW) St Paul's Anglican Church Burwood

### **Or**

Direct Credit to the above name with bank account details:

Westpac

**BSB:** 032-044

**Account number:** 742 926

**Branch:** 275 George Street Sydney NSW

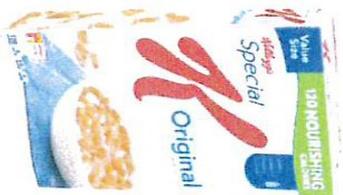
Please contact Pam for more details or place a donation in an envelope and label with National Trust donation and include your name for your receipt and an address to post it to. Thank you.

# PARISH PANTRY LIST



## Food

- Boxes of Cereals
- Long Life Milk
- Pasta and Pasta Sauce
- Rice and Couscous
- Instant Noodles
- Harvest Meals (Tinned)
- Meals in a Box (Sun Rice)
- Spreads—Peanut Butter, Jam
- Tin Food—Corn Beef, SPAM, Tuna, Sardines, Corn, Fruit, Soup,
- Snacks—Sweet and Savoury Biscuits, Chips, Wafers, Chocolate
- Coffee, Tea, Milo
- Sugar, Salt, Cooking Oil



## Health



- Shampoo & Conditioner
- Toilet Paper
- Disposable Razor
- Bars of Soap
- Toothbrush & Toothpaste
- Hand Sanitiser
- Moisturiser
- Sanitary Pads



## Clean

- Laundry Powder
- Dishwashing liquid
- Chux / Sponges / Scours



### **Coping with coronavirus disappointments: Five lessons from Dietrich Bonhoeffer - *By Brian Rosner***

I started 2020 with five New Year's resolutions and seven anticipations, things I was eagerly looking forward to, such as special social occasions and travel. I won't comment on my progress on the resolutions — my brother-in-law reckons New Year's resolutions are a to-do list for the first week in January, and I don't want to confirm his cynicism. But I will report that five of my seven anticipations have been cancelled, with the two in November and December looking less likely every day.

For some of us, the personal cost of the coronavirus will be huge; for others less profound, but still troubling. But one form of suffering will afflict us all — namely, the experience of disappointment. With everything from meals out and sport to weddings and funerals being cancelled, “cancel culture” is taking on a new meaning. No one will be immune from disappointments, the displeasure of having our anticipations unfulfilled.

For a case study in coping with disappointment in the context of isolation and social distancing, we find a surprising source of help in Dietrich Bonhoeffer — the pastor, author and church leader who was active in Germany in the 1930s and 1940s.

Bonhoeffer's life story is a mixed genre. It started out like a fairy tale. Born in 1906 to a prominent German family, Bonhoeffer was a tall man, possessing an athletic physique and a round boyish face. With his mother's blue eyes and blond hair, he perfectly fit Hitler's Aryan stereotype. But any affinity between Bonhoeffer and the Third Reich stopped there.

With the rise to power of Hitler in 1933, Bonhoeffer's fairy tale took a dangerous turn, transforming into a spy thriller. His opposition to National Socialism began early, when Bonhoeffer gave a radio broadcast on the dangers of charismatic leadership. It was abruptly ended by

government censure. For the next ten years, Bonhoeffer worked for the good of his nation, eventually operating as a double agent. Employed by the Abwehr, a division of German Intelligence, Bonhoeffer used his contacts outside of Germany to support the insurgency. A man of impeccable integrity, Bonhoeffer also functioned as the conscience of the conspirators, commending their moral courage and bolstering their resolve.

Along with the spy thriller, Bonhoeffer's life was a tragic love story. In June 1942 Dietrich met Maria von Wedemeyer. Maria was beautiful, poised, cultured and filled with vitality, but only eighteen years of age — fully seventeen years younger than Dietrich. Bonhoeffer and Maria fell in love. Maria's father had been killed on the Russian Front and her mother insisted on a year's separation to test the couple's feelings. But Maria convinced her mother otherwise and in January 1943, with some restrictions in place, they were engaged to be married. Unfortunately, "happily ever after" is not the way their story ended.

Two key aspirations of Bonhoeffer's life — the renewal of the German church and people and his plans to marry his fiancée Maria von Wedemeyer — were both cruelly thwarted. In 1943 he was arrested by the Gestapo, incarcerated for two years, and finally executed at the order of Adolf Hitler.

If some disappointments are mild, Bonhoeffer's were crushing. How did Bonhoeffer handle his disappointments? Although he wrote a number of books, the answer to this question is found in the remarkable letters to and from his parents, relatives, fiancée and above all his best friend Eberhard Bethge, collected and published in the now classic volumes *Letters and Papers from Prison* and *Love Letters from Cell 92*. With social isolation ahead for all of us, at least in a physical sense, Bonhoeffer's prison musings offer sage advice and salient lessons.

**First, focus on what really matters.** According to Bonhoeffer not all disappointments are equal. He urged an ordering of priorities:

There is hardly anything that can make you happier than to feel that you count for something with other people. What matters here is not numbers, but intensity. In the long run, human relationships are the most important thing in life. God uses us in his dealings with others. Everything else is very close to hubris.

In the strange world of physical distancing, we do well to remember that we don't have to be relationally distant. There are still ways to cultivate community that don't involve getting up close and personal physically.

**Second, stay cheerful.** Bonhoeffer wrote to his fiancée Maria: "Go on being cheerful, patient and brave." And he told Bethge to "spread hilaritas." Even amid hardship, a joyful optimism can prevail.

Cheerfulness was in fact one of Bonhoeffer's abiding qualities despite the horrors of prison. In his famous prison poem, "Who am I?" the opening stanza reads: "They often tell me I would step from my cell's confinement calmly, cheerfully, firmly, like a squire from his country-house."

Indeed, Bonhoeffer's letters from prison are surprisingly dotted with glimpses of humour. He quips: "Prison life brings home to one how nature carries on uninterruptedly its quiet, open life, and it gives one quite a special, perhaps a sentimental, attitude towards animal and plant life, except that my attitude towards the flies in my cell remains very unsentimental." Bonhoeffer and Bethge wrote back and forth over the naming of Bethge's first child. When the name "Dietrich" was floated, Dietrich wrote back to the couple amusingly: "You still seem to be thinking of 'Dietrich'. The name is good, the model less so."

Perhaps those corny coronavirus memes scattered across social media serve a purpose. In Bonhoeffer's case cheerfulness was no accident of temperament; it was born of his unshakeable confidence in God: "I'm travelling with gratitude and cheerfulness along the road where I'm being led. My past life is brim-full of God's goodness, and my sins are covered by the forgiving love of Christ crucified."

**Third, embrace optimism.** Bonhoeffer's approach to prison life was not to allow the confinement to restrict his activity. Quite literally, he did not sit still while waiting for his hope for freedom to materialise:

I read, meditate, write, pace up and down my cell — without rubbing myself sore against the walls like a polar bear. The great thing is to stick to what one still has and can do — there is still plenty left — and not to be dominated by the thought of what one cannot do, and the feelings of resentment and discontent.

This is good advice for anyone facing the frustrations of an ongoing disappointment and restrictive circumstances.

Late 1942 and early 1943, just a few months before his arrest, Bonhoeffer wrote a series of reflections to his fellow conspirators, entitled "After Ten Years." In it he refuses to be pessimistic, even though the goal of removing Hitler looked so unattainable. He went on to explain that there are two kinds of optimism:

It is true that there is a silly, cowardly kind of optimism, which we must condemn. But the optimism that is will for the future should never be despised, even if it is proved wrong a hundred times; it is health and vitality, and the sick man has no business to impugn it.

With a chilling allusion to the danger the Resistance members faced, Bonhoeffer mused: "It may be that the day of judgment will dawn tomorrow; in that case, we shall gladly stop working for a better future. But not before."

**Fourth, compare yourself with those less fortunate.** When things don't work out as you'd hope they would, the natural thing to do is to become self-absorbed, to lose perspective and to be enveloped in self-pity. Envy is the oxygen to an unhealthy response to disappointment and envy thrives on comparison. Put simply, Bonhoeffer seems to have avoided this danger by comparing downwards, not upwards.

He wrote to Bethge: "When people suggest in their letters ... that I'm

'suffering' here, I reject the thought ... I doubt very much whether I'm 'suffering' any more than ... most people are suffering today." When confronted with terrifying air raids he reasoned: "When the bombs come shrieking down, I always think how trivial it all is compared with what you're going through out there." And he was constantly concerned about and asked after the welfare of his comrades. For instance, he wrote with reference to the church leader Martin Niemöller, who had been in Dachau concentration camp since 1937: "Please harbour no regrets about me. Martin has had nearly seven years of it, and that is a very different matter." The sad irony is that Niemöller survived the war, and Bonhoeffer did not.

Bonhoeffer continued to feel the pain of others despite his own troubles, believing that "the centre of our own lives is outside ourselves." Indeed, his faith enabled him to retain a broader view of his circumstances: "As long as one doesn't lose sight of the greater issues in these small disappointments that one keeps on experiencing, one soon sees how trivial one's own personal privations are."

Fifth, the believer should walk through their disappointments with God. Bonhoeffer's sense of living life before God can be heard in the Hugo Wolf song he quoted in two letters, to his parents and to Hans von Dohnanyi, his brother-in-law and fellow conspirator: "Over night, over night, come joy and sorrow, and before you know it, both leave you and go to the Lord, to say how you have borne them." According to Bonhoeffer, "it all turns on that 'how', which is more important than anything that happens to you from the outside."

In relation to his fiancée's well-being, Bonhoeffer was encouraged that Maria too had "learnt very early to recognize a stronger and more gracious hand in what men inflict upon us." He wrote to Maria concerning the German poet Adalbert Stifter's description of pain as "the holiest angel," that "there is an even holier angel than pain, and that is joy in God." He encouraged her to believe that "God is forever upsetting our plans, but only in order to fulfil his own, better plans

through us.” To Maria’s mother he wrote: “We want to receive what God bestows on us with open, outstretched hands and delight in it with all our heart, and with a quiet heart we will sacrifice what God does not yet grant us or takes away from us.” This God-centred view of life’s unfulfilled desires was the bedrock of his resilience.

Chances are that over the coming months many of us will identify with Bonhoeffer’s disappointments and frustrations in his confinement — albeit for most of us, with the volume turned down. Bonhoeffer’s advice to us would be to focus on what really matters, stay cheerful, embrace optimism, compare yourself with those less fortunate, and walk through your disappointments with God.

**Brian Rosner** is the principal of Ridley College, Melbourne, and a Fellow of the Centre for Public Christianity. He is the author of *Known by God: A Biblical Theology of Personal Identity* and editor of *The Consolations of Theology* (in which he wrote the chapter, “Bonhoeffer on Disappointment”).

## **Coping with coronavirus anxiety: Four lessons from Søren Kierkegaard - by Brian Rosner**

As the weeks of coronavirus isolation drag on and look like turning into months, the highlight of my week is a trip to the shops; my wife and I fight over the privilege. However, the exhilarating freedom of escaping “house arrest” and the surprising ease of finding a parking spot are soon soured upon entering the supermarket. There you are greeted with the masked face of an employee dispensing hand sanitiser; you move around as if in a computer game avoiding some invisible menace, and stand meekly in the checkout line on spots on the floor 1.5 metres apart. It’s enough to rattle even the most tranquil spirit.

Surely one of the most unfortunate effects of the present pandemic is

money? Will my aging loved ones survive? Will things ever return to normal? The only certain thing is that there are no certainties.

It appears that we have entered a unique time for worry, on a truly global scale, of biblical proportions. For decades health professionals have warned that anxiety disorders are on the rise in Western countries. Now more than ever we are living in the age of anxiety. The example of Dietrich Bonhoeffer gave me some comfort in coping with my coronavirus disappointments. To whom might I look for help with my rising levels of anxiety?

The nineteenth-century Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) is a likely candidate for a couple of reasons. He remains influential to this day among philosophers, psychologists and theologians. In 1844 Kierkegaard wrote a book that has appeared in English translation as *The Concept of Dread* (1944) and *The Concept of Anxiety* (1980). Kierkegaard wrote it under the pseudonym Vigilius Haufniensis — or “Watcher of the Marketplace” — making it all the more an appropriate place to turn for help with supermarket angst.

Kierkegaard also helps because of his life experience. If anyone had cause to feel anxious, it was Kierkegaard. Søren and his brother Peter were the only two of seven siblings to survive the ravages of accident, disease and childbirth complications. His father even shared with his surviving sons the belief that he had brought a curse on the family and that God was punishing him by finishing off his children one by one. Later in life, Kierkegaard prayed: “O my God, my God, unhappy and tormented was my childhood, full of torments my youth.”

A defining moment of his adult life was when Søren broke off his engagement to Regine Olson, an anguished decision he returns to repeatedly in his writings. Kierkegaard is a kind of role model for angsty, overwrought people.

However, we must not regard Kierkegaard’s contribution to the topic of responding to anxiety as merely autobiographical. Undoubtedly, he wrote with his own difficulties in mind, but most of all he sought to think

about human life in general, and in particular, life before God. Jean-Paul Sartre put it well: “Reading Kierkegaard, I climb back as far as myself. I want to catch hold of him, and it is myself I catch.”

For Kierkegaard, anxiety is “a kind of horror at an undefined possibility, a terrifying presentiment of some unknown but possible peril.” This captures pretty well what many of us are feeling in this unsettling time.

We may glean four lessons from Kierkegaard for our coronavirus anxieties.

### **Our age of anxiety is not unusual in history**

Human beings’ sense of anxiety and alienation is as ancient as the Epic of Gilgamesh, one of our oldest surviving texts, in which humanity is portrayed as threatened with destruction for disturbing the slumber of the gods. For Kierkegaard himself, anxiety can be traced back to the very beginnings of human existence, and the way it is depicted in the biblical stories of humanity “falling” into sin. The quaint subtitle of his book, *The Concept of Anxiety*, points in this direction: *A Simple Psychological Deliberation Oriented in the Direction of the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*.

Each of us exists with what Kierkegaard terms “objective anxiety” — a core insecurity, which is built into our mortal bodies. In the New Testament, one Christian writer describes human lives as “held in slavery by the fear of death.” Kierkegaard believed that we cope with this soul-level insecurity by seeking security in material goods, status and power, all of which ultimately fail to deliver. It is no wonder we feel anxious when such things are removed or begin to crumble.

Without underestimating the scale of our present crisis, many periods of human history could be termed “an age of anxiety.” In the past the term has been applied to medieval times, seventeenth-century England and the periods following both World Wars. The first-century world could also wear the label, as the Pax Romana slowly gave way to more and more social upheaval. If you doubt the threats to ordinary life in that period,

read *Damascus* by Christos Tsiolkas — the gripping historical novel about the Apostle Paul, who describes the cruel barbarity of everyday life in the Roman Empire in lurid detail.

To be human in this fallen world, living under the shadow of death, is to be anxious. As much as the comforts of the modern Western world have immunised us from it, human beings have always lived in an age of anxiety.

### **Live in the moment**

For Kierkegaard, every action has “a moment” in which that action is willed. Part of his solution to the subjective experience of anxiety is to focus the mind upon the present and thereby not to catastrophise about the possibilities that still lie in the future. Predictions about the end of our current crisis have ranged from the end of May, to six months, to 1-2 years. Wondering too much about the future, while understandable, is unhelpful.

At this point Kierkegaard anticipates modern psychology and the practice of mindfulness. However, he conceptualises “the moment” theologically, counselling that when we are about to act in one way or another, with all the anxiety that is therefore aroused, we must see ourselves in that moment as those living before God, accountable to him for how we are living today.

Part of the answer to our anxious thoughts about the future is to remain in the present. Pete Davis, an oceanographer at the British Antarctic Survey, took this approach to his missions to the South Pole, which due to weather considerations were of an undetermined length. The “worst thing to do,” he said, was to focus on when isolation would end. “The best thing to avoid is what’s going to happen in three months’ time, when you’ve only just started. All you can control is what’s going to happen today or tomorrow.”

Jesus said something similar: “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matthew 6:34). In Jesus’s case, the advice to live in the present is

only half the story; he goes on to urge that his disciples focus on something meaningful, seeking first the kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33).

### **Anxiety is an opportunity for faith**

For Kierkegaard, living responsibly in the moment before God involves turning our anxious thoughts into prayer to a loving and trustworthy God. Anxiety can serve a purpose. Alluding to the Grimm's fairy tale, "The Youth Who Went Forth to Learn What Fear Was," Kierkegaard comments positively:

This is an adventure that every human being must go through — to learn to be anxious in order that he may not perish by never having been in anxiety or by succumbing in anxiety. Whoever has learned to be anxious in the right way has learned the ultimate.

Notwithstanding his appeal to existential philosophy, for Kierkegaard anxiety is a summons to place one's faith in Jesus Christ. And that faith is expressed in fervent prayer, seeking to become the person that God wants us to be. As it turns out, a number of studies

show that prayer is associated with well-being and physical health and find that those who pray are less likely to become anxious and depressed. For all his angst, Kierkegaard sees anxiety as a strong incentive to turn to God and find peace in a posture of hope and trust. He prayed, "Teach me, Lord, to breathe deeply in faith."

### **Find joy in the midst of anxiety**

In spite of his haunted childhood and experience of trauma and torment throughout his life, Kierkegaard found joy in the midst of suffering. This can be seen over and over again in his "startling prayer life." Karen Wright Marsh explains:

Prayer, Søren's ongoing conversation with God, became the source of his greatest earthly happiness. Søren likens prayer to a gyroscope, a practice that balances him come what may. Happily for you and me, he recorded his prayers in a journal. On those pages, Søren speaks frankly to God of his questions, confidence, doubts, joys, pains, consolation, suffering, love, longing, depression. It is all there.

The brooding, overwrought philosopher is able to pray:

Father in Heaven! Help us never forget that you are love. This conviction will triumph in our hearts, even if the coming day brings inquietude, anxiety, fright or distress.

Kierkegaard recommends a simple strategy for experiencing joy when feeling anxious about the future. In his book *The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air*, Kierkegaard reflects on the instructions of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount not to be anxious (Matthew 6:26-29):

Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ... And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these.

Kierkegaard believed that observing such vignettes of the natural world could be a source of deep joy. To ease anxiety, Kierkegaard recommends focusing your attention on positive and happy things in the natural world as a joyful reminder of God's care for all of creation. But his call is not just for the

practices of ornithology and gardening as a welcome diversion or a form of romantic escapism.

Observing birds and lilies offers a concrete way of living gratefully in the moment before a faithful and loving God. According to Kierkegaard, birds and lilies take our minds off the dread of a bleak future and offer the individual "an unexpected foretaste of paradise," giving us a glimpse of a world to come in which the age of anxiety will be fully replaced. They reassure us that God has not abandoned us or his world.

In this light, the current social media trend of posting pictures of positive, happy images as an aid for soothing our anxieties — oceans, mountains, beaches, lakes, flowers, trees, pets and so on — might have more to it than we realise. Maybe we should share pictures of birds and lilies too!

Kierkegaard might say four things to calm our anxious thoughts during the coronavirus crisis: don't be surprised that our tranquil times have turned into an age of anxiety; live in the moment; view anxiety as an opportunity for faith; and find joy in the midst of anxiety.

## **Purim: God is present, even in His absence - By Rabbi Raymond, an emeritus rabbi of the Great Synagogue, Sydney.**

The Jewish festival of Purim is on Tuesday, 10 March. Like everything in Judaism, it intensifies my feeling of God — indeed, as I get older I am ever more of a believer. As a child I was told by my mother that there is a God and we can talk about Him every day by saying the Shema prayer morning and evening. But I must admit I was puzzled about having a God who could see me while I couldn't see Him. For a while, I even thought my rabbi was God — though I never told the rabbi (and I suspect he would have given me an enigmatic smile).

Now I'm old and I don't think so highly about some of the rabbis I know (I'm not even certain about myself), but nothing enhances my life more than knowing I am in the presence of God. I see Him (in a metaphorical sense) all around me. A wondrous world must have a wondrous Creator. A world where love is possible must have a beneficent Maker. The Jewish liturgy says *V'khol ma'aminim*, "Everything attests to God."

The Bible is where this is recorded — even in the Purim reading of the Megillah, the Book of Esther, where the Divine name is missing. Despite the light-hearted boos and bangs that punctuate the reading, the book has its serious side. Yet there is no mention of God. True, ancient ingenuity found a hint: when Mordecai says to Esther, "If you keep quiet at this time, relief and deliverance will come for the Jews from *makom aher*, another place" (5:13-14). *Makom*, "He who is in every place," is a name for God, but I obviously have problems with adjective "another"!

Apart from Esther, only one other Scriptural book lacks a reference to God — the Song of Songs. There is an incidental phrase, "Jealousy is as cruel as the grave: its flashes are *shalhevetyah*, a very flame of the Lord" (8:6). Some take *shalhevetyah* literally, but it is a mere metaphor. Because Biblical Hebrew has no superlatives, it uses phrases like flame of the Lord to denote something that is great in cosmic terms: Nimrod, for example, is "a mighty hunter before the Lord" (Genesis 10:9); Nineveh is "a great city unto God" (Jonah 3:3).

When Australia debated whether the preamble to the constitution should mention God, I weighed in and argued that better than a perfunctory nod to the Almighty was a nation that lived by His moral law. I said that if God's name mattered, His word mattered even more.

Judaism ascribed to God the daring words, "Let them forget Me but keep My Torah." Even if we don't use His Name, He is there as an axiom — a fact of life. We live in the Divine Presence, even if we don't spell it out. The Psalmist says, "I set the Lord always before me" (16:8). We perceive the Presence when we see His deeds, when we are awestruck by His Creation, when, in Abraham Joshua Heschel's words, we feel a sense of amazed, wondering awe.

Hassidism says, "All is God" — but this is not pantheism, which says the world is God and God is the world. It is closer to panentheism, which says all is in God. No place or moment is devoid of Him. Whether we contemplate nature, history or human life, all is in God. The miracles of love and loyalty; the deeds of the heart, mind and spirit; birth. and the first awareness of self, all are

in God.

Synagogues display over the Ark (the shrine of the Torah scrolls) an inscription derived from the Talmud: Da lifnei mi attah omed — "Know before Whom you stand." Even without His name, I am in His presence. This is the sub-text of both Esther and Song of Songs: God is always present, even in His absence.

Yet life with God is not easy. Evil mars the world and we feel affronted. Like our ancestors, we confront God and challenge His moral judgment. Like Abraham we say, "Does the Judge of all the earth not act justly?" Like Moses we say, "Why have You dealt evilly with this people?" But here is the dilemma. As Jacob Agus puts it, "God cannot but be good and just." We trust God even when it is difficult; we distrust man even when he claims to be our friend. Life is tension. Man lets us down; we're not certain about God. But Agus is right. God must be good and just. Our way is to demand instant explanations. His is to be patient and take His time. His ways, says Isaiah, are not our ways. The rabbis say, Lu yedativ heyitiv — "If I knew Him, I would be Him."

## The promise of negative political theology

*By David Newheiser*

Some theorists argue that religion relates to politics in one of two ways: either it asserts its authority over the public sphere, or it withdraws from the world in preference for spiritual concerns. Against those who appropriate divine authority in support of a given regime, Jewish and Christian negative theology argues that God is radically elusive. Where resistance movements sometimes struggle to transition from opposition to governance, negative theology models a critique that allows for robust affirmation.

Although the tradition of negative theology does not directly address democratic politics, it demonstrates that a commitment to radical transformation does not rule out the compromise required to enact concrete policies. In this way, negative theology offers resources for addressing the crises that currently threaten democratic politics in the West.

### **Negating political theology**

The term “negative political theology” has a short history. It is

chiefly associated with Jacob Taubes’s 1987 lectures on the Apostle Paul. In an afterword to the published edition of the lectures, the editors remark that “Taubes regards the function of the Pauline critique of the law to be a negative political theology.” On their account, Taubes appeals to Paul in order to delegitimise every political structure. They explain:

[Paul] doesn’t oppose a political theology of the Torah to the Roman nomos of the earth in order to establish a new national form of rule. He fundamentally negates law as a force of political order.

In their view, where first century Jews appealed to divine law in developing a positive political theology, Paul explodes every claim to authority. On this reading, Taubes follows Paul in negating political theology.

This places Taubes at odds with Carl Schmitt, the progenitor of modern political theology as a descriptive discipline. In his 1922 book *Political Theology*, Schmitt argues that the concepts of modern politics are theological, not simply because they are historically linked to Christian thought but because

they systematically rely upon the miraculous. Schmitt writes, “Like every other order, the legal order rests on a decision and not on a norm.”

Against those who portray politics as the rational adjudication of contested questions, Schmitt argues that — in the foundation of any system and in the application of any norm — a decision is required that goes beyond the norm itself. According to Schmitt, such a decision is irruptive and irrational, and so it resembles divine intervention to contravene natural law. In Schmitt’s account, the paradigm of decision is a sovereign who acts unilaterally.

Although Taubes owes a great deal to Schmitt, he objects that Schmitt’s account of sovereignty aims to legitimate authority. In this way, Taubes extends a criticism of Schmitt first articulated by Erik Peterson in 1935. Peterson argues that “Orthodox Trinitarian doctrine in effect threatened the political theology of the Roman Empire.” According to Peterson, in Jewish and pagan theologies monotheism represented a political problem insofar as it identified the earthly

emperor with the divine Monarch. Where some early Christian theologies reiterated this form of monotheism, the doctrine of the Trinity described the Godhead as one God in three persons, united without subordination. Because the Triune God has no analogy in the created realm, Peterson argues that this rules out the representation of the divine by a human ruler. “With this,” Peterson writes, “the linkage of the Christian proclamation to the Roman Empire was theologically dissolved.” Like Taubes, Peterson’s point is that earthly power should be strictly distinct from the spiritual.

In the final footnote to his treatise on monotheism, Peterson addresses Schmitt directly: “To my knowledge, the concept of ‘political theology’ was introduced into the literature by Carl Schmitt ... Here we have tried to show by a concrete example the theological impossibility of a ‘political theology’.” Peterson construes political theology as the legitimation of political power through theological authority, and he argues that the doctrine of the Trinity excludes it altogether. For this reason, he says, political

theology must be negated.

### **Pessimism and affirmation**

Because some theologians tend to triumphalism, I think Taubes and Peterson are right to resist the theological legitimation of power. However, political theologies that are purely negative sometimes struggle to contribute positively to political reflection. Following Augustine of Hippo, theologians such as Reinhold Niebuhr have interpreted politics in terms of the pervasiveness of sin. On Niebuhr's account in his 1940 book *Christianity and Power Politics*, since pride corrupts human activity, every political project is problematic. Niebuhr argues that Christian tradition teaches humility, and he implies that a key function of theology is to criticise political structures:

Only in a religion in which there is a true sense of transcendence can we find the resource to convict every historical achievement of incompleteness, and to prevent the sanctification of the relative values of any age or any era.

For Niebuhr, as for Peterson and Taubes, theology is political above

all because it prevents political order from appropriating divine authority. The problem is that Niebuhr's pessimism inhibits theology from constructively addressing questions of policy.

In the 1960s and 1970s, a wave of German theologians argued along similar lines that political theology is primarily negative. Dorothee Sölle, Johan Baptist Metz and Jürgen Moltmann each argued that Christian thought must engage political questions, but they tended to present theology as a force that judges politics from the outside rather than contributing constructively.

Sölle foregrounds the critical function of political theology, Metz equates "political theology" with "(socio-)critical theology" and Moltmann writes that "political theology is the internal critique of the modern world." In each case, the emphasis upon critique resists the tendency of political leaders to appropriate divine authority, but it discourages theologians from addressing debates over policy. As Metz explains, "The Church's task here is not the elaboration of a system of social doctrine, but of

social criticism.”

These pessimistic political theologies offered an important corrective to the tendency to see theology as a purely spiritual affair. However, some feminists responded by arguing that their negativity is corrosive. Where Niebuhr presents pride as the primary sin, Valerie Saiving argues that the problem for marginalized groups is not self-assertion but “underdevelopment or negation of the self.” In her view, Niebuhr’s insistence upon meekness is the wrong recommendation for some people. Although pride sometimes needs to be checked, it sometimes needs to be nurtured.

Authority sometimes needs to be resisted, but at other times it should be bolstered. Since Augustine, Christians have struggled to acknowledge both demands, and they have not always succeeded. This suggests that while Niebuhr and theologians like him are right to insist that God must not be identified with a given political regime, they are wrong to imply that critique must be the primary focus of political theology.

Where these twentieth-century

theologians worked under the shadow of Hitler and Stalin, we now confront other dangers. Although sovereignty remains a problem for politics, we must also address systems of power that have a deep but indirect influence on each of us. Niebuhr argued that the idealism of the social gospel movement underestimated the human capacity for evil, so he opted for a tough-minded realism that some took to justify torturing terrorists, albeit with a frown.

As I have argued at greater length in a recent book, *Hope in a Secular Age*, negative political theology constitutes an alternative to both optimistic idealism and pessimistic realism. By holding construction and critique together in tension, negative theology demonstrates that it is possible to pursue particular aims while acknowledging their inadequacy. In this way, it models a hope that encourages critical vigilance while allowing the compromise that is required for concrete action.

### **Theological negativity**

The tradition of negative theology explores a tension between negativity and affirmation that is woven

deeply within Jewish and Christian scriptures. The Torah insists that God alone should be worshipped, and so it proscribes the representation of God in graven images (Exodus 20:4). Although early Christians affirmed that Jesus Christ was “the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15), this paradoxical phrase suggests that God remains obscure. Jesus’s closest contemporaries repeatedly failed to recognize his divine mission, and later Christians disagreed concerning what that mission meant. Although Paul claims to possess apostolic authority, he writes that “we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known” (1 Corinthians 13:12). On this view, Christians’ knowledge of God is imperfect: at least for now, it fumbles in the dark. Some theologians therefore insist that every attempt to represent God must be accompanied by a disciplined negativity.

In the second century, theologians such as Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria adapted vocabulary drawn from contemporary philosophy in order to underscore that God is beyond understanding. Several centuries later, Dionysius the Areopagite (also known as “Pseudo-Dionysius”) developed this ethical discipline into a systematic account of unsaying. In his view, because theological language is drawn from creation, it falls short of the Creator, and so every name for God must be negated. In *The Mystical Theology*, Dionysius describes an ascending series of negations, which systematically undoes the categories of human thought:

[The Cause of all] cannot be spoken of and it cannot be grasped by understanding. It is not number or order, greatness or smallness, equality or inequality, similarity or dissimilarity. It is not immovable, moving, or at rest. It has no power, it is not power, nor is it light ... It is not kingship. It is not wisdom. It is neither one nor oneness, divinity nor goodness ... There is no speaking of it, nor name nor knowledge of it. Darkness and light, error and truth — it is none of these. It is beyond assertion and denial.

Dionysius construes this negativity as a discipline of unknowing, which pursues intimacy with God by renouncing security. Dionysius’s many followers in the Middle Ages are diverse, but they agree that a disciplined negativity is integral to Christian life.

Some theorists claim that this negativity is a disingenuous ploy. In their view, mystical discourse attempts to eliminate particularity, but it remains bound to the content of specific traditions. I think these readers are right to identify a tension between negation and affirmation, but they are wrong to suggest that it constitutes a contradiction. In fact, this tension is explicitly central to negative theology in its classic formulations. According to Dionysius, theological affirmations are inadequate to the divine, but theological negations are no better. Because saying “God is not wisdom” might imply that this statement accurately describes God (albeit negatively), he claims that it is necessary to say at the same time that “God is wisdom.” In similar fashion, Gregory of Nyssa refers to “the seeing that consists in not seeing,” and Meister Eckhart suggests that we “pray to God that we may be free of God.”

In each case, these paradoxical formulations indicate that neither affirmation nor negation is adequate. Rather than requiring pure negativity, negative theology juxtaposes affirmation and negation in order to prevent Christian discourse from settling into stasis.

### **Negativity and politics**

It is understandable that—with some notable exceptions—relatively little has been written on the political significance of negative theology. Because the texts in question are elusive, it is difficult to extract instructions concerning worldly life. To complicate matters further, many commentators claim that the tradition is centrally concerned with mystical experience, which is implicitly apolitical. In my view, however, this reading rests upon a misunderstanding. In fact, theologians such as Dionysius and Eckhart directly reject the claim that one could know that one has had an experience of God, mystical or otherwise. Rather than appealing to extraordinary experiences, they describe a discursive practice that calls into question every claim to grasp God.

In my reading, although negative theology does not offer direct prescriptions for modern politics, it exemplifies an ethical discipline with political implications. By holding affirmation and critique together in tension, it

models a circumspection that avoids both optimism and despair.

Forty years after Valerie Saiving criticised Reinhold Niebuhr's pessimism, a group of scholars in other fields argued along similar lines that critique is corrosive. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick claims that, although critique equates itself with dispassionate truth, it anticipates the negative in order to neutralise the threat of pain and surprise. In her view, this motivation overrides other affects — joy, nostalgia and so forth — in order to foreclose anticipated danger.

In similar fashion, against the view that critique is a destabilising force that disrupts unjust relations, Rita Felski argues that it has hardened into a new orthodoxy. She writes that “what is needed ... is a politics of relation rather than negation, of mediation rather than co-option, of alliance and assembly rather than alienated critique.” Like Saiving, these theorists argue that critique can preclude other approaches.

Where Felski opposes relation and negation, love sometimes calls for negativity. The rise of right-wing movements around the world has cast a cold light on the racism, sexism and xenophobia that poisons the heart of ostensibly democratic societies. In response, critique is required — to demonstrate that the current configuration of power is contingent and to condemn injustices that have become entrenched.

I think Sedgwick and Felski are right to argue that this negativity must not be allowed to overwhelm the affective range that is required by constructive politics. The challenge, therefore, is to find a form of critique that encourages robust affirmation. This is, I believe, what negative political theology offers the world. In the wake of the Great Recession of 2007, a range of movements emerged around the world to resist racial and economic injustice, from Occupy to Syriza and the “Arab Spring.” The energy that animated these groups was inspiring, but they struggled to transition from opposition to sustainable power. Where protest movements pursue the purity of justice, the work of governing must reckon with ambiguity and compromise. Both relation and negation are needed, but — as Felski and Sedgwick observe — it is difficult to maintain these affective registers at once. In my view, the tradition of negative theology

demonstrates that it is not impossible.

Negative theology affirms particular projects that it subjects, at the same time, to critique. When situated within the unfolding time of human life, this tension functions as an ethical practice that is oriented toward unexpected possibilities. In contrast to an unmodulated negation that simply obliterates its object, it exemplifies a negativity that holds affirmation open to future revision. Because this negativity is reflexive, it resists the hegemony that Felski and Sedgwick fear.

Negative theology calls everything into question, including itself. Rather than foreclosing creativity, negative theology encourages experimentation by rendering every attempt provisional, fungible and fresh. It is thus possible to affirm particular projects while acknowledging that our best judgments remain subject to revision.

Negative political theology does not answer every question that confronts those who are concerned for the future of our societies. However, it does hold the potential to reframe debates over religion and politics, realism and idealism, optimism and pessimism, negation and relation. By holding together construction and critique, it offers an alternative to the pessimistic political theology that colours Christian thought in the West, and it models the bold circumspection required to sustain political movements in the face of uncertainty.

**David Newheiser** is Research Fellow in philosophy and the study of religion at the Institute for Religion and Critical Inquiry at the Australian Catholic University, Melbourne. He is the author of *Hope in a Secular Age: Deconstruction, Negative Theology, and the Future of Faith*. An earlier version of this article appeared as an introduction to a special issue of the journal *Modern Theology* on negative political theology.

## What can the environmental movement learn from the response to the COVID-19 pandemic? - by *Dalia Nassar*

Since the COVID-19 shutdown, environmentalists have been celebrating the significant changes in the natural world that this massive response has brought about. The water is “blue and clear” in Venice’s canals and cormorants have returned to them. In China, some children are seeing the stars for the first time in their lives, while everywhere animals have taken to the streets. The Himalayas are visible from the plains of India for the first time in thirty years. The sky is bluer. The air is cleaner. And, it appears, the slower pace of life, and our forced confinement, have triggered a reconnection with our local environments: whether it is our backyard, the forest paths in our neighbourhood, or the little patch of grass outside our block of flats.

But it is not only the side-effects of the shutdown that environmentalists have celebrated. The shutdown itself is, for many, something to laud. As George Monbiot put it in a recent interview, the shutdown shows that we can change — that governments have the will and the resources to fundamentally transform. Not only did the UK government eliminate the £13 billion NHS debt within minutes, but governments across Europe are talking seriously about (and in some cases adopting) a proposal that, just a few weeks earlier, had been considered a fringe idea: Universal Basic Income.

In a word, the response to the virus has stretched the boundaries of the possible: all those unimaginables are now not only imaginable, but also real.

For many environmentalists, these transformations provide crucial clues for the environmental movement. What the shutdown reveals is a resolve not to carry on with “business as usual” in order to protect lives. This, according to Monbiot and others, should fill environmentalists with courage and determination in order to save many more lives: the lives of the animals and plants, of the ecosystems, and the humans who are affected by the environmental crisis.

But what kind of courage, determination and resolve does this situation give us? What lessons are we actually learning from the COVID-19 crisis?

In their scramble to respond to COVID-19, the majority of countries have chosen to enact a full shutdown of their economies and services. But does this shutdown show us what governments can do, or does it rather reveal the problems of responding in an unstudied, rushed and undemocratic way — with the consequence being that too many crucial factors have been forgotten, overlooked or neglected?

After all, while some enjoy the cleaner air and the slower pace of life, others are suffering because of the shutdown. Though praiseworthy in its intent to protect the lives of the most vulnerable, the specific actualisation of the COVID-19 response — namely, the shutdown — has both directly and indirectly increased the suffering of many. The environmental movement should neither celebrate nor strive to emulate this response. What we need, instead, is an ecological response to the environmental crisis — a response that is considered, democratic and capacious; one that takes an encompassing view of life and aims to protect all lives in the most inclusive way.

### **“Saving lives”**

Life is at the heart of the COVID-19 crisis and the shutdown response. COVID-19 is a virus that kills, especially the elderly and those with pre-existing conditions. The response in the form of a shutdown of all business-as-usual is a response that aims to protect these fragile lives. However, it is not at all clear what we mean when we say “life.” In Europe, a philosophical debate has emerged over the last few weeks, focused on the very notion of “life” and the shutdown’s stated goal of “saving lives.”

On 18 March, the Swiss newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* published, in translation, Giorgio Agamben’s critique of the shutdown. Originally published in Italian on 11 March, Agamben’s critique revolves around the notion of what he calls “bare life” — that is, biological life. His claim

is that the response to COVID-19 reveals a unilateral concern with “bare life.” We are willing to give up everything that matters to us—our relationships with others, our work, our study, our love, our religion — for the sake of our physical bodies, for the sake of bare life. But, Agamben contends, this is not all that life is. Life is not just biological life, but also all those other things that make life worth living: connections to family, work, social relations, religion and so on. By reducing life to “bare life,” he argues, we have robbed ourselves of life, of precisely all those things that make life worth living.

In a follow-up article (an English translation of which can be found [here](#)), Agamben argues that our response to COVID-19 is essentially anti-social. For, he contends, we have transformed ourselves from being sisters, brothers, mothers, fathers, friends and co-workers to “virus-carriers.” All that we think about when we see another person approaching us on the street is whether she or he might have the virus. Our social relations, or ways of relating to others, have been fundamentally disrupted.

Agamben’s views have been challenged. Critics have argued that the focus on “bare life” should be praised rather than criticised. The shutdown, for the sake of life, reveals a real heart in us: that we care about the lives of others and are willing to give up so much in order to protect those lives. In turn, biological (“bare”) life is itself a form of abstraction. After all, without biological life there is no possibility for that richer form of life that Agamben highly prizes. Accordingly, and as Slavoj Žižek has argued, the response to COVID-19 is not at all anti-social, but deeply social: it reveals a fundamental care for others, and a willingness to make sacrifices for the sake of the most vulnerable.

There is, no doubt, truth to these critiques. However, they do not ultimately get at the kernel of Agamben’s argument. For, as Italian philosopher Luca Illetterati has argued, the crucial problem has to do with the abstract nature of the COVID-19 response: it is abstract

because, in its effort to save “lives,” it has overlooked the reality of lives — the lives that we actually live.

### **Lives at risk**

Across the world, but especially in Europe, the shutdown has involved closure of most businesses and governmental agencies, and the creation of hospital beds for the expected corona patients. This has affected people’s lives in ways that we cannot yet fully grasp or assess.

The economic effects of the shutdown are the most widely discussed and acknowledged. In turn, the economic crisis that is upon us was one of the reasons why some governments, to begin with, resisted shutdowns. Poverty is a likely result of the shutdown, and estimates predict that in certain parts of Italy 41 per cent of the population is at risk of poverty. Businesses are going bankrupt, homeowners are losing their homes, and people are losing their jobs.

While different countries are dealing with the economic crisis differently, the vast majority of them have not dealt with it adequately. In the United States, for instance, in just three weeks, 17 million individuals became unemployed. There is no reason to expect that these newly unemployed individuals will find employment in the aftermath. In turn, the \$1200 payment approved by Congress has been estimated to cover costs for one week, not months, of shutdown. Similar shortcomings have been noted in the UK, where the government’s scheme does not assist those without work or those who are about to lose their jobs.

In Australia, the government has been more generous, but it has refused to expand support to casuals and temporary visa holders. Some critics have argued that the stimulus is simply not enough to keep a majority of people employed, while others worry about its efficiency. After all, the checks following this summer’s horrific bushfires have yet to arrive, and the small businesses that suffered on their account are, for this reason, unlikely to survive.

But it is not only economics and the ensuing poverty that the shutdown has not adequately taken into consideration, even if poverty is going to be the likely cause of the greatest number of deaths. Other casualties of our response are other patients — which is to say, human beings who are sick, but not from COVID-19.

In Germany, governments have required hospitals to empty beds. This has meant that cancer patients are being turned away from hospitals. Though these patients only have “small” tumours, it is impossible to know whether delaying the operation for a month or two will not put this individual’s life at risk. As Martin Schuler, Director of the University Cancer Clinic in Essen, notes, cancer is unpredictable and delaying an operation may be putting lives at risk. After all, he emphasises, “there is not only one illness in Germany.”

In an effort to challenge the one-sided focus on COVID-19 patients, German citizens have developed a website to indicate where (in which clinics) ICU beds are being used to capacity, and where they are not. On a related website, doctors are able to provide up-to-date information on the numbers of beds available. In Tübingen, where I live, 26 of the 85 beds prepared for COVID-19 were used on 12 April.

A number of articles have focused on the way that women in particular are being negatively affected by the shutdown. According to the New York Times, since the shutdown, the number of women experiencing domestic violence has surged (in Spain, for instance, during the first two weeks of the shutdown 18 per cent more women called the domestic violence hotline than in the same period the previous month). With no access to social services and, in many nations in Europe, no permission to leave their homes, these women find themselves completely unprotected. Their lives are at risk. The same is the case for children with abusive parents.

Children’s education is, of course, a right — one that they supposedly can continue to enjoy over Zoom and other media. However, as the Sydney Morning Herald has reported, the shutdown and school closures

in Australia mean that the number of students who are not going to be part of the formal education system will skyrocket. One teacher interviewed for the article is particularly concerned, warning that these are the children who will most likely end up waiting in a Centrelink queue in a couple of years.

What these examples demonstrate is that the shutdown response, while saving some lives, is putting many other lives at risk: the lives of cancer patients; the lives of women with abusive partners; the lives of children living in abusive or negligent homes; the lives of the impoverished. These lives matter, too. But the shutdown, with its one-sided focus on COVID-19, has overlooked or forgotten them.

### **Biological life is social life**

A key aspect of Agamben's argument, and Illetterati's response, is that life, or at least a meaningful life — a life worth living — is a social life: a life that is engaged with the world of culture, politics, religion. To conceive of life in any other way is to fundamentally divorce the body from its lived reality. While their argument focuses on human life, it can also be also made for biological life. Biological life, too, is social.

Though biologists do not agree on what we mean by "life," it is clear that biological life entails certain features: organisms are both in their environments and also separate from their environments. Thus, while their growth, development and reproduction are affected by their surroundings, their growth and reproductive cycles are also based on their own nature: some grow more quickly, some less; some reproduce more often, some less. In mammals, where we see a greater independence from the environment, the organism's body temperature is maintained by an internal mechanism, not by its surroundings. Still, mammalian behaviour changes significantly in relation to the seasons (consider hibernation).

Ultimately, then, an essential feature of life is that it takes place in a specific context, which we call "environment." This environment is, in turn, dynamic: it changes over time, and it is a product of an ongoing

relation between the many organisms that inhabit the environment. Life does not happen in isolation, and the essential activities of life (growth, development, reproduction) occur in a dynamic context, in which living beings are constantly relating to other living beings. Life, one can say, is relation.

This is what we need to keep in mind as we think about what kind of response is required to the environmental crisis. We need to remember that life is essentially relational — or better, ecological. And unless we develop a response that can consider life in all its relations, we are going to act in ways that fundamentally undermine lives.

### **Ethical life**

As German philosopher Markus Gabriel has argued, the COVID-19 shutdown infringes on every aspect of ourselves: not only our biological lives, but also our psychological or emotional lives, our social and political lives, our intellectual lives.

That the shutdown affects every aspect of our lives should mean that every aspect of our lives should be taken into consideration when decisions about restrictions or easing restrictions are being made. It means, in other words, that not only epidemiologists, but also ethicists, sociologists, political scientists, economists, philosophers and theologians should be part of the decision-making process concerning the right response to the crisis.

This is exactly what it means to consider life in all its relations — to consider it in as capacious and inclusive a way as possible. To take account of the whole human being, and to develop a context-sensitive understanding of human and planetary health.

But governments across the world have refused to adopt this stance. In Germany, where a lively debate on the shutdown has emerged, political scientists, lawyers, doctors and ethicists have challenged the shutdown on a number of grounds: political, moral and psychological. The infringement of basic rights is especially troubling, but so is the lack of consideration of our psychological well-being. They have also

challenged the shutdown on health and environmental grounds. In fact, some of the country's most highly respected epidemiologists have questioned the shutdown altogether.

And while recent research has shown that a context-sensitive approach must be taken to understand why only five regions in the world have been so badly struck by COVID-19 (a potential answer being air pollution), politicians press on with averted eyes. German Chancellor Angela Merkel, for instance, while drawing on some expert advice to reopen small shops and allow those students taking exams to return to schools on 4 May, announced in a cabinet meeting on 20 April that she wants to end the “orgiastic discussions of reopening.” The German public was shocked by Merkel's use of the term “orgiastic,” but the sentiment was clear: further discussion, with potentially diverging views, is unwanted. Is this what a democracy should look like?

Politics wants to put an end to the crucial questions being asked: questions that seek to consider the whole human being, and all human beings; questions that demand that we adopt a more integrated understanding of health. Unfortunately, however, we cannot put our health “on hold.” Our psychological, sociological and political wellbeing all play a role in our overall health.

For now, every aspect of our lives depends on government decisions. When we go out, how often, with how many people — these most basic of aspects of our lives are no longer decided by us. We have been rendered passive in the face of this emergency.

### **An ecological approach to the environmental crisis**

The idea that children in China are seeing the stars for the first time is no cause for celebration, but for deep critical reflection. Does this mean we want a world in which children cannot gaze at the stars? Few of us would want such a world — but that does not mean we should celebrate or seek to emulate the COVID-19 response.

The measures put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic have significantly restricted our lives — on all levels and in the most fundamental ways: our biological, social, psychological and political lives. This is no way to be alive. This is no way to be a citizen, nor is it a way to actively engage with the world in a time of crisis. On the other hand, our lives before COVID-19 did not bode well for the environment: our eternal hunger for new products, our love of fossil fuels, and our one-sided individualism (think of toilet paper hoarding) cast a negative light on who we are (were?) and on the extent to which we are willing to change our ways and ourselves for the sake of others and the earth.

There is good reason to critique who we were and how we acted before the COVID-19 outbreak. But we also do not want to find ourselves living half-lives; nor do we want to find ourselves in a situation with our hands tied behind our backs, with governments using “state of emergency” power to undermine the system of checks-and-balances, or extend their authority in undemocratic ways, as some governments are doing now.

What lessons, then, can we glean from the COVID-19 crisis? In contrast to the shutdown, the response to the environmental crisis must be capacious, context sensitive and democratic. It must take account of the complexity and many-sidedness of life, and of the concreteness of all living beings. It must consider differences across regions and cultures. Only in this way can we develop an adequate response to the environmental crisis: one that aims not to neglect, exclude or put in danger’s way any of the beings that share this planet.

To develop an inclusive response requires careful thinking — thinking which demands that climate scientists work together with ecologists, ethicists, political scientists, psychologists, sociologists, philosophers and anthropologists, to develop an ecological approach to the environmental crisis. It also means that our response cannot emerge out of a state of emergency, where citizens are rendered passive and must await government directives with respect to their most basic rights. Accordingly, we must think and act now. And we must do so together.

The longer we wait, the more likely we will have to make recourse to a quick and half-considered response, like the one we are witnessing now. And that is not what the environmental movement should aim for.

**Dalia Nassar** is Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Sydney, and the author of *The Romantic Absolute: Being and Knowing in Early German Romantic Philosophy, 1795-1804*.

**A God Of Hope - A poem by M.S. Lowndes**

I just want to say thank you  
For this life you've given me,  
For all the wondrous blessings,  
For setting my spirit free

You are such an awesome God  
Who only gives the best,  
Giving us a life of hope  
When we face all kinds of tests

For often we face in life,  
Struggles of every kind,  
Little things can get us down  
And peace is far from our minds

But you give hope to carry on  
No matter what we face,  
When we feel like giving up,  
Unable to finish the race

You step in just in time  
With angels heaven sent,  
To encourage us to carry on  
And to give us extra strength

So I praise you, Lord, for whom you are  
And for all that I can be,  
For I'd never have a better life  
Apart from your life in me.

# Are you a new parishioner?

## Have your details changed recently?

### Office use

- PR**
- NB**
- WL**
- PV**
- NSE**

Please return  
this form to the  
Parish Office.

Surname \_\_\_\_\_ First Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Suburb \_\_\_\_\_ Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

Postal address (if different from above) \_\_\_\_\_

Service(s) you normally attend \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (h) \_\_\_\_\_ Phone (w) \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (m) \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

DOB \_\_\_\_\_ Occupation \_\_\_\_\_

- I'm new to St Paul's
- I'm already on the roll – my details have changed
- I'm already on the roll – I just need a new name badge

# Pray throughout the week

## **Pray for the Anglican Church –**

for Justin, Archbishop of Canterbury; Archbishop Geoffrey Smith, newly elected Primate of Australia; Glenn, Archbishop of Sydney; Michael Stead, our Regional Bishop; and for all the bishops, priests, deacons and Religious of the Anglican Communion.

## **In the Anglican Cycle of Prayer**

we are asked to pray for the Anglican Church of Korea, for its Bishop, The Most Revd Moses Nagjun Yoo and for all his clergy and people.

## **Pray for Fr James and for**

**Fr Michael** as well as for Helen and Antonia. May God bless them and their ministries and may we support them as they work among us in Christ's name.

**Pray for St Paul's:** God of mercy, strengthen us to help shape a parish where diversity is a source of enrichment, compassion is common, life's poetry realized, suffering lightened through sharing, justice attended, joy pervasive, hope lived, the hum of the universe heard, and together with you and each other we build what is beautiful, true, worthy of your generosity to us, an echo of

your kingdom. Amen. (Ted Loder)

## **Pray for, St Matthew's, Zababdeh, (West Bank, Palestinian Territories), our Anglican**

**Communion Partner:** We remember especially their Parish Priest, Fr Saleem Dawani, and his ministry in the parish. We remember also Jameel Maher, who acts as the St Matthew's partnership link person with us. May both our parishes be blessed by the link we are establishing.

## **Pray for the Church's mission:**

Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honour of your name. Amen. (Author unknown)

## **Pray for our Children's Church:**

The Lord said, 'Let the little children come to me and do not forbid them for such is the kingdom of heaven'. Bless, Lord, your children who now stand before you in prayer. Help them to understand the depth of your love.

O Lord, bless our Children's Church and all its future endeavours, that through it we may glorify you with

your Father and the Holy Spirit, now, always and forever. **Amen.**

**Pray for peace:** Lead me from death to life, from falsehood to truth; lead me from despair to hope, from fear to trust; lead me from hate to love, from war to peace.

Let peace fill our hearts, our world, our universe.

**Pray for all in need,** we pray for all those who have lost jobs due to the COVID pandemic. May the Lord God give them peace and strength during this stressful time. May they not lose hope as they search for a new job .

**Pray for :** Alf; Joyce Bannister; Margaret Baseley; Isobel Brandy; Jenny Bounds; John Burns, June Cameron; Eddy; Simeon Felt; Anna Felt; Margaret Hayes; Graeme; Greg; Enid Kell; Jessie Langenegger; Lily; Margaret; David Morgan; Clive Norton; Alister & Sally Palmer; Mark Palmer; Sophie Palmer; Michelle Phillips; Geoff Riccord; Diane Smith; Jean Storey; David Thompson; Ken Turner; Dora Whikway; Bob Woods.

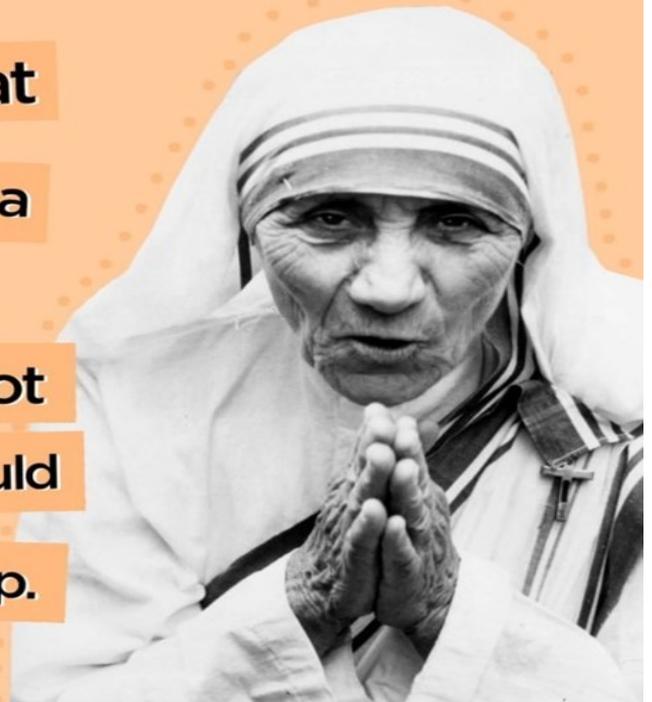
**In love and charity please remember the recently departed, especially** Tony Cane that God may grant him a place of refreshment, light and peace.

**Pray, too, for,** Russell George Lynott; Iris Gwendoline Stephens; Edward Livsey Taylor; Sir John Leslie Carrick; Reginald Clive Pollard and for any others whose year's mind falls around this time.

*Rest eternal grant unto them O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon him!*

“  
We ourselves feel that  
what we are doing is just a  
drop in the ocean.

But if that drop were not  
there, I think the ocean would  
be less by that missing drop.



# CONTACT US **St PAUL'S ANGLICAN CHURCH**

**Phone** 9747 4327

**Post** PO Box 530, Burwood, NSW 1805

**Website** [www.stpaulsburwood.org.au](http://www.stpaulsburwood.org.au)

**Rector** Fr James Collins  
[rector@stpaulsburwood.anglican.asn.au](mailto:rector@stpaulsburwood.anglican.asn.au)

**Senior Assistant Priest** Fr Michael Deasey OAM

**Honorary Priest** Fr Jim Pettigrew

**Lay Minister** Ms Rosemary King

**Director of Music** Mr David Russell

**Organ Scholar** Aleksander Mitsios (Organ Scholar)  
Bailey Yeates (Junior Organ Scholar)

**Rector's Warden** Dr Jane Carrick – 0418 399 664

**People's Wardens** Mrs Elizabeth Griffiths – 8033 3113  
Mrs Pam Brock – 9747 3619

**Office Secretary** Mrs Caroline Badra  
(9.30am to 2.30pm, Tuesday to Friday)  
[office@stpaulsburwood.anglican.asn.au](mailto:office@stpaulsburwood.anglican.asn.au)



- Supporting St Paul's Anglican Church community.
- With 25 years of experience, we can arrange a service that is personal, meaningful and reflects a person's life.
- We offer a wide range of options and competitive pricing.
- Pre-Arranging a service allows you to plan the details of a

**9747 4000**

**24 HOURS 7 DAYS**

**[www.unityfunerals.com.au](http://www.unityfunerals.com.au)**

**INDEPENDENT, AUSTRALIAN OWNED FUNERAL SERVICE**