



DEATH IN A TIME OF COVID-19

Evert Van de Poll

Non-religious people and even quite a few who believe in God, suppose that there is nothing after death. The expression that someone has ‘passed away’, has lost its real sense of people ‘passing’, somehow, from the midst of the living to somewhere else. Death is reduced to a moment in time. In hospital, death happens when medical treatment stops. The devices are unplugged. The doctor determines the cause of death and that’s it. The End

“The coronavirus epidemic confronts us with the fragility of man and the reality of our mortality ”

Bottom-line

And yet, the subject of death, so avoided, concerns everyone. The coronavirus epidemic confronts us with the fragility of man and the reality of our mortality, despite all our techno-scientific means. People thought the worst was past and the economy would soon recover after the first wave earlier this year, (as if the economy is the real patient!). As a second wave hits the population, we’re less confident about our capacity to overcome ‘this thing’ quickly and easily, despite the news of a vaccine offering some glimmers of hope. That is the bottom line of the whole pandemic, the underlying uncertainty, which causes so much anxiety, stress, and even

EDITORIAL: Let’s talk about death

What is there still to be said, about the Covid-19 pandemic and its multiple consequences? It seems that all aspects have been dealt with by governments and their advisers, the medical profession, scientists and journalists.

And yet, it seems that one very important aspect is often left aside. The numbers of infections and the death toll in each country are reported daily. At the time of writing the pandemic has caused over 1.5 million deaths worldwide. However, these cold figures say nothing about how these people lived their last weeks or how they faced the inevitable death. The media comment on so-called health trends, but say little about the victims, their struggle, their fear, their agony, or even their faith or their expectation of a life beyond. All attention is paid to the prevention of death, and, containing the spread of the virus through masks, tests, physical distancing, monitoring and confinement, not to forget the hope being placed in mass vaccination programmes. Death has been pushed to the fringes, kept far from everyday life and its preoccupations. We don’t reckon with the possibility that we could die sooner than we think, perhaps today.

This issue of Vista explores the uncomfortable subject of death, and the contemporary Christian response to it. From understanding ‘the art of dying well’, to exploring the role of grief and the work of hospital chaplaincy, we hope you will find this issue helpful and encouraging to you in your ministry and personal reflection.

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depression. Everybody is involved, me too, whether I like it or not. I might catch the virus and contaminate someone else who could die from covid-19. Even my own life is in the balance, if my own immune system happens to fail. Am I prepared for that? Are my friends prepared for that? These questions should not be avoided.

What do Christians have to say?

By the very nature of their faith, Christians should be able to address the subject without hesitation. The Gospel is about conquering death, about a Saviour who died and rose again, who promised the believers: “I live, and you shall live”. However, it strikes us that churches and individual Christians speak so little about facing death, about comforting, about coping with grief. Despite a plethora of material, aimed at helping churches and individual believers to respond to the pandemic crisis, there appears to be little focus, if any, on the theological – and missiological – implications that people can no longer ignore the possibility of death.

It is these implications that we want to point out in this issue of Vista. They can be formulated in the form of questions that make us think: What do Christians have to say about death? What can we offer to the dying, apart from personal presence and medical assistance? Do we offer real comfort? Some kind of perspective? What is the ‘good news’ for people in lockdown, in an intensive care unit, in an old people’s home? What is our message in a society in the grips of the pandemic? How do we encourage people to take their mortality seriously?



Etching of the plague in Florence, 14th Century

Very briefly, we want to highlight three elements of response to the question of death.

Christian realism

A believer is a realist insofar as he fully accepts the implications of his mortality, and at the same time full of hope because he has placed his trust in God the Heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, for this life here and now, for the moment of death, and for life eternal.

From a Christian point of view, death has meaning. This is not the end but an ‘ontological’ transition, the same person who lived on earth will enter into a new mode of existence, a new dimension of life. A believer knows that he or she will be ‘with the Lord, in the house of the Father’, because of Jesus Christ who opened the door to eternal life for men. While this offer of salvation is made to all mankind, it has to be received by faith. It is in this life that the future beyond death is determined!

Ars moriendi, the art of dying well

In the history of the church, a whole tradition of pastoral ministry has developed, called *ars moriendi*, ‘the art of dying well’.¹ The term *ars moriendi* dates from the 14th century, the time of the Black Death, when the churches asked theologians to write guides for the consolation of the dying. But this part of a practice that is as old as the church itself. And it has continued until the 19th century included. Many texts have been written to help believers realise their mortality and be prepared to die, at whatever moment the Lord will call them ‘home’, to comfort those who are faced with an imminent death. In 1519, Martin Luther preached his famous *Sermon on Preparing to Die*, where

he proposed 20 points of reflection about death. “We should familiarize ourselves with death during our lifetime, inviting death into our presence when it is still at a distance and not on the move,” Luther preached. Practicing this *memento mori* (remembrance of death) enables Christians to overcome the natural fear of death and to fight against the devil who, particularly at the hour of one’s life, seeks to frighten us with “dangerous and pernicious thoughts” and take our assurance of eternal life away from us. One should prepare for death all along one’s

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life. One can be assured that God gives “great benefits, help, and strength” when the believer faces death, and by which he can be “loved and praised” even in the last hour.

This tradition has fallen into oblivion, with contemporary thinking very much focused on the faith experience in this life. But now, as the epidemic faces us with our fragility, we are reminded of themes that we have perhaps left too much aside.

John Sikorski² writes that today we are at a crossroads: a medicalized and scientific approach toward death accompanied by a great fear of suffering which manifests itself in two practical and diametrically opposed ways. On the one hand, it leads to arguments in favour of physician-assisted suicide, once a certain quality of life is no longer possible. On the other hand, it leads to the endless pursuit of new and experimental therapies. Treatment is pursued at all costs, disregarding both the likelihood of success and the disproportionate burdens that extraordinary treatments can place on the individual's and their family's quality of life. Fear of suffering and death thus leads to practices that deprive individuals and families of the potential good involved in accompanying, enduring and ultimately conquering death by sharing in Christ's victory over it. Fortunately, there is the hospice movement that aims at creating a space for the dying where they can be accompanied in a very personal way.

Matthew McCullough recently aroused much attention through writing about enhancing death awareness, among Christians.³ When we are aware of the reality of death, we see our problems in another perspective. Our joy does not depend only on what this life brings us. Moreover, by facing our mortality we become more aware of the power of Jesus in our lives, who gives us the force to live and to die with him. It is precisely this death awareness that enables us to enjoy a life a hope. Living in this way, then, is our evangelistic witness.

Care and survival – examples from the past

There is a long history of Christian care for the dying. Epidemics have occurred throughout history, spreading from one region to another through traders, soldiers and others who travelled. All over 'Christianised' Europe they were a recurrent phenomenon, right until the 20th century. The severest of all was the bubonic plague called 'The Black Death' that annihilated between a third and a half of the European population in the 14th century and which continued

to reappear periodically in Europe right up until the 18th century.

People did not know the real causes of this and other epidemic diseases, until the discoveries in the late 19th century, of what viruses are and how they spread. But they always took the same measures as today against the coronavirus: isolating those who have the disease from the rest of society. People with the disease were more or less left to die, while those who could afford it left the crowded cities where people ran more risks and wait for the end of the epidemic.

“... churches, monasteries and voluntary groups of Christians have always responded to epidemics by taking care of the people that suffered.”

It is interesting to see that churches, monasteries and voluntary groups of Christians have always responded to epidemics. by taking care of the people that suffered. Church historians like Rodney Stark write that during epidemics in the Roman Empire and the early Middle-Ages the survival rate among Christians was much higher than the general population because Christians cared for one another, enhancing even the physical chances of surviving the epidemic. Christians risked getting the diseases themselves, because of their hope. They did not fear death.⁴

In the 4th century, church father Basil of Cappadocia created an institution of hospitality, aimed at taking care of the homeless, the sick and especially those who were dying. This example was quickly followed all over the Christian world, and these institutions became the hospitals.

Christians have always also reached out to society at large. The Reformers Luther and Calvin emphasised that it is a matter of Christian charity to care for those who suffer from the plague, despite the risk of being contaminated. They and other church leaders argued that believers can take this risk, because they do not have to fear death and have the hope of eternal life.

Reading the stories of Christian care in times of previous epidemics inspires us today. They encourage Christian medical staff in their service to the suffering. They encourage churches to seek ways of reaching out to the suffering, despite the restrictive measures. As many people suffer from the lack of personal contact, everyone realises how precious this is. It reinforces the resilience of those who suffer, it even contributes to their physical survival.

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Conclusion

Covid has brought a time of great challenge, but also opportunity to the church. Opportunity to be involved in practical good works, reaching out to the most vulnerable in society to meet their current needs. But in the busyness of the here and now of helping people 'live well' let us not forget the future hope and comfort that enabling people to die well will bring.

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Endnotes

1. For a description of this tradition, and of modern authors in several churches calling to renew this tradition in today's context, see Donald F. Duclow, 'Ars moriendi', in Glennys Howarth and Oliver Leaman (editors), *Encyclopedia of Death and Dying Paperback* (Routledge, 2014)
2. John Sikorski, 'Toward a Recovery of Christian Dying: Ars Moriendi', *Reformed Journal*, Vol. 32 nr. 6, 31 October 2017
3. ¹ Matthew McCullough's, *Remember Death: The Surprising Path to Living Hope* (Crossway, 2018).
4. Rodney Stark, *The Triumph of Christianity: How the Jesus Movement Became the World's Largest Religion* (New York: Harper One, 2011), p. 114-

FAITH, GRIEF AND HOPE

Jim Memory and Jo Appleton



Social distancing signs in a church in Paris

The Covid-19 pandemic is the closest thing to an existential threat that most Europeans have experienced in their lifetimes. Not since the Second World War has something so profoundly affected the lives of all Europeans simultaneously like this. It has impacted our health, both physical and mental, our livelihoods, our freedoms, our social interactions, and is likely to continue to do so for years to come.

Both individually and as societies, when faced with such existential challenges, we tend to use a set of coping strategies to reduce our sense of insecurity and one of those is the practice of religious faith. In short, it is in moments of crisis that we remember God.

Drawing on this simplest of observations, Norris and Inglehart (2004) suggested that religious vitality in a given context could be explained by the "existential security"

that was experienced by people living in that situation. They observed that, where life was lived under the constant threat of war, poverty, disease, famine, corruption, etc., these societies frequently had high levels of religiosity.

Conversely, when a society enjoyed peace, welfare provision, good healthcare, economic prosperity and good governance, then religious belief and practice was often observed to be weak.

So, will the existential threat that Covid-19 poses to Europeans, not just for their health, but also to their freedoms and economic prosperity, have an impact on secularisation in Europe? That is the suggestion that Foshaugen (2020) makes: "economic development and an increase in material security have been suggested as the primary causes of secularization in the West... If the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacts these two causes of

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secularization and leads to raised levels of existential insecurity and angst, then it is plausible that there will be an upsurge in religiosity in the West.” (Foshaugen, 2020, p5)

There is anecdotal evidence of an upsurge in Google searches for prayer during March 2020 (Kelly-Linden, 2020) and a tripling in the number of Alpha courses running in the UK during the first wave of the pandemic (Evangelical Focus 2020) would appear to support this idea.

Fascinatingly, sociologists of religion in Italy, the first western country to be hit by the pandemic, have already gone some way to testing this hypothesis. Measuring virtual attendance at religious services (via web, radio and TV) and the practice of prayer, Molteni, et al (2020) found that Italian people who had someone in their family with Covid-19 did show a higher degree of religiosity. As they put it, “the findings suggest that religious behaviour – even if in different forms – is a compelling coping strategy for people confronted with events undermining their existential security.” However, there was a difference between those with a religious heritage to draw on (measured by regular attendance at a religious service at age 12) and those with a secular upbringing. “The findings confirm that individuals who do not already have some sort of religious reservoir do not rely on religion when dealing with situations impacting their existential security” (ibid.).

“will the existential threat that Covid-19 poses to Europeans have an impact on secularisation in Europe?”

But whether or not there is a longer term religious revival in the wake of Covid, it is clear that for now churches have a significant role to play in standing alongside people who feel the very foundations of their life are shattered, and showing them the hope there is to be had in Christ.

Funerals are one of the ways where the church often performs a vicarious act on behalf of individuals who may not have a committed faith (Davie, 2002). People who do not usually attend church may potentially be present in a church building, or at least experience public prayer and hear scripture read. It’s also a chance for a church leader to visit the grieving family and offer comfort and support.

Covid-19 has led to legal restrictions on numbers of people attending funerals, and on the whole, churches have been careful to keep the law. In some countries such as Spain, funeral ceremonies were not allowed at all during the first

wave of the pandemic. Although they are TV now allowed, in Spain only up to 30% of the capacity of the mortuary chapel can be permitted to attend – with regulations constantly changing. In other countries, as few as 10 people can be present when a loved one is buried or cremated, although some churches have livestreamed funeral services meaning that sometimes more people than would have usually attended can at least observe the proceedings.

Where churches have been forced to close due to lockdown, the sense of being ‘open for business’ to support people outside the church is less, and visiting restrictions mean it is harder for church pastors to connect with people as they grieve.

So what creative ways have churches tried to reach out to people and support them in their loss?

Rosie is an Anglican vicar in a rural part of the UK. “Funerals are usually a time when the whole community gathers; we never do a small funeral,” she says, adding that it has been difficult for the community not to have the traditional big gatherings such as funerals or markets. “We have now developed an alternative ritual, where the funeral procession travels around the whole village rather than going straight to the church from the funeral parlour, and people stand by their front door and clap, thus expressing their sympathy for the family.”

Some churches such as St Mary’s Anglican church in Yate, UK have used their outdoor space to help people grieve in more creative ways by creating a labyrinth of lights in their graveyard. The Labyrinth enables people take time out to contemplate their lives in relation to God. People start at the edge and walk to the centre, bringing a thought or question before God as they do so. As they return outwards again, they do so with the symbolic sense of being reborn, leaving their worries at the centre.



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The St Mary's Labrynith uses 100 solar lamps to mark out the path, representing God's light in the darkness. In addition, local people are invited to dedicate a light to the memory of a loved one, enabling a sharing of grief and hope in the middle of this loss.



Online resources have also helped, for example the Spanish Evangelical Alliance promoted '[Dando Vida al Recuerdo](#)' on the 14 June, among evangelical denominations in the country. "This was a day in which all churches could remember the people they have lost, and pray for the country, taking time to identify with the suffering of thousands.", explains Joel Foster of Evangelical Focus. "An adaptable/open programme was proposed to the churches of about 20 minutes, including a manifesto, a selection of songs, Bible readings, a video etc. The response was big, with dozens of churches responding and some streaming it online publicly."



All Souls day at the end of October/beginning of November presented another opportunity to remember those who had died, with many state churches organising 'All Souls or 'All Saints' services, the day when churches traditionally remember those who died. But some non-denominational churches also used the time to enable people to grieve, for example Woodlands church in Bristol who held an online '[Service of Lament](#)' on 31 October. The video was viewed over 700 times on Facebook in the first 24 hours, and now has had over 1300 views from around the world.

'In a charismatic church, the dominant culture is often one of hope and celebration. We don't often pause to be honest about the pain and suffering we feel in the loss. We want to hurry through it, try to find a solution and get out of this uncomfortable place,' explains senior pastor Dave Mitchell. 'Having an online service of lament expressed the need to allow our grief to take its time. We start with expressing the pain, then gradually move through it and bring in hope. We wanted to go for a service that was visually beautiful, giving people with artistic talent the opportunity to do something in a different vein and call beauty out of pain suffering and loss.'

Whether Covid-19 will lead to a resurgence of faith in Europe will be seen in years to come but, for now, it has forced churches to innovate in their responses to grief and death and share the hope in Christ beyond the walls of the church.

Jim Memory and Jo Appleton

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MOURNING, THE DOOR OF HOPE BETWEEN LOVE AND PAIN

Pablo Martinez

In this hour of tremendous pain, we want to convey our deepest sympathy to so many families who have lost their loved ones in the pandemic. The circumstances that have surrounded these losses multiply the pain and the sorrow. For this reason, now more than ever, we remember the apostle's words: That you may not grieve as others do who have no hope (1 Thess. 4:13 ESV).

Full of hope is the purpose of this interview with Dr. Pablo Martínez. It is our desire that the reader find in it the balm that the Word of God always provides and practical guidance to face such an anomalous grief.

We cry with hope because the risen Christ has made it possible for the day to come when: *"Your sun shall no more go down, nor your moon withdraw itself; for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended"* (Isaiah 60:20 ESV).

Could you define what exists behind that feeling that we call mourning?

PM: Mourning hurts. Above all there is deep sorrow and much pain. It is no coincidence that in Spanish the word for mourning (*duelo*) is related to pain (*dolor*). However, there is a key concept that helps us to change our negative, dark vision of mourning: in mourning there is not only pain, there is also love. Mourning is an expression of love, it is the other side of love. We cry because we love. And the greater the love, the deeper the pain. Mourning is the price paid in pain for the end of a dear and valuable relationship.

The view of mourning as a posthumous expression of love is a balm that mitigates grief. This positive vision sheds light on the darkness of sorrow and can help us grow. In fact, mourning changes us, we are never the same again.

There is a natural mourning, and a time when mourning becomes a problem in itself. How do we distinguish them?

PM: Mourning is always a difficult path, but some people find it more difficult than others. That happens when the mourner is unable to accept or learn to live with the loss and the feelings that it brings. In those cases, grief is denied (absent grief), postponed (delayed grief) or prolonged (chronic grief). These three are reactions of

pathological grief that usually come with anxiety or depression.

There is a quite reliable way to know when grief is becoming abnormal: the person is unable to return to everyday life. The bond with the loved one is so intense that they cannot free themselves from him or her, so that they cannot cope adequately with life. That feeling of paralysis, "my life ended the day he/she left", signals a complicated grief.

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, many have experienced the death of loved ones from far away, without being able to be next to them in their last moments. How does this affect us?

PM: It affects us a lot. This has been one of the most devastating effects of the pandemic from an emotional point of view. Being alongside and farewell at the hour of death are needs deeply rooted in human nature, because death is not a natural thing; death is the most unnatural thing that exists. We were not created to die but to live. Contrary to what some thinkers like Heidegger say, we do not exist to die, but to live. Death is a foreign body in God's creation, in the words of Paul, it is the last enemy (1 Cor. 15:26 ESV).

Therefore, being there alongside becomes like the ointment that alleviates the pain of separation. Farewell is the natural gateway to mourning. Being deprived of this option is an obstacle that complicates the subsequent process.

The Bible gives great importance to this aspect. Some of the most beautiful words of the patriarchs were spoken in those parting moments. Jacob's blessing on his children is a good example (Genesis 49). Likewise, when Paul bids farewell to the Ephesian elders, he gives a moving and inspiring speech (Acts 20:17-38).

We have not been able to share those losses with the family and community either, even to attend the funeral. It is like living a virtual death, but at the same time we know that it has happened by the emptiness that it brings. How can we face this situation?

PM: Mourning is a personal experience, but not an individual one; it has a community dimension. Crying together is therapeutic, crying alone can be bitter.

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Above all, it is necessary to mourn together as a family. Solitary mourning is more likely to become a pathological grief. Moreover the believer has another family, the family of faith, which gives us the warmth of brotherly love. It is at those times of sorrow when we can deeply experience that the church is a therapeutic community. In my own time of mourning, I remember the affection and support received from the brethren as an unforgettable experience and a source of much encouragement.

***“Mourning is a personal experience,
but not an individual one;
it has a community dimension”.***

In the current circumstances of the pandemic, we cannot embrace each other physically, but we can support each other through the means that technology provides (messages, video calls, telephone, etc.). Today more than ever we can make the grieving person feel that we are close. Being “connected” is much more than a technological issue, it is a spiritual reality because, as the body of Christ, we belong to each other.

How does the Bible, as the Word of God, help us understand and assimilate not only mourning, but these very special situations?

PM The Gospel provides two pillars that sustain us in the hour of mourning: trust and hope. Our confidence is that the keys to life and death belong only to God (Rev. 1:18). None of us will be uprooted from this earth a minute before, or a minute after what God has designed in his wise providence. As I recently wrote in an article ([A Psalm in the epidemic](#)), the Christian’s confidence lies in the conviction that it is not a virus but God who keeps time on our life clock.

The other pillar is hope. There are tears full of hope and there are tears full of despair. Christians also cry, but our tears are full of the hope that Christ gives us. Jesus is not the weak man nailed to a cross that Nietzsche ridiculed, but the One who rose with power from the grave and defeated death with his resurrection. This is the unshakable hope, the sure anchor of our faith: because Christ is risen, we too will be resurrected (Rom. 8:11). That is why Paul cries out victoriously, Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? (1 Cor. 15:55 NIV).

Many pastors wonder how to help or support those who have suffered the loss of a loved one. What is your advice for them?

PM: People in mourning during this pandemic suffer additional pain from the loneliness and isolation already mentioned. In addition, the pain multiplies because “everything happens very quickly”, without time to assimilate it. Because of this, their greatest need is to feel accompanied and loved. Therein lies the essence of comfort.

How do we do it? When we comfort others, speeches are unnecessary and gestures of love are needed. A love gesture is much more encouraging than an eloquent word. A golden principle to accompany the mourner is: “speak little, listen much and help all you can”.

Is there anything you would like to add...?

PM: Comfort, comfort, my people (Isa. 40:1 ESV). That is how Isaiah’s section which proclaims the coming redemption begins, as does Handel’s “Messiah”. What an astounding opening note! The first two words of God to announce the coming of the Messiah are powerful words of comfort. It’s not by chance. God comforts by providing hope.

This sublime text from Isaiah shows us the close relationship between comfort and hope. Giving hope is comforting. For this reason, the resounding opening words -Comfort, comfort, my people- are followed by the prophetic announcement of the Messiah. There is no separation between them because the coming of Christ to the world puts an expiration date on death and suffering. Can there be a greater hope?

True comfort, the comfort that reaches the heart, cannot be separated from the person and work of Jesus Christ. The ultimate answer to the pain of mourning is in the pain of the Suffering Servant. With his death he conquered death (Heb. 2:14-15) and opened the door of Hope with a capital letter, the hope of a day when He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away (Rev. 21:4 ESV).

There is consolation in this hard time of pandemic that we have to live. It is the strong encouragement given to those who hold fast to the hope set before us. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul (Heb. 6:18-19 ESV).

Pablo Martínez

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THE MINISTRY OF PRESENCE THROUGH HEALTHCARE CHAPLAINCY

Katie McClure with Jo Appleton



Treating a ventilated patient *Photo by Mufid Majnun on Unsplash*

People have said to me ‘this must be a particularly hard time for you’, as they consider my work during the Covid pandemic as part of a multi-faith chaplaincy in a large teaching hospital. But in reality this is what chaplains do - we deal with unspeakable loss and separation every day. It is a particular feature of our work that we are with people when their world is turned upside down and everything they thought they knew has been stripped away. The key is being there.

So when the first wave of Covid began in early March, our role didn’t change, but how we could do it did. At first, some staff wanted to protect us from exposure to infected areas, or didn’t see spiritual care as an essential intervention, while others thought we were the most important part of the jigsaw. We knew we had to minimise face to face contact, and there would be barriers to compassionate communication to overcome which were posed by wearing the necessary personal protective equipment (PPE) ‘Routine’ referrals decreased and our large team of volunteers who would visit people on the wards were unable to come into the hospital.

As a department we decided to ‘engage fully on the floor’. We raised our profile by creating laminate cards for wards to publish our availability to talk in person (as usual) and (additionally) by phone or tablet. We also set up a telephone line for staff and patients, offering prayer and pastoral or religious support. We created wellbeing podcasts and a Twitter feed with resources like a ‘prayer for the day’. While gathered services stopped in our chapels, the space became, with all the necessary precautions in place, important spaces for reflection and personal prayer for weary staff.

With no visitors allowed, we found ourselves ‘being church’, filling the gap where other clergy from the community were unable to visit their church members. We also found ourselves ‘being family’ to patients, holding their hands, reading letters and poems or helping facilitate online calls to loved ones at home. We could sit with someone dying of Covid or anoint them, and let their family know. We were also asked to go regularly to the mortuary to offer a simple act of remembrance, so that no-one would go to their death with their name unspoken or unheard.

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In ways formal and informal we offered support for staff, where many conversations were about risk to, or separation from, their families, their own vulnerability and fears, the practical changes in their life and working routine, sickness and absence; the ripples go on. With the 'second wave' now in full swing, many staff are exhausted, and again making huge sacrifices.

“We are with people when their world is turned upside down and everything they thought they knew has been stripped away. The key is being there.”

Within the hospital as an organisation, we contributed to the spiritual care section of a newly created 'Every Name a Person' toolkit for staff, helping them to remember the humanity of each patient who dies. We played our part in the revived Ethics and Law Committee. We were also invited to participate in the countywide 'Vulnerable Adult End of Life' Workstream, which brings together representatives from all sectors of healthcare in hospitals and the community. This gives us extraordinary insights into the bigger picture and ongoing valuable opportunities to have a voice where we were not previously heard.

In faith terms, healthcare chaplaincy can feel like it is on the edges of the church, filling the space between congregational

life and the hospital/institution. Because our work has cultural and pastoral dimensions as well as the spiritual and religious, we cannot proselytise but we can speak into people's situations and offer them support and hope. Sometimes people want prayer or to be anointed, other times they simply want someone to speak with, and the dialogue may turn to exploring the vestiges of a faith whose seeds were sown much earlier in life. Faith is often kindled in times of challenge, and chaplaincy is in the right place for those sorts of conversations, especially in a pandemic.

Speaking about people's differing experiences of Covid, the hospital Chief Executive Officer said recently 'we are all in the same storm, but we're not in the same boat'. For us as chaplains, there have been more moments of feeling like we are finally in the same boat, where our relationship with the staff has deepened through this shared experience. It's not them and us; we are all in it together.

And while chaplaincy has always been about walking alongside people in their most difficult times, the difference is that, instead of ministering from solid ground, our worlds have been dismantled too. Somehow, like Nouwen's wounded healer, we find that has made us more real and accessible.

Katie McClure is an Anglican priest who has been a full-time chaplain with the Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust for more than ten years.

Lausanne Europe 20/21 Conversation and Gathering Dynamic Gospel – New Europe

Vista are partnering with Lausanne Europe through being one of the key resources to facilitate a conversation about mission across Europe and beyond

While the physical Gathering has now been postponed to November 2021, the Conversation has already begun. For the last few months, Lausanne Europe delegates and other church leaders and influencers have been meeting across Europe in what are called Impact Groups. The idea is that each of the 800 selected delegates form an Impact Group of 10-12 people to reflect on the key issues for mission in Europe today, on Scripture, discipleship, mobilisation, and prayer. The hope is that, by the time the delegates meet up in Wisla, Poland in November 2021, as many as 10,000 evangelical leaders might be part of the Lausanne Europe Conversation.

The Conversation is open to all and more information on how to start an Impact Group can be found on the website.

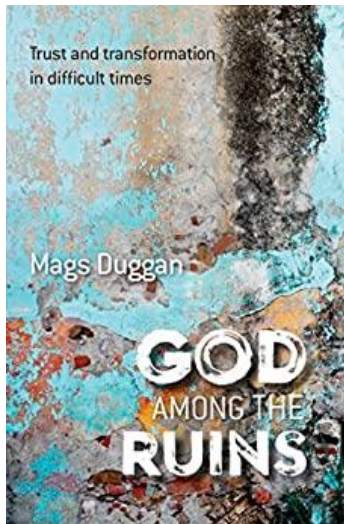
www.lausanneeurope.org/conversation



**DYNAMIC GOSPEL
NEW EUROPE**
CONVERSATION
AND GATHERING

GOD AMONG THE RUINS by MAGS DUGGAN

Reviewed by Sarah Hay



I think it is safe to say that for many people the death of a loved one represents a life ruined. That joyful, supportive relationship once enjoyed can be enjoyed no longer and the person left living feels bereft, cheated, alone. Eric Liddell, the Olympic runner turned missionary who died in a Japanese POW camp in 1945, wrote that 'God is not helpless among the ruins' even when circumstances appear to wreck our lives and Gods plans. In her book, Mags Duggan unpacks this in a very transformative way.

Mags writes very honestly, as she faced the terminal diagnosis and then the death of her most beloved 23-year-old niece, Jenny. Using the book of Habakkuk, and her own experience, she takes the reader on a reflective journey to help face and walk through the most difficult of times.

This journey gives permission to lament, something too often missed in bereavement as people are expected to 'move on'. I found it so helpful to write my own psalm of lament during a very difficult situation, telling God how I felt and questioning his purposes and plans, just as Habakkuk did. There is the acknowledgement that the road ahead may be long and winding, that healing will not and cannot be quick. But then comes the encouragement to relinquish what might have been, wait on God, listen to him, and learn to trust him again. It's through this trust that we can see transformation in the darkest of times. It's not just for people facing the loss of a loved one. I have recommended this book to a person going through a debilitating health issue, a parent whose child

is struggling, a friend facing their singleness and another having to make a tough decision. I've also recommended it to those who have a pastoral or member care role within church or mission settings, but it's an equally valuable tool for those of us who want to be a true friend.

I'll let Mags have the final word: "Walking with someone through the...ruined places of their lives is not for the faint-hearted - ...It is for those who, in trusting dependence upon the Spirit of God, are willing to sit with the broken in the rubble of their dreams, the heartache of their losses and the devastation of their hope Sometimes we want to ease them out of their pain rather than stand with them in it. And when we do we violate the sometimes slow healing of the work of God in a person's life and we dishonour their unique journey".

Sarah Hay

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Lecturer and Member Care Specialist, All Nations Christian College*

God Among the Ruins: Trust and transformation in difficult times is published by BRF (The Bible Reading Fellowship) and is available from all good booksellers: •

ISBN-10 : 0857465759; ISBN-13 : 978-085746575



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