BOOKS I HAVE READ: HEALTHY FAITH AND THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

Posted on April 24, 2020 by Eddie

It is a very honest book, at times brutally so. It does not shy away from the fact that we are facing a deadly disease that will kill people and that some readers will face a lonely death or bereavement. However, the book also brings hope, by clearly pointing us to the one who has overcome death who brings hope beyond this current age.

Category: Observations

The nice people at IVP sent me a copy of the manuscript for their new book; Healthy Faith and the Coronavirus Crisis to review, and I'm very glad they did. Subtitled, Thriving the Covid-19 Pandemic, this really is an excellent book.

The book is a multi-author volume with twenty bite-sized chapters, an afterward and nine appendices. As with any multi-author book, the style and the standard of the contributions varies. The writing could probably be described as popular-academic. The book does not shy away from difficult concepts and there are footnotes scattered throughout the text. However, it is the popular aspect of this popular-academic which really comes to the fore. This is an eminently practical book; informative and useful, and I would not hesitate to recommend it widely to believers and unbelievers alike. Each chapter has a selection of further resources, which are likely to prove very helpful.

It's always difficult to tell what size a book is when you read it as a pdf, but my impression is that it is a normal-sized paperback. It has a little over 250 pages and the Kindle version will set you back Â£6.39 - it is worth every penny.

I am not going to try to summarise the book. Getting to grips with a wide variety of different content is beyond the scope of this review. The table of contents gives a good overview of what is actually in the book. My intention is to make some general comments and to highlight some issues of particular interest and then to post some illustrative quotes.

I have already mentioned that I would be happy to share this book with both Christians and non-Christians. This would appear to be the aim of the editors:

> *We asked each contributor to do three things; orient readers to their topic as it plays out during the COVID-19 pandemic, shed the light of Jesus and the Christian scriptures on the subject, and offer some practical advice. They were asked to write in a way which is intelligible to those unfamiliar with the Christian faith...*

For the most part, this aim has been achieved. Although the content is unashamedly Christian, it appears to be very accessible. Some of the material - especially that which assumes that people are involved in the life of a church - is less relevant to people who are not Christians, but it is not presented in a way which excludes others. The first three chapters, in particular, which present an

apologia for the Christian faith in the face of the pandemic will be of particular relevance in this context.

As a glance at the table of contents shows, this is a very wide-ranging book with chapters covering subjects as diverse as loneliness, grief, fear and humour. It is also a very honest book, at times brutally so. It does not shy away from the fact that we are facing a deadly disease that will kill people and that some readers will face a lonely death or bereavement. However, the book also brings hope, by clearly pointing us to the one who has overcome death who brings hope beyond this current age. Uncomfortable honesty, practical wisdom and hope based in Christ are the underlying themes in all of the articles. There is also a solid, if not always overt, theological basis to all of the content.

It is difficult to pick out any highlights. As a former biologist, I found the chapter on Viruses and God's Good Creation fascinating (though I suspect it might challenge a few conservative evangelicals). The chapter which looked at learning from the persecuted church is also very helpful. But at this point, I'm tempted just to list the whole lot and say how much I enjoyed/was helped by them!

Who should read it? You should.

Those who are married might be tempted to skip the chapters on loneliness and singleness and the singles might want give the chapters on marriage and parenting a miss, but I would argue that there is a value in learning from the perspective of others.

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- 2. **Homecoming:** The Art of Being Human (Kristi Mair)

Section Two: *fragile life*

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- 4. **On Dying Well**: Reflections of a Christian Medic (John Wyatt)
- 5. **Dancing with Uncertainty**: Lessons from the Persecuted Church (Eddie Lyle)

- 6. **Grief and Comfort**: Understanding and Responding to the Experience of Loss (Richard Winter)
- 7. **Navigating Loneliness**: Why It Hurts and How We Can Respond (Ed Shaw)
- 8. **Heathy Fear:** Keeping Calm and Considering Christ (Dan Strange)

Section Three: *connected life*

- 9. **Stable Disruptions**: Furlough, Unemployment, Front Line, and Our Constant Call (Ed Creedy)
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- **God With Us**: A Paradigm for Life During the Pandemic (Tom Wright)

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A few illustrative quotes:

> *But death wasnâ€™t first introduced to Europe in January 2020. Itâ€™s not some exotic import previously only available from speciality retailers. Nor did the tight interconnectedness of the human race become a reality only once everyone morphed into potential carriers of a deadly pathogen.*
>
> *Luke Cawley*

> *We have never been more at home, and yet, weâ€™ve never felt less at home.Â*
>
> *Kristi Mair*

> *We were once at home with each other and the one who made us. We were made to reflect the beautiful God â€" literally as those â€˜in his imageâ€™ â€" and to care for the good world he had made. Yet, as good as this home was, we wanted more. A restlessness set in. Not an urge to journey to far-flung lands to find ourselves, or to take a little breather outside because things were growing intense indoors, but a restlessness to be more and to have more; to become the gods of our own world, a move towards independence rather than connectedness. So, as we pull away, God lets us go. But not without cost: as relationship with God dissolves, the candles are blown out, the spiders start creeping in and the cobwebs begin to surface. We start to crumble.*
>
> *Kristi Mair*

> *The way home, however, is threatened by danger. As some of our old maps used to say, â€˜here be dragonsâ€™. One such sulphurous beast is death itself. When we chose to make our homes away from God, we became less human, and decay and death followed us.*

> *Wherever we go, we canâ€™t shake it off. It is always lurking in the shadows. It is in the world, as much as COVID-19 always will be, and we are unable to escape it. Jesus slayed death through death. His own death. His broken body is the gate to the path home.*
>
> *Kristi Mair*

> *In order to die well, I have to be at peace with God and at peace with the most important people in my life. Strangely and wonderfully, a dying person is able to bless his or her loved ones by â€˜completingâ€™ or strengthening the most significant relationships at the end of life.*
>
> *John Wyatt*

> *Our ancestors were better prepared for death than we are today. By the age of ten, a century or more ago, most children would have attended several funerals of siblings and other relatives. We would have seen people dying in our homes. Today, because of the achievements of modern medicine, this is a rare occurrence.Â*
>
> *Richard Winter*

> *Christians should always be alert to the good that can come out of suffering: the cross of Jesus trains us to do this. Out of the deepest pain ever has come the greatest rescue ever.Â*
>
> *Ed Shaw*

> *Too often the church has looked a lot less like an emergency service, and more like a health club for paid-up members. But in this time of crisis, the public perception is changing.*
>
> *Krish Kandiah*

> *When our faith, our theology and our ministry methods are tested in the crucible of affliction, we may see much of our beloved traditions evaporate, but we could also find that refined in the fire is a much healthier church, fit for a new generation to take the gospel afresh to the*

> *ends of a world desperate for our good news.*
>
> *Krish Kandiah*

At this point, I should reiterate that I was provided with a free copy of the manuscript for this book in return for an honest review. While I appreciate this generosity, I have not allowed it to influence my review. If I thought the book was a stinker, I'd have said so. It isn't a stinker, it is excellent and you should get hold of a copy. Well done, IVP!