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# Speaking to the mood of the nation in the wake of the Covid-19 crisis

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**The Very Reverend Adrian Dorber, Dean of Lichfield**

Space for Learning - 1 June 2020



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## Introduction

I'm offering a few reflections and resources to help us think through the extraordinary times we have been living in. There has been a flurry of ecclesiastical comment on the Dominic Cummings affair but we haven't heard much from official sources about what kind of hope and vision the Christian faith brings to bear on our corporate life as communities and as a nation.

Everyone involved in Christian ministry faces the responsibility not only of leading and guiding part of the Church but also in caring for, responding to, and bringing blessing and critique to the wider community in which the Church is set. We've all had to face questions from worried people recently, not only existential questions about suffering and death, but "what's going on?" "What will the new normal look like?" "Are our children's prospects threatened?" "Will life be worse for most of us?" Will the goodwill and neighbourliness we've discovered be forgotten or squandered?" "Has the crisis been a wake-up call to live differently, more sustainably, more together?"

There are no easy answers but there are good resources to help shape conversations and inspire appropriate action. I would like to invite wider discussion from across the Diocese in imagining what a post-Covid-19 society might look like and how faith communities can articulate their faith and values as a contribution to public thinking and an inspiration to promoting the common good. I'll try and host an occasion later in the year when some of our thinking can be shared.

## Speaking to the mood of the nation in the wake of the Covid-19 Crisis: A Resource compiled by the Dean of Lichfield, Adrian Dorber.

### How to use the material

The aim of this resource pack is to help you reflect on the experience of the pandemic, to gather those reflections together if you wish to contribute to a wider discussion later in the year, reckon with some journalistic readings of the crisis, have a look at a 'green' reading of the crisis, take on board a contentious verdict on the failure of our culture, and remind ourselves of what we already know - our tradition of Social Theology with its foundations in scripture, tradition, reason and experience. Finally, to consider what bodies (Church/civil) we can address or dialogue with and what we'd feel able or empowered to say or share or explore.

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## A. Starting Point: the seven-fold inventory

1. To cope with the challenge of ministry in the crisis, what have you (and your church community) had to develop that you would like to further develop?
2. How have you been interpreting the crisis for yourself and for the community?
3. What kind of communication have you received or you have been able to make with parish and congregation during lockdown?
4. What's been good about your communication: given and received?
5. What's been difficult or painful news or comment to give or receive?
6. What experiences have been liberating at a pastoral and personal level?
7. What's my self-understanding in the light of recent experience?

## B. The Journalistic Pieces (and the long paper 'A Green House Gas' by John Barry)

In this bundle of different kinds of perspectives and outlooks:

- what strikes you as pertinent, helpful, provocative?
- what chimes with your understanding of Christian social ethics?
- what stretches your understanding of Christian social ethics?
- what fully contradicts or relativises your understanding of Christian social ethics?

1. Simon Tisdall's article from *The Observer*.

As we emerge from crisis we need a revolution for a born-again world.

2. Peter Hennessy's article from *The Tablet*.

The corona experience, though suffused in tragedy, has shown us the very best of ourselves.

3. Matthew Parris's article from *The Spectator*.

The difficult balance of public vs political agony.

4. If you've got time, read the long (15 pages) paper from John Barry from the Green House think tank. [Download paper here](#)

## C. The contentious conclusion of Adrian Pabst's book, *The Demons of Liberal Democracy* (Polity Press, 2019, pp. 149-152)

Pabst is a practising Christian, part of the Radical Orthodoxy Movement. As you read this piece, what challenges or affirms your understanding of the moral foundation of society and how it should be ordered? (You might want to do this part of the resource pack with colleagues or friends - it might make for a sparky conversation!)

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**D. Have a look at my reflection on social theology: *Notes on Anglican Social Theology - its practice and reception.***

- What would you add or what perspectives would you want to bring or what other emphasis would you add that you believe to be really helpful or significant?
- Anything you would wish to challenge?

Think of your sources.

1. Which passages in the Bible speak significantly to God's concern for justice, peace and flourishing? Pentateuch? Psalms? Prophets? Wisdom literature? Gospels? Epistles? Revelation?
2. On which Christian thinkers do you base your views about the inter-relationship of the Church and society and society's proper ordering?
3. Thinking of the past two months, what has given you grounds for hope? What has been your biggest fear for society once the crisis ends? If you had the gift of prophecy, what would you feel called to say?

**E. Who are your conversation partners in Church and Community?**

- Local church
- Ecumenical partners
- Local authorities
- Local civic associations
- Political parties
- Special interest groups
- An event you can convene
- Who are the people who have to be listened to?
- How to share your learning/ experience in the Diocese?

**Adrian Dorber**

**May 2020**

(Please see my suggestions for further reading if you wish to pursue things.)

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## Further Reading

Nicholas Sagovsky, *Christian Tradition and the Practice of Justice*, SPK, 2008

Will Hutton, *How Good We Can Be: Ending the Mercenary Society and Building a Great Country*, Little Brown, 2015

Malcolm Brown (ed.), *Anglican Social Theology*, Church House Publishing, 2014

Simon Cuff, *Love in Action: Catholic Social Teaching for Every Church*, SCM Press, 2019

Rowan Williams, 'Knowing Our Limits', *Crisis and Recovery: Ethics, Economics and Justice*, eds. Rowan Williams and Larry Elliott, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010

Justin Welby, *Reimagining Britain: Foundations for Hope*, Bloomsbury 2018

Virginia Moffatt (ed.), *Reclaiming the Common Good - how Christians can help rebuild our broken world*, Darton Longman Todd, 2017

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# Notes on Anglican Social Theology - its practice and reception

## Adrian Dorber

Anglican Social Theology (Public Theology) has been through many phases of style and content. Quite right! It has ranged from weighty reports such as 'Faith in the City', 'The Church and the Bomb' (based very much on Royal Commission methodology: examine the evidence, point out what is wrong and all people of reason and goodwill will agree with you), to more fragmentary, prophetic critiques based on the lived experience of the poor and the marginalised. The towering figure of Archbishop William Temple (1881-1944) and his legacy 'Christianity and the Social Order' remains one of the outstanding attempts to enable Christians respond to God through worship, reflection and action with fidelity and an adequate grasp of society. More recently, Evangelical social theology has been prominent with its basis in social activism, moving from a concern with the personal and domestic to matters of structural injustice such as poverty and racial discrimination, housing, education and welfare.

Wherever one takes one's stand in the rich pattern of Anglican thought, it has to be acknowledged that there is remarkable ecumenical convergence between the Catholic and Anglican communions in the area of social thought. Catholic social teaching has been described as the Catholic Church's "best kept secret". Archbishop Justin Welby has paid tribute to his own indebtedness to this body of thought. He called it "the applied outworking of the good news of Jesus Christ in terms of social structures and social justice: a series of brilliant reflections on the nature of a functional and just society."

Much of the official thinking of the two Church hierarchies has followed this trajectory. *Its fundamental principles are:*

- The fundamental nature of human dignity
- The Common Good
- Solidarity
- Subsidiarity
- Social Sin
- The preferential option for the poor

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Simon Cuff has summarised these principles very well (Cuff, *Love in Action*, SCM Press, 2019, p. civ-xv):

**"The inalienable dignity of each and every human being** has its basis in the fact of our creation by and in the image of God.

The **Common Good** is that which builds up the entire human race. the relationships between each of us make up the **solidarity** which strengthens the human race and builds up the body of Christ. The relationships within and across that race and body, and the intermediary groups which mediate between the individual and the whole constitute **subsidiarity**, which keeps the power of decision-making close to those affected by any decision to be made.

Where these decisions are exercised poorly or selfishly, or in the interests of certain individuals or parts of the body, we see the effect of **social sin**. Such sin is part of the world of competing interests in which we live, where conflicting claims and interests can be made on the same resources. In deciding between such claims, **the preferential option for the poor** reminds the whole of the human race that focusing on the poorest members of that race enables the flourishing of all. It should be obvious that in combination these principles strengthen the flourishing of the entire human race, and enable every member to live out the abundance of the human life to which God wills us all. This is as true of the body of Christ as of the human race as a whole."

Of course, all this calls into question the kind of market fundamentalism enunciated by many economists - "The business of business is business and business alone" (Milton Friedman) - The duty of company directors is to shareholders and shareholders alone. Of course, it was and is claimed that a rising tide of prosperity lifts all boats; wealth trickles down from the top and eventually helps everyone. Yet markets depend equally on social capital and trust. The common good is an operating principle for every healthy and loving family however constituted and most of the institutions that care for us and educate us do not operate on a profit motive but on mutuality. The NHS represents the principle that the health care interests of everyone are the responsibility of everyone. Few would regards

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paying tax to support the NHS as a charitable donation or those who use the NHS as being selfish: it is a civic responsibility for a shared benefit - for the common good.

The pastoral dilemma many of us face is that we work with people forced to live a divided life. There's the everyday 'social self' on one hand, where the culture and ethos of the common good is taken for granted and normative. On the other hand, there is a workplace culture where neoliberal individualism and the ethos of self-interest are part and parcel of holding a job. Living in two camps is a strain. It can be argued that the conflict is resolved by taking the values of the workplace into the home and into social life. This is a profound misreading of human nature: we are not isolated consumers. If we treat each other as if we were, social trust is quickly corroded. The basis of all moral human agency has to be some level of trust. Without it there is de-personalisation, indifference and violence.

If we understand that men, women and children have inalienable rights because of their dignity as creatures made in the image and likeness of God, that human life is precious, then solidarity expresses a natural law, a truth about human nature, a basic instinct that we belong to one another. Hence any economic theory that claims to be based on truths about human nature ought to be aligned with it. Competition is embedded in nature, but so is cooperation, collaboration and reciprocity. Solidarity rescues human life from being what Thomas Hobbes described as "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short".

Equally, we have to acknowledge that terrible things have happened in the name of the 'collective' and this is where solidarity has to be corrected and checked by subsidiarity, the notion that families, individuals, small units, local societies have a natural inclination to self-determination and therefore, to a degree, of self-government. Yet, the main tenets of social theology face pugnacious tabloid mockery, and we can be under no illusion about the fierceness of those who hold contrary views. Listen to Will Hutton:

"Church leaders who inveigh against the injustices of our society are regarded with amused indifference as emissaries from planet God - literally a universe apart, and in such decline that their moral intensity is eccentric, or from the perspective of the right, motivated by political malevolence."



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"It was ironic that it fell to Rupert Murdoch's daughter, Elizabeth, giving the McTaggart lecture at the Edinburgh T.V. Festival in 2012, to argue that what was happening was to establish profit and the market as the only valid 'sorting mechanism' in society. But 'it's us, human beings, we the people who create the society we want, not profit', she insisted. The consequence, she said, was 'an unsettling death of integrity across so many of our institutions'. Integrity had collapsed, she argued, because of the collective acceptance of a libertarian belief in an individual's calculus of profit and loss. She continued: 'it's increasingly apparent that the absence of purpose, of moral language within government, media or business could become one of the most dangerous own goals for capitalism and freedom'."

The opportunities and threats of our current situation seem beautifully balanced. Yet we're in the days after Pentecost and rather than regard the Holy Spirit as solely an in-house refreshing agency, it is right to regard the Spirit as the one who also re-births the Earth in righteousness.

"Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful people.  
Come Holy Spirit, and renew the face of the Earth."

# As we emerge from crisis, we need a revolution for a born-again world

## FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMENTARY

Simon Tisdall



**R**esponding to Donald Trump's pandemic antics last week, Hu Xijin, the editor of China's state-controlled *Global Times*, accused the US president of trying to distract attention from his failure to prevent the deaths of nearly 100,000 Americans. "If it were in China, the White House would have been burned down by angry people," he tweeted.

Given Beijing's dislike for protests of any kind, that seems unlikely. Yet Hu raised a question relevant to all countries ravaged by Covid-19. Where is the fury, the public outrage? Faced by the inability of incompetent governments to protect them, why have the people not risen up, erected figurative scaffolds and guillotines, and set a torch to the established political order?

In other words, when does the revolution begin? Furloughed workers of the world, unite! You have nothing to lose but your supply chains.

Given the history of the past century, today's politicians, democratic or authoritarian, left or right, may count themselves fortunate not to be experiencing a fiercer backlash. This may be brewing, once people regain their nerve. Many countries have seen small-scale Covid-related protests. Yet by and large, insurrection has not gone viral – yet.

That's despite a consensus among business leaders, scientists and pundits that the world will never be the same again. A watershed has been reached, they say. Mostly older people are suffering now, but millions among the younger generations may have their lives forcibly upended for years to come. Like it or not, a second Age of Revolution is dawning.

So the real question is not whether but what manner of revolution is coming. Will it be of the uncontrollable, ideological 20th-century variety associated with the likes of Marx, Mao, Guevara and Castro? Or will it take the form of a non-violent but nonetheless rapid and profound shift in the way a more consciously interdependent world works? A lot rests on how the pandemic's shockwaves and after-effects are directed and shaped.

The main elements of political revolutions have not changed much since Aristotle identified them more than 2,300 years ago. Whatever the objective, he wrote in Book V of *The Politics*, inequality is the chief cause of revolution. Justice and equality are "the fundamental basis of any state", and inequality, being a kind of injustice, is potent grounds for challenging that state. "The lesser rebel in order to be equal, the equal in order to be greater. These then are conditions predisposing to revolution," Aristotle declared.

Amid epidemic uncertainty, two things are clear. First, the virus is universal and ubiquitous – a threat to all humankind. Second, its impacts are deeply unequal, decisively determined by social class, race, ethnicity, income, nutrition, education, living conditions and geographical location as well as by gender and age.

It follows that the large, unjust social inequalities found both within and between wealthy and developing countries, and ruthlessly exposed by the virus, are just as powerfully insurrectionary in nature today as when Aristotle first pondered them or when Marie Antoinette told peasants to eat cake.

The danger that entrenched inequality poses to hopes of weathering the Covid storm without chaotic upheavals was recently debated by the tsars of modern American capitalism. "This is our chance to do the right thing" by reducing income disparities, said top investor Mark Cuban. Ray Dalio, a hedge-fund billionaire, described inequality as a national emergency. "If you don't have a situation where people have opportunity, you're not only failing to tap all the potential, which is uneconomic, you're threatening the existence of the system," Dalio said.

JP Morgan's chief executive,



Jamie Dimon of JP Morgan has said the pandemic 'is a wake-up call' for business and governments.

Jamie Dimon, called the pandemic "a wake-up call ... for business and government to think, act and invest for the common good". This sounds almost socialistic.

A revolutionary agenda for the post-pandemic world also includes meaningful steps to address poverty and the north-south wealth gap, more urgent approaches to linked climate, energy, water and mass extinction crises and, for example, the adoption of so-called doughnut economics that measures prosperity by counting shared social, health and environmental benefits, not GDP growth.

It may seem like pie in the sky. But so too did the idea of millions working from home, and halting road and air travel, until it happened almost overnight. Whether recognised as such or not, this is a revolutionary manifesto that, if it is pursued – as a growing body of opinion believes it must be – will demand the transformation of political behaviour and organisation.

**I**n the US, the increasing lawlessness of the Trump plutocracy, coupled with its high-handed pandemic response, has exposed the inadequacy of democratic checks and balances created more than 200 years ago. What's required now is a second American revolution – and a fresh constitutional convention that demolishes anachronisms such as the electoral college, makes democracy work for all, and refocuses on constructive global engagement.

In Britain, centralised, top-down mismanagement of the pandemic has underscored a crisis of representative governance and national cohesion. To survive as a United Kingdom, an insurgent moment akin to the Great Reform Act of 1832 is needed. In Europe, too, the EU *ancien regime* must remake itself or risk overthrow by populist-nationalist *sans-culottes*.

Nor may authoritarian oligarchies such as China and Russia, weaned on violent rebellion, continue on their self-aggrandising, quasi-imperialist path if repeat conflagrations are to be avoided. To forge the necessary consensus for this born-again world, it's time to reboot the United Nations, revive the idealism of the 1945 San Francisco founding conference, and rekindle that transformative vision of humankind working in concert to defeat common evils.

As Aristotle might have said, the revolution starts here.

Observer  
Sunday  
24 May  
2020

## The corona experience, though suffused in tragedy, has shown us the very best of ourselves



“ It’s perilous, perhaps even foolhardy, to try and write the history of an event as it is still unfolding. But so extraordinary are the times that this is exactly how I am filling the 12 weeks the NHS has instructed me to stay at home along with 1.5 million others deemed to be specially vulnerable.

Of one thing I am sure. Henceforth, those who write the history of Britain post 1945 will divide it into BC, Before Corona, and AC, After Corona. Ours is an experience laced with sorrow, loss and widespread anxiety.

Never before have we been both collectivised – the huge surge of extra state power requiring us to be the “Corona state” itself embodying the liberties we have temporarily lent to the government – and atomised at the same time.

It is impossible to be as detached and coolly analytical about what is unfolding as a professional historian should be, but I have chosen two methods to increase my chances. I am keeping a daily “Corona Britain” diary. Historians have a tendency to tidy things up when an event is over. Diaries can be an antidote as we travel a baffling arc in the cycle of our collective and individual histories.

And I have started to write a book about the refreshed and extended duty of care which might make the weather in our post-corona politics and society, and lead to a substantial array of improvements and reforms in the early 2020s that would be a worthy memorial to those we have lost and those we have still to lose, as well as ensuring that the year of loss is not followed by a decade of squandered opportunities and narrow partisan politics.

I have sensed the possibility of this each Thursday evening at eight when we come out of our houses, lean out of our flats and cheer, clap, rattle our pots and pans to show how much we cherish our NHS staff and all who work on the front lines in care homes, pharmacies, stores, transport and delivery or one of the three-quarters-of-a-million volunteers. I am not alone in hearing in that glorious cacophony the sound of a people and a nation rediscovering their better selves.

The question is: can it – will it – be

sustained post-corona and be turned into something durable? Long ago we did exactly this in the decisive war and post-war years of the 1940s, which also shaped the Queen and to which she returned in her short but moving address from Windsor Castle last week. That great burst of reform and social betterment was powered by a formidable “never again” impulse – never again would we have to go through an economic slump like that of the 1930s; never again would the bulk of our people suffer chronic multiple deprivations.

In 1942, the greatest social arithmetician of the age, Sir William Beveridge, produced a map for the pathway to reconstruction. He saw “five giants” on the “road to recovery”: WANT, DISEASE, IGNORANCE, SQUALOR and IDLENESS.

Beveridge’s key insight was that all five had to be struck simultaneously if the outer crust of deprivation was to be cracked and the whole scheme would only work if full employment was maintained. There has never been a report like it, before or since.

The wartime coalition government of Winston Churchill began the implementation; the Attlee governments of 1945-51 completed it. It was the heart of a post-war consensus, of Britain’s post-1945 “new deal”.

A new Beveridge is above all what post-corona Britain needs. We already have the “never again” impulse. Can we find the people to draw us such a plan? Can we see those in the political class who can conjure the words to carry the spirit and the skills to turn it into policy and practice?

Brexit wore us out – three-and-a-half scouring, souring years in which the worst characteristics of our politics were on display. The corona experience, though suffused in tragedy, has shown us the very best of ourselves once more.

We can do it. It is entirely up to us. The road to 2050 can be the remaking of us; a high road, not a low road for the country and our people to travel.

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# The difficult balance of public vs political agony



Fear is the politician's friend. When terror grips the public, an opportunity arises for those in power to step forward as the people's guide and protector in dangerous times. One sees this in wars. One sees it whenever the public suspects hostile conspiracies, networks of spies or mischief-makers. We likewise cleave to leaders who will confound predatory foreign powers, terrorist plots or the danger of being swamped by waves of immigrants. In fear or anxiety the people will hug their leaders closer, and their leaders know this as surely as every priest knows that despair and anxiety are his faith's most reliable draw.

Do not, therefore, overlook the power of a submicroscopic virus to herd the flock we call the electorate towards the shepherds we call the political class. And don't suppose the shepherds haven't noticed.

The coronavirus panic we've landed ourselves in brings with it woes for politicians and people alike, but few in politics or public administration are going to lose their jobs; millions of others will; and meanwhile there is something almost beyond price now within reach of the party in government. How can I express this, even name it, without sounding insulting? Let me make clear what I do *not* mean to imply.

I do not imply that anyone in our national leadership is luxuriating in any conscious sense of advantage from the Covid-19 crisis. I do not imply that the Conservative party is cynically anticipating the reward that could flow from their near-ecstatic embrace of our national religion, the NHS. Our governing class will have persuaded themselves that their advice is blind to everything but the greater public good. I freely grant that.

But perception of advantage or disadvantage is often unconscious. Subliminally, political decision-making these last two months has been partly driven by a powerful political imperative to be associated with the National Health Service and to harvest some of the respect, even adoration, the NHS commands; and by an equally powerful political dread of being seen to have failed the NHS at a moment of danger.

Now if the NHS and the public good are the same thing, there can be no harm here. But what if they are not? What if our NHS

is not, in fact, as successful at its job as the public think? Or — and this is the most fundamental question — what if the short-term prevention of death could conflict with the longer-term wellbeing of the nation? I'll deal with each of those two questions in turn, but first remind you why Conservative politicians shrink from any hint of friction between themselves and our health service.

Ever since the post-war Labour government nationalised health, the Tories have been half-suspected of secretly doubting the project but going along with it because it's wildly popular with voters. When, therefore, Labour governments economise on health spending, we're ready to accept that this is because the Chancellor's cupboard is bare. When Tory governments do it, we're readier

*Along comes a crisis that offers a Conservative government a historic chance to show that they care*

to believe it's because they don't love the NHS as they should.

This mistrust has exacted a persistent electoral price for the Tories: the most popular idea in Britain has been the idea Labour cherishes and the Tories (voters suspect) don't. Now along comes a crisis that offers a Conservative government a historic chance to show that they and their party care. Who with a political bone in their body wouldn't leap to grasp it?

Next to the first of my two questions. Is our health service as good as we think? Ministers are loath to let daylight in on the magic of our NHS, but it strikes me, reading between the lines, that Matt Hancock thinks too many health workers are using masks, gloves and gowns wastefully, while others won't get tested because they prefer to stay isolated at home. But do ministers breathe a word of it? Our health service enjoys a position akin to the Thai monarchy: no breath of complaint, question, or even levity is permitted.

Overlooking the fact that other countries' health systems seem to have done as well as or better than ours, we applaud from front windows or crowd on to Westminster Bridge (flouting health advice) to clap.

Many find this moving. I find it as mawkish as teddy bears and flowers for Diana. Of course front line NHS staff are dutiful and brave. The poor bloody infantry always are. The monolith they work for, however, has appeared slow-footed and logistically challenged, its command structure so tangled that nobody seems to know which levers are actually connected to anything. Are we clapping the bureaucracy when we clap?

If it's the front liners we're clapping, then how about some applause for Britain's bus drivers? Comparing this workforce with NHS nurses makes bus-driving look like a much bigger Covid risk, but we'd need to know more about the two workforces. Suffice it to say that I've seen no evidence so far that working on the front line of the NHS is inherently more dangerous than much other public-facing work. If such evidence exists, let's have it.

And how about applause for the nation's small shopkeepers and supermarket counter staff, largely unsung heroes? But no, a secular society whose first fear is death is making cathedrals of our hospitals, priestly vestments of personal protection equipment, and altars of ventilators. And cabinet ministers, knowing it, scurry to lead the congregation in prayer, hoping some of the divine authority will rub off on them.

I have a question. The measure of the present lockdown's success is — must by definition be — the number who have never been exposed to the virus once the lockdown ends. This risks a 'second wave' of infections. Before ministers reversed the previous 'herd immunity' strategy, this risk will have been considered. The argument the other way will have been that in the short term the NHS might be overwhelmed, with avoidable deaths of identifiable people resulting. Ministers will have had to weigh one horror against the other. Which of the following alternatives do you think tipped the balance for them: (a) the *numbers* of likely deaths attached to each strategy? Or (b) the very political horror of TV footage of hospitals turning ambulances away? In other words, might ministers have chosen, unconsciously, to prolong the public agony in order to avoid political agony? I leave the question hanging.

Adrian Pabst : The Demons of  
Liberal Democracy  
Polity Press 2019

## Conclusion – Renewing the Democratic Promise

In 1997 the American commentator Fareed Zakaria wrote an influential essay in *Foreign Affairs* on illiberal democracy in which he argued that ‘the two strands of liberal democracy are coming apart . . . Democracy is flourishing . . . liberalism is not.’<sup>1</sup> While this evolution might have applied to some of the former transition countries, the more significant development has been just the opposite – the rise of hyper-liberalism and the erosion of democracy. This excess of liberalism and the deficit of democracy lead to a lack of legitimacy as growing economic and cultural insecurity, combined with social fragmentation, undermines the social contract that is the bedrock of liberal democratic government. In the final instance, liberal democracy is caught in a tension between the positive freedom of popular self-government and the negative freedom of ever greater individual choice and between an equal status of all before the law and the reduction of equality to sameness. Liberal democratic models are self-eroding as they conjure up the demons of oligarchy, demagoguery, anarchy and tyranny.

## Conclusion

Across the West and beyond, countries have witnessed the rise of undemocratic illiberal liberalism and an anti-liberal insurgency that are but two sides of the same coin. Both are mutually reinforcing and define their legitimacy in opposition to each other: elite technocrats claim to guard against anti-elite insurgents who seek to overthrow the establishment that is seen as corrupt and out of touch. But in reality both involve oligarchic power and deploy a mix of authoritarianism with populist demagoguery. They invoke the primacy of the will over any other principle – whether the primacy of the individual volition or the ‘will of the people’. Liberalism and populism also concentrate power and wealth in old elites and new classes turned corruptly oligarchic. They undermine parliamentary democracy and are silent about what people share as citizens or what binds them together as members of national and cultural communities. Both polarise politics and further divide society just when democracy requires a transcendent conversation about how in a context of plural values we can forge a common life.

This will require far more than either restating liberal democracy’s founding values of liberty and equality or delivering on the promise of prosperity and peace. Rather, democracy requires a renewed civic covenant – what Edmund Burke called ‘partnership . . . not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born.’<sup>2</sup> This emphasis on covenantal ties among generations can help us address the growing economic injustice between young and old today. Society is not a contract of individuals but a partnership between the generations that balances individual rights with mutual obligations

## Renewing the Democratic Promise

and contributions with rewards. But today we have a culture of entitlement that does just the opposite. Workers who have contributed for a lifetime receive ‘nothing for something’ – the same meagre unemployment benefits as the young or migrants who get ‘something for nothing’. Justice without compassion is empty, just as compassion without justice is blind. The path towards greater economic justice involves a renewed balance of interests among the generations and the building of a common good between estranged parts of the body politic.

Covenantants endow social relations with meaning that is missing from Hobbes’s and Locke’s idea of social contract underpinning liberal democracy because it ignores our social nature. Human beings are not atomised agents maximising their utility. Nor are they anonymous carriers of historical laws. We are born into social relations, ‘the little platoon we belong to in society’ (Burke), and these are the first object of our affections. We learn to love and care for family, neighbours, friends, colleagues and fellow citizens. Far from being confined to the in-group, this love creates a sense of attachment and belonging that extends to strangers – ‘the strangers in our midst’ who become part of our communities.<sup>3</sup>

Liberal elites and anti-liberal insurgents have little to say about our social nature. We are embodied beings who are embedded in relationships and institutions. They command affection and forge attachment as they are rooted in people’s identity and interests. These ‘public affections’, as Burke called them, are indispensable to the good functioning of the rule of law. They build trust and cooperation on which a prosperous market economy and a vibrant democracy depend. An appeal to love and affection reflects the primacy of

## Conclusion

relationships over impersonal mechanisms. The practice of lived fraternity can shape a politics of affection and attachment to people, place and purpose. This primacy of real relationships extends from the domestic arena to international relations. The strongest partnerships forged between nations come not through treaties or trade but through cultural association, and democracy within and between nations cannot survive and flourish without it.

We live in troubled times. A sense of anger and abandonment is spreading as people feel humiliated, unable to live the lives they hope for and powerless to shape the forces that dominate them and those they care about most. Politics is about nurturing a sense of fraternity – lived solidarity that can mediate between liberty and equality and direct collective action towards a plural search for the common good. A middle path of prudence and courage, based on virtuous leadership and popular participation, can renew the promise of democracy. Martin Luther King, Jr., who was assassinated half a century ago, called it the noble purpose of making ‘people . . . partners in power’.<sup>4</sup>