

Navigating Nothingness

Dr Lisel Joubert

Lecturer in Church History, Department of Systematic Theology and Ecclesiology, University of Stellenbosch; Ordained minister DRC Gansbaai.

Email: liseljoubert@sun.ac.za

Abstract

During the past 18 months and more religious leaders from different denominations and faith traditions had to be creative in leading their congregations into worship. Social media and computer technology in all its forms came to the rescue. One notable phenomenon was that congregants suddenly received much more spiritual resources and nourishment than in pre-Covid times. People were confronted with a veritable banquet of choice from meditations to sermons (and naturally the ever-popular end of the world warnings). There where people had the luxury of data, and access to social media platforms and the internet there were no scarcity of devotional material. However, in this presentation the question will be asked if abundance was really the best choice? Was and is this not actually a time of inviting pastors and ministers to help people to navigate nothingness and loss by giving less? What if believers were not bombarded but were led to find God in other places, in nothingness or not at all? The language of apophatic mysticism will be used as a conversation partner in contemplating the possibility of “navigating nothingness”. This tradition of Apophaticism reminds of Gregory of Nyssa who said, “reticence always benefits the theologian”; Jaroslav Pelikan who saw this tradition as a check on the “pretension of theologians” and E. Ann Matter who describes Apophaticism as “the theology that speaks away rather than affirms”.

