



RECONCILIATION IN THE CONFLICTED CONTINENT

Europe's history is a story of conflict. For centuries, the nations of Europe have fought bloody wars over territory, power and religion. However, since 1945 Europe has experienced an unprecedented period of peace. Of course, that isn't true everywhere. For those living in Cyprus, the Balkans, and Ukraine, conflict is recent memory and, in the latter case, an ongoing reality. But most Europeans can't imagine what it's like to live in a country at war. And yet, as students of history know, the story of every conflict begins with the events that led up to it.

**“how can Christians and churches
be ‘peacemakers’ and ‘agents of reconciliation’
in today’s Europe?”**

What signs of tomorrow's conflicts are there in today's Europe? What can we learn from previous generations who have shaped peace in our conflicted continent? And how can Christians and churches be “peacemakers” (Matt. 5:9) and “agents of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:18) in today's Europe?

EDITORIAL: A STORY OF RECONCILIATION

Over the last ten years, Vista has sought to provide fresh missiological reflection on the crucial issues for mission and theology in Europe today. Yet all of that reflection sits within a broader context: God's story of cosmic reconciliation in Christ, “and through Him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.” (Col. 1:20)

With the 75th anniversary of Victory in Europe Day and the 70th anniversary of the Schuman Declaration, this seemed the perfect moment for an issue of Vista dedicated to Reconciliation in Europe. After my lead article looking at what we can learn from the past to equip us to be agents of reconciliation in the present, Johannes Reimer delves deeper into the dynamics of radical reconciliation and asks: Forgiveness – why not Europe?. Ruth Valerio's article, Reconciling a Wounded Planet in the Midst of a Pandemic, manages to be both the broadest and the most contextual, and a second article from Johannes Reimer asks if the current health crisis is not a huge opportunity for personal and community reconciliation. The final article is a unique piece of research by Darrell Jackson on European missionaries and their response to Covid19.

“My prayer is...that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.” (John 17:20,21)

Jim Memory

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Jim Memory

The Conflicted Continent

If there is one lesson from Europe's recent history, it is the danger of nationalism. And when nationalism is fused with populism, the danger is even greater. But before we discuss this further, let's take a moment to define our terms.

Nationalism is a discourse around identity and belonging. Fundamentally, it is an opposition between those who are seen to belong to the nation and those who are considered not to belong. Populism, on the other hand, sees "the people" as the victims of oppression by elites, whether in their own government, the media, the EU, ECB or globalist movements. So, we might talk about nationalism as a horizontal opposition between people, whereas populism is a vertical opposition between "the people" and the elites.

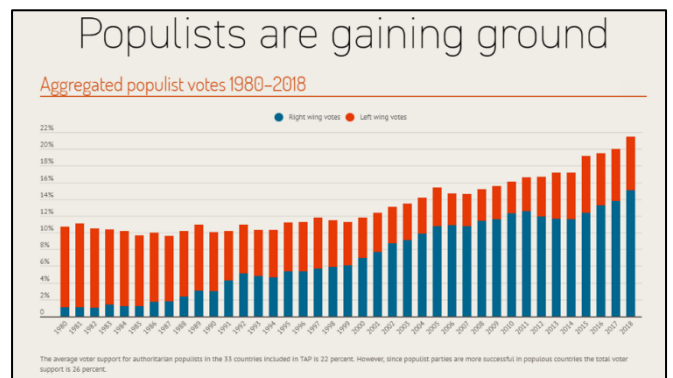
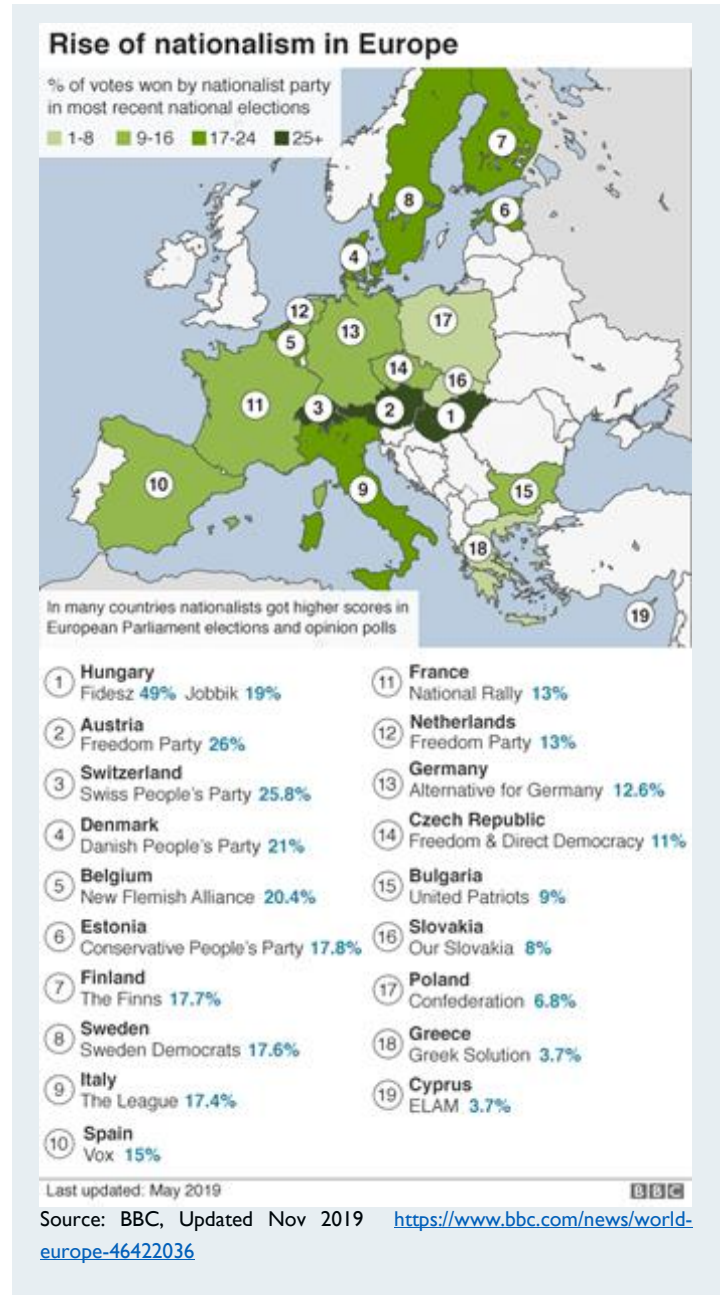
Whilst populist movements can be found across the political spectrum, the fusion of nationalism and populism on the political right has given rise to national populist parties that are now to be found in almost every European country.

National populist leaders draw their power from the "4 D's": *distrust* of their politicians, *depravation* of people's economic advantage whether by elites or migrants, *destruction* of native culture and political *de-alignment* (Eatwell and Goodwin).

How these dynamics operate can be illustrated by two recent events in European history: Brexit and the Coronavirus outbreak.

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The result of the United Kingdom Referendum on EU Membership surprised many, but anyone who travelled beyond London and the South East could hear Eatwell and Goodwin's 4 'D's in conversation. And the slogan of the Leave campaign, *Take Back Control*, summed up this frustration perfectly. The argument was clear: *Things would be so much better if "we" were in control. So many of our problems are down to "them"*. Though notionally targeted at the EU and its bureaucrats, in practice, this anti-European rhetoric made "others" of our brothers from the rest of Europe.



Source: Timbro <https://populismindex.com/?fbclid=IwAR3krCQnGjWoZItOXmOPU5o8u0FCNjjXjacXCHFp-clbxU8r8TDE8SuqBMO#about>

This dynamic of “othering” is also evident in the Covid-19 pandemic. Europeans quickly transitioned from blaming the Chinese to blaming more traditional targets: the Roma, migrants generally and even Evangelicals and Baptists, in the cases of Spain, France and Russia.

Coronavirus has had devastating economic and political consequences, some of which will endure long after the virus has come under control. It was extraordinary to see how quickly the Schengen Area was suspended especially given how essential the value of “free movement” is to the European Union. But more pointedly, the economic impact of Covid-19 brought national interests to the fore as Italy and Spain sought support from the EU for their fragile economies.

The resistance of some states within the European Union to the idea of debt mutualisation has a clear message. Despite all the talk of European solidarity, at the end of the day, “you are on your own”. Covid19 has revealed Europe’s nationalist reflex. Following on from the financial crisis of 2008, the sovereign debt crisis of 2012/13, the migrant crisis of 2015/16 and Brexit, the EU faces a fresh existential crisis which threatens to put nation against nation as the huge economic and political impact of Coronavirus becomes clear in the years ahead.

A Lesson from Recent History

This edition of Vista coincides with two anniversaries. Seventy-five years ago this week, on the 8th May 1945, the forces of Nazi Germany formally surrendered to Allied Forces in what came to be called VE Day, Victory in Europe Day. But the 9th May is also the seventieth anniversary of a three-minute speech by Robert Schuman, the French Foreign Minister, which is celebrated across the EU as Europe Day for it is seen as having a crucial part in establishing peace in Europe.



The Schumann Declaration, 9 May 1950 (Source Wikipedia)

The Schuman Declaration, borne out of the pain of WWII, sought to institutionalise the reconciliation between France and Germany by means of a common transnational structure for the administration of coal and steel, the raw materials of armed conflict, so that “any war between France and Germany becomes not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible.”

Whatever our opinion of the European Union, from which the European Coal and Steel Community grew, in our current conflicted state it is good to remember the role that influential Christians like Schuman played in pointing people towards reconciliation and a shared future.

Schuman understood that reconciliation involves the past, present and future. It involves an honest evaluation of the sins of the past: the divisions and inequalities that gave rise to the conflict, and the true nature of the evils committed during WWII. It involves working in the present, in the construction of realities that makes a material difference. And it involves a vision of the future, imagining a future beyond that structure, that would be a blessing beyond itself (note the reference to the “development of the African continent”). Can Christians of today learn from Schuman’s proposal as we seek to be peacemakers today?

“Schumann understood that reconciliation involves the past, present and future”

Peacemaking in Europe Today

It was the French Sociologist Hervieu-Léger who first noted that Europeans suffer a collective amnesia about their Christian heritage. I would add that many European Christians are increasingly amnesiac about the dangers of nationalism. The way that many Christians across Europe are lining up behind national populist politicians simply because they use Christian symbols, or hold traditional positions on certain issues, is very troubling.

The demonisation of the “other”, a defining feature of nationalism, cuts right across the Christian gospel. As the German theologian Jürgen Moltmann reminds us: “The church of Christ is, in its ideal state, on the side of humanity and incompatible with nationalism. When God became human, he became just that, and did not become American or German...every human being, regardless of nationality, is to be respected as an image of God.”

Hospitality to the stranger, to the “other”, is a fundamental biblical value. And for Christian churches, our very constitution in the New Testament will not allow us to build

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walls of separation, for “there is no Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). A church that is not both for us and the other is not a Christian church at all.

So how can we be Peacemakers in today’s Europe? By being like sons and daughters of Issachar who understood the times in which they lived and therefore knew what to do (1 Chron. 12:32). For like Schuman, our task of reconciliation involves both past, present and future.

1. Past We need to build peace by righting the broken stones of Europe’s past. Each new generation needs to be reminded not only of the dangers of nationalism but also the other “sins of the Fathers” that we have committed: slavery, the exploitation of the world’s poor and the destruction of the planet. The justifications for conflict are always found in real or perceived injustices in the past. Christians must work to heal and reconcile the past.
2. Present We need to contribute to building peace in the present. To speak prophetically into our contexts. To challenge those who “other” those in our society in the name of Christ. But more positively to lead local, national and international

reconciliation initiatives, as Robert Schuman, Desmond Tutu, and so many others have done.

3. Future We need to project a vision of peace into the future. Conflicts are often fought to secure a better tomorrow. More frequently, they just store up new grievances that fuel the wars of tomorrow. As Christians we know what God’s purpose is, and it is not war but the reconciliation of all things under Christ (Col. 1:20) – the ultimate ‘better tomorrow’. Our vision is of a people of God from every tribe and tongue and nation who together proclaim: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever.” (Revelation 11.15).

Jim Memory

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FORGIVING — WHY NOT EUROPE?

Johannes Reimer

Divided Europeans – A hindrance for the Gospel

There's no question that we, in Europe, need reconciliation. East and West, North and South - our great continent has witnessed numerous wars and conflicts.

Europeans carry enough historical baggage to be mad at each other for another century. The English, French, Spanish, Russians, Germans and other European nations have all built their empires through ruling over the smaller tribes and forcing them to adapt their culture and language accordingly. Just ask the Scots how they see the English, the Catalonians – the Spanish, or the Ukrainians – the Russians.

Most of our European empires have collapsed long since, but the hard feelings against the former ruling nations stay. Collective memory goes way back and shapes the attitude towards the 'other' even where there are no obvious conflicts today.

Consider the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. For centuries they were occupied by the Russian Empire and later by the Soviet Union. Many Russian-speaking people from all corners of the former empire moved in and made the Baltics their new home. Russification of the nationals from Alexander III's reign (1845-1894) onwards became state policy.¹ National cultural values were suppressed and thus the Russian language, Russianness and the Russians became the most hated neighbors. This story was and is repeated in many European settings, and conflicts become the constant reality that society lives by.

But the same is true for churches. Ethnocentrism and Ethnoconfessionalism are the biggest hindrances for spreading the gospel in Europe today.²

“The Church's task is to promote the kingdom of God and not the kingdoms of certain national majorities”

Unity promotes the knowledge of the Lord in the world, explains Jesus in John 17:21. Disunity, on the contrary, is why people do not see God's glory in his followers.

During centuries of European conflict, major church denominations viewed themselves as national, even state churches. Supporters of the state church suppressed the smaller ethnic groups. No wonder those ethnic groups sought a different religious identity

Many European denominational divides also go back to attempts to establish the dominance of a singular national identity. Unity forced by the State and to the expense of freedom of others will always result in a culture of strife and hatred.

The Church as Agent of Reconciliation

The Church of Christ is God's agent of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5. 19-20). She can never be an appendage of the state. Her task is to promote the Kingdom of God and not the kingdoms of certain national majorities. And in the Kingdom of God there will be no concentration of ethnic backgrounds.

The apostle Paul states to the Galatians: “In Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal. 3:28). Jesus is our peace and He made those from afar and those near one body (Eph. 2:14).

Ethnoconfessionalism is, biblically speaking, a no-go. The Church is set to reconcile and not to divide and promote the politically strongest!

This places the European church into a special position. In the midst of conflict and ethnocentric divisions, she will seek for ways to reconcile the people with God and with one another and lead them into God's kingdom. Stanley Hauerwas summarises the references to peace and mission in the New Testament by claiming that Jesus' followers are no less than “signs of the kingdom of peace in the world”³.

How can this be done? What are the instruments of effective reconciliation? How do people who have been collecting hatred for centuries forgive each other and establish new and meaningful patterns of cooperation? What do the Scriptures suggest?

Reconciling – God's way

Jesus is God's radical reconciler. He came to reconcile the world with God, the father (2 Cor. 5:18). And he states the principles of radical reconciliation.

First, Jesus claims that people need to recognise the truth in order to be free (John 8:32). Recognition is a process by

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which people will overcome their prejudice. By looking at what has really happened, they may also discover that their own limited perspective towards other people is distorted by collectively shaped memory. In reconciliation, the two parties will do what the biblical term *catalasso* = reconciliation suggests: they will go back and forth naming and renaming the issues of hurt and injustice until a common understanding of what has happened is established and the parties agree on it.⁴

“Without knowing the story, no reconciliation is possible”

Without knowing the story, no reconciliation is possible. “You will know the truth and the truth will set you free”, says Jesus. The European Church as God’s reconciler will mediate a process of truth-finding as a first step towards a peaceful co-existence in Europe.

Secondly, where truth is known and agreed upon, where victims and perpetrators are named and injustice is revealed, the mediator may suggest a process of forgiveness.⁵ It is important not to compare injustices. No sin is greater or lesser than another— all injustice must be named and people asked for forgiveness. And perpetuation, patterns of privilege and oppression that consciously or unconsciously perpetuate injustice, must be named, as Bishop Tutu rightly claims.⁶

Collective and historic injustice is not a personal thing, and people involved in the process of reconciliation may not have been directly involved in that hurting and perpetuation. But the victims have identified with the sufferings of their people, accepted the collective hurt and lived accordingly.

As a result, they are eligible to forgive the successors of the perpetrators – the same way that the successors are eligible to ask them for forgiveness. Surely this is a step of humility and grace. And both are God-given. In Jesus, there is freedom for both humility and grace for He is our peace.

“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed,” Jesus says about himself (John 8:36). Both requesting forgiveness and receiving forgiveness is a divine act.

Confession and forgiveness belong together.⁷ Wherever this act involves the presence of Jesus, true forgiveness is

possible, and the negative memory will be transformed into a valuable experience we all can learn from.

Reconciliation, however, is not finished when rivals forgive each other. The third step is equally important: the competitors will have to develop a common future, discussing possibilities and opportunities to work for better life conditions in their communities, in their countries and beyond.⁸

We Europeans need an idea of what can be done together and what our positive relationships may look like. And Christians are perfectly prepared to draw principles and practices from their kingdom-of-God culture, which establishes a meaningful social space of living in unity by appreciating our diversity. As a matter of fact, the Church herself is called Body of Christ. And nothing is more diverse really than a human body. All parts are different but at the same time they all serve each other and thus establish the most powerful unity under the sun (Eph. 1:23). So the Church must teach the nations those principles. This is her divine calling (Mt. 28:19-20).

Johannes Reimer is professor of Mission Studies and Intercultural Theology at the Ewersbach University of Applied Arts, Germany and director of Public Engagement of the Worldwide Evangelical Alliance.

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RECONCILING A WOUNDED PLANET IN THE MIDST OF A PANDEMIC

Ruth Valerio



Photo by Aziz Acharki on Unsplash

I am writing this looking out into my garden. I can hear the birds singing loudly and the silence from the lack of traffic noise is stark. If I stand outside and look up at the sky, it is clear blue with no airplane trails across it. The canal where I go for my daily walk is the clearest I've ever seen it, now that there are no boats using it, stirring up the mud. Walking with my daughter the other day, we stood in the middle of what is usually a busy road, with not a car on it, and I said, 'stand still for a moment and appreciate this. You may never experience this again'.

We are going through profound shocks: socially, politically, economically... and the impact of these will last for many years. Alongside the positives that some of us are experiencing, we are also facing fear, grief and suffering. There are immense challenges that we are dealing with, in our homes, our churches and our workplaces. How does the theme of reconciliation contribute to this current time, particularly in relation to our relationship with the wider natural world?

Let me start with the fundamentals: God created a world that he declared to be very good, a world in which people and the wider natural order exist harmoniously in the presence of God. Relationship with God, with others, with ourselves and with the rest of creation is central to God's loving purposes. But those relationships very quickly went wrong, and the Bible then tells the story of how God works to restore them and put them back to rights – a plan that ultimately finds its fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

The Gospel – literally 'the good news' – is thus a Gospel of reconciliation. Through Jesus we are reconciled with God, with the wider natural world, with other people and with ourselves. That means that a Gospel that does not include our relationship with the whole creation is not the full Gospel. How tragic that we have been content with such an emaciated Gospel!¹

Through the pandemic I have been reflecting on how we live in a wonderful yet wounded world. As we saw at the top, many of us have been re-discovering what a wonderful world we live in. For those of us fortunate enough to have gardens or to be in countries where lockdown has allowed us a daily walk, we have come to appreciate getting outside more than ever. So many people have been reconnecting with the wider natural world in a way they haven't done for years and realising just how nurturing and good for our wellbeing it is to spend time outdoors.

“This is; a world that God has created teeming with life, full of diversity and abundance and colour”

This is a world of awe and beauty; a world that God has created teeming with life, full of diversity and abundance and colour. And what neighbours we share this world with: the most incredible and stunning mix of strange, funny, scary, cuddly, scaly, odd, tiny, huge creatures that we could ever possibly imagine!²

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Yet at the same time, we live in a world that is seriously wounded. Against what some church leaders are saying, I want to state that Covid-19 is not a judgment from God: he did not cause it or will it into being. Whilst the Bible indicates there can be times when someone's sickness is the result of personal sin, if and when people fall ill, there is no biblical warrant for automatically linking that with a person's sin and we must be very careful before we pronounce something as being God's judgment.

Having said that however, as we have seen, the Bible is clear that God, people and the wider natural world are deeply interconnected. If one aspect of that set of relationships is broken then everything will be impacted. As hard as it is to hear, the outbreak of Covid-19 is not a 'natural disaster'. Rather it is a disaster of our own making. Viruses jump species and get into humans, and environmental destruction makes this more likely to happen, and with greater frequency, as people are brought into closer contact with virus-carrying animals.

Deforestation, mining, the bushmeat trade, animal trafficking and unsustainable agricultural practices are all likely factors at play. It is tempting to see this pandemic and the climate breakdown as having their origins elsewhere, to point the blame at people, governments and organisations in other parts of the world. But, Europe is certainly no innocent bystander.



In 2008 the European Commission pledged to halt deforestation, but in 2019 recognised its goals are unlikely to be met with current trajectories.³ While Europe's forestation plantations are booming, European consumer practices are still stimulating global deforestation importing nearly a quarter of products which have been cultivated on illegally deforested lands around the world⁴.

A 2010 study revealed that concerning quantities of bushmeat was being illegally imported from Africa into Europe, posing significant health risks to people and livestock.⁵

Alongside this, the virus has spread so rapidly because of our dependence on flying. We've known for decades how environmentally harmful flying is, yet we have been steadily increasing our flights in, from and to Europe, amounting to over a billion passenger flights in 2008.⁶

The desperation of poverty and the greed of wealth underpin a global system that is fundamentally at odds with God's original intention of shalom between all things, and the current pandemic is a terrible consequence of that. And of course, whilst we may be focused on Covid-19, the disasters of climate breakdown, biodiversity loss and plastic pollution are still continuing and we still need to tackle them urgently.

“The desperation of poverty and the greed of wealth underpin a global system that is fundamentally at odds with God's original intention of shalom”

So how do we bring a Gospel of reconciliation into this situation? One answer to that is found by looking at what it means for us to be made 'in the image of God' (Gen. 1:26-28). This description places humans in a particular relationship with God and looks in two directions.

Firstly, it looks in the direction of our relationship to others and speaks of the absolute equality between people: all people have been made in God's image. That absolute equality means that poverty is an absolute abomination. Covid-19 challenges us here. It exposes the stark inequalities of our world as it wreaks havoc most on those for whom lockdown means no money and no food and who don't have access to the basics of clean water and soap let alone a garden or park.

Reconciliation with others includes responding to the needs of neighbours both near and far. In Europe, 1 in 5 people are living in households at risk of poverty or social exclusion and research is indicating that this makes them especially vulnerable to the virus, as does living in areas with high air pollution⁷ People in refugee camps are particularly vulnerable in Europe during this pandemic.⁸

Reconciliation with others means not only responding to the needs of our immediate communities and nation, but also looking to our global neighbours and the needs of those living in countries that do not have the financial protection or health equipment that we do.

Secondly, being made in the image of God looks in the direction of the whole creation. Like an image in a temple, we are God's representatives, created to serve and look after the rest of what he has made. Covid-19 challenges us to recognise how far we have fallen from doing that well, but it also presents us with a unique opportunity for change. As we emerge from lockdown and stimulate our economies, will we do so in a way that does not take us back to pre-pandemic levels of pollution? Will we prioritise tackling deforestation and unsustainable agriculture?⁹ Will we push our governments to ensure that economic recovery happens within the parameters of keeping within a 1.5°C future? It is encouraging to see Amsterdam deciding to build back its economic activity in a way that meets the core needs of all but within the means of the planet, and the state aid being given to Air France has come with strong climate conditions¹⁰

“We are God’s representatives, created to serve and look after the rest of what he has made”

At Tearfund, we are working hard on the ground with our partners in many countries around the world, responding to the urgent needs of the pandemic. And, we are looking at these underlying systemic issues and stimulating a conversation with churches to ask, how can we build back a better world that is fairer and greener?. www.tearfund.org/about_you/action/the_world_rebooted

As Christians and churches we can have a central role in calling for, and working towards, a world without huge gaps between rich and poor - one that enables us to live in harmony with the whole creation. We know we won't see it fully until Christ returns to this earth and he dwells in our

midst, in the transformation of all things (Rev. 21 and 22), but we are future-oriented people and we can let that hope motivate us now in how we live, act, pray and speak out.

Ruth Valerio, Global Advocacy and Influencing Director for Tearfund

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RECONCILIATION AND CORONAVIRUS

Johannes Reimer

Maybe it is time for reconciliation

Kathryn Jean Lopez's article in the Catholic News magazine "Our Sunday Visitor" on reconciliation in times of Corona has inspired me deeply. "Maybe it is time for reconciliation" states Lopez to her Catholic readers. Locked in our apartment, each of us has plenty of time to think about God and the world. Life is busy and it has become so easy to forget our creator. Perhaps we should consider spending some time with Him and his word, confess our sin and get ready for the next phase of life after corona. All specialists predict that the time after the pandemic might be much more difficult than what we are experiencing now. It is obviously smart to rid ourselves from all the sinful ballast of the past. Reconciled people are free to start a new full power.

Reconciliation with God leads automatically to restoration of our own identity. The apostle Paul writes, that whoever is in Christ, is a new creation: old things have lost their influence, new things have started to shape our reality (2Cor. 5:17). Reconciliation with God results in reconciliation with oneself. We have plenty of time to think and pray about our own identity. Many Western people live with a growing inferiority complex. They desperately need reconciliation with their own past, their own ways of enculturation and their own position in society. Only

people with a healthy self-esteem will be able to stay "above water" in times of crisis. Spend time with yourself, find your own face in the presence of the Lord.

With all this excess time on your hands now, you might also think of people you are still in conflict with. Broken relationships absorb your energy, occupy your calendar and are the greatest hindrances to a meaningful life. You may have separated long ago, but memories don't go away that quickly. Healing of memories is urgently needed if you want to avoid becoming bitter. Now in times of COVID 19 you have the time to take the phone and call your former friend or partner and seek a heart-to-heart talk with the aim of reconciliation. Reconciled people are free to build new relationships and restore the old.

You may even look out of your window and take time to commit yourselves anew to caring for God's good creation. For those with gardens, there is time now to grow flowers and trees in the garden. You could even build a house for the birds. They have been busy all morning singing to you. Have you ever spent time seeing to their welfare or even just admiring them for a moment. God gave you a cultural mandate. You are supposed to care for the nature around you (Gen. 1:26-28). Do you? If not, is there a pressing need to reconcile with nature?

Maybe Corona provides time for us to reconcile!

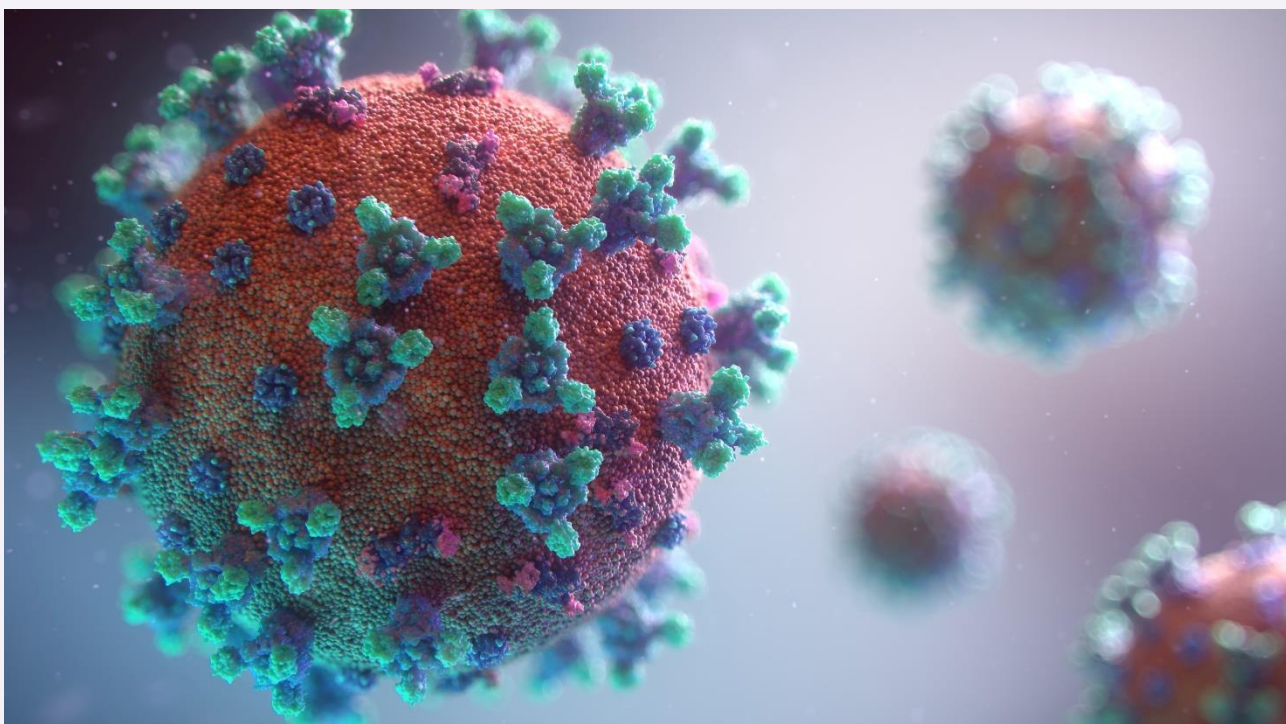


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How does reconciliation work?

The New Testament word for reconciliation “*catalasso*” describes a process in which you enroll into a conversation by which you jointly determine: (a) the state you are in and what caused the situation; (b) name abuse, injustice, the victims and perpetrators; (c) confess sin, ask for forgiveness and forgive in the name of Jesus; (d) build a new relationship for a better future.

First, reconciliation looks for truth, because only where we know what really happened, we might become free. Jesus says: “You will recognize the truth and the truth will make you free” (John 8:32). The problem here lies with our memory. We remember our interpretation of the truth. And, our interpretation is colored by our culture, experience and often by our prejudices. We may think we know why God seems so far removed from us, and why we ourselves so often experience bouts of inferiority and our neighbours create constant conflicts. In reality we work with our own limited perspectives on all of this and some of our so-called experience may have even turned into a lie. Hence, recovery of the truth will probably need the services of a counselor, a neutral mediator who may be a pastor in your local church, a trained Christian psychologist, or just a good Christian friend. Going back and forth on your issues, exercising *catalasso*, you may soon discover truth, broaden your perspective and understand what really happened between you and God, you and your family and your neighbours.

Secondly, knowing the true story allows you to name the forces of abuse, destruction and conflict. Do not try to cover up but instead open your heart to the truth. This will allow true confession and genuine forgiveness to take place. Sin, both against God and humans, has names. Speak them out and prepare to confess them to God, yourself, your neighbours and even creation.

Third, confess your sin and be prepared to forgive those who have sinned against you be this yourself, or other humans. And you will receive forgiveness out of God’s grace. At the same time forgive, if others have abused you, as you been forgiven by God.

And lastly work for justice. Go and pay your share, accept punishment, if this is what your misbehavior has produced. Forgiveness does not remove the question of justice from the table. In fact, forgiveness is a transformational process which enables the forgiven to carry the load of punishment, to restore justice and build just relationships.

For all of this we need time. Reconciliation does not happen overnight. And here is the good news – the awkward situation with the virus, opens up enough time for us.

Corona virus and community mediation

But the difficult time is not only an invitation to personal reconciliation. It opens doors for community reconciliation. Corona does not pick and choose its victims. All humans in the whole world are in danger. Only when we humans unite, will we win the war against the virus. And this forces even enemies to join hands for the time being. Across all religious affiliations, people of good will have to started to support one another, share their masks, food and water.

And again, Christians should be on the frontlines of such community support actions. Going to the nasty neighbour in times of need and crisis will soften their heart, and open potential doors for settling conflicts and establishing a peaceful community. In a city in Central Asia, for instance, Christians were distributing masks to the Muslims of the community. There has always been a rather difficult relationship between the two faith communities. But now, observing Christians serving the Muslims, their leaders came and apologized for all the problems they created for the Christians.

The time of crisis is inevitably also a time of opportunity for reconciliation, mediation and a new start. The American journalist Kathryn Lopez is right, maybe the corona pandemic calls us to a deeper level of reconciliation. Let’s set aside the needed time and find new ways to reconcile with God, ourselves, our neighbors and even creation. This is a wonderful opportunity for us Christians to take the lead in ushering in a renewed and healing world.

Johannes Reimer is professor of Mission Studies and Intercultural Theology at the Ewersbach University of Applied Arts, Germany and director of department of Public Engagement in the Worldwide Evangelical Alliance (WEA).

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This article was first published by the WEA <https://worlddea.org/es/news/reconciliation-and-coronavirus/>

RECONCILED TO CHANGING CIRCUMSTANCES: MISSIONARIES AND COVID-19 IN EUROPE

Darrell Jackson and Jim Memory



Photo by Fran Boloni on Unsplash

COVID-19 restrictions are posing challenges for missionaries in Europe and across the globe. In late April, the Vista editors asked Darrell Jackson to develop a questionnaire to explore the response of two European mission agencies: European Christian Mission (ECM) and Greater Europe Mission (GEM). They were asked to complete an online survey of ten questions between the 29th April and 3rd May. When the survey closed, a total of 145 responses had been gathered, 56 from ECM and 86 from GEM.

The full 43-page report will be published shortly. What follows is a summary of some of the data and narratives that emerge from the responses offered.

1. “Leave? We’re staying, this country is our home!”

The first question was open-ended and explored the factors considered by missionaries when making the decision whether to remain or return.

Approximately 93% have remained in their country of ministry with only eleven missionary families returning to their sending country, most commonly for a family

wedding. Some missionaries were already on home assignment so were unable to return to their country of service following travel restrictions. Commonly, we were told, “We didn’t even consider returning, this is our home”.

The considerations fell into five categories: **personal considerations**, such as the need to attend family wedding or care for elderly parents; **practical considerations**, such as healthcare provision, travel or repatriation factors, accommodation, financial support or the impact on children’s education; **vocational considerations**, which figured prominently with many saying that ‘Corona doesn’t change our calling’; **missional considerations**, the impact that leaving would have on their ministry or witness; and **spiritual considerations**, that without the prompting of God’s Spirit they felt called to remain.

2. Travel restrictions, or their impending threat, lay behind decisions to return home for family reasons, support-raising, or for volunteers on short-term placements

Our second question asked which reasons best explained decisions to return to the sending/home country. Only 22

RECONCILED TO CHANGING CIRCUMSTANCES ctd

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of the 145 (15%) respondents were in their sending country when we surveyed them. Of these, around half were on home assignment and thus prevented from returning by travel restrictions. A further six reported that health concerns had prompted their return to the sending country. Five were facing a slowing of financial support and had returned to boost their support. Most short-termers had returned home

3. When considering a return to a sending country, a comparison of respective healthcare systems was the most commonly cited factor when deciding whether to remain in country of service.

A third question asked which would be the single most important consideration if the respondent were to consider a return to their sending country. The most frequent response was fear of inadequate healthcare in the country of service, especially where the missionaries have a low resistance to infection or other pre-existing health risk, followed by the sending agency's recommendations, the need to boost support levels, and impending travel restrictions.

4. "This is our home; we simply have to stay put!"

Question 4 explored the reasons for remaining. The most frequently mentioned consideration was the missionary's feeling that the country of service was their 'home' (66%) and that they simply felt it was important to stay (64%). The quality of the healthcare system in the country of service was ranked almost as highly as the first two (60%). Some also mentioned multiple citizenship (17%) and were not sure where else they might go.

A fifth question had asked missionaries to indicate which had been the most important consideration. Most re-affirmed their sense that their country of service is their 'home' and therefore important to stay there.

5. Missionary service in Europe was not considered different to mission service elsewhere, although there are practical benefits to serving in relatively prosperous countries.

Question six asked, 'Do you think there is anything unique about being a missionary in Europe that had a bearing on your decision?' Most respondents (28%) said there was

nothing unique about missionary service in Europe that affected their decisions. Some 23% affirmed their view that calling and vocation came before all else, 'God's call is a call to remain'. Lusting benefits to serving in Europe, missionaries most notably mentioned that these include 'a good healthcare system' (28%), along with stable and secure social conditions (14%).



6. Creative, online opportunities for outreach are accompanied by increasing opportunities among immediate neighbours and friendship circles

When asked how their mission service had been impacted, 34% highlighted the rapid uptake of online means of engaging in ministry and mission, suggesting a highly adaptive missionary community. Some reported that 'it has actually made us more connected' although one or two disagreed, suggesting that 'there is only so much you can do online to build community'. Clearly the extent to which technology is seen to help or hinder is determined by the shape of the ministry, personal circumstance, or individual personality. One or two have clearly struggled with new technologies.

Just under a third (31%) highlighted that restrictions had given rise to 'creativity' or 'new opportunities'. Some described a new sense of solidarity with their neighbours, or that mission had become more local, whilst others talked of new possibilities for outreach. In contrast, a small but not insignificant number (16%) had seen their ministry close down, especially ministries using short-termers.

Four themes emerged frequently in the responses:

New communication technologies were forcing the missionaries to 'think outside of the box'. As one respondent put it, 'It's helped us to think more creatively in how to minister to people.' If one word sums up this shift, it is the word 'Zoom'!

New opportunities were observed by many. Some felt an increased confidence in the relevance of a Gospel of hope. New connections with neighbours included missionaries 'shopping for elderly neighbours' or 'doing gardening work' for them. Mission has become more local, whilst contact at a distance has been maintained by increased use of cards and postcards and, in one instance, the 'writing of a daily reflection on the Psalms for neighbours and friends.' However, some observed that fringe church contacts had drifted out of contact.

New pressures meant that some had a 'terribly difficult transition' to embracing new technologies. Some respondents noted 'Zoom fatigue' and 'screen fatigue' whilst others felt the stress of disconnection, the burden of home-schooling, or the balancing increased ministry expectations alongside extra family demands; 'windows of tolerance are certainly narrower.'

New restrictions were mentioned frequently; including restrictions on meeting together, travelling, attending conferences, teaching classes, offering face-to-face ministry, visiting homes, or street evangelism. Some clearly viewed these restrictions lightly, suggesting 'there are no restrictions, just new ways of serving'. In contrast, one

missionary described their experience as akin to 'living in a police state'.

7. With more frequent prayer, Bible reading, and more free time, missionaries have been able to reflect more deeply on the theology of what they do as missionaries

A final question that invited open reflections on anything else occurring to the missionary, prompted some unique but very rich responses.

Devotional practices Many missionaries said they were 'praying with a new intensity and frequency', some had taken up 'prayer-walking', whilst other described 'pressing into God's Word' accompanied by a new sense of urgency and purpose.

Theological questions One missionary described having time for 'real theological and missiological reflection.' The fruit of such reflection seems to have generated questions such as whether this 'will mean more of us go home and focus on raising up first culture workers?'. Others marvelled at the fact that 'it took the closing of the church doors to bring so many more people to church.' One suggested that 'the pandemic has forced all churches to cease business as usual...many are thinking about how things can or will change' once restrictions have been lifted.

Pastoral concerns A range of responses underlined the experience of one missionary who had come to 'understand more about the theology of suffering and faith in a time of crisis'. For some it prompted a degree of heart-

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searching; 'The already troubling tendency towards burnout and overwork among missionaries has only become more pronounced. The proliferation of extra meetings and content creation may be based on a genuine desire to care for others in this difficult time. Or, perhaps many of us find our worth in what we can tell our supporters that we have done.' Others added that 'many missionaries feel unless they're busy doing things and leading things many things will fall apart'.

Some experienced the restrictions as imprisonment, 'Had I known that we could not go outside and walk for 7-8 weeks, I might have returned home.' Some felt pressured 'to clap for health workers' and that 'being told to stay home', was experienced as 'a loss of civil liberties'.

Feelings of isolation were also described by some, 'We are struggling to have appropriate or frequent communication with national teammates and families back home. We are taking the role of virtual carer, but need care ourselves'.

8. Is the future of mission in Europe a 'new normal'?

The responses offered here certainly suggest that COVID-19 has stimulated and accelerated innovative and creative practices. Whether these point to a new future is beyond

the scope of an information-led article. Speculation is a prophetic and visionary act, but glimpses of the future are seen in our survey responses, nevertheless.

As we've gathered up the fragmentary responses of almost 150 missionaries serving in Europe, we remain aware that a new narrative will be required as missionaries return to the new 'normal'; narratives that define the shape of God's mission in Europe, the nature of mission, the role of the missionary, the character of the missionary, missionary call and crisis, and missionary vulnerability.

The fact that missionaries serving in Europe consistently see it as 'home' may not necessarily be seen as unique by the missionaries, but it is arguably much less commonly seen this way by missionaries serving elsewhere in the world. This factor deserves further investigation. Perhaps the language of 'benefits' rather than 'unique' is a better explanation of why missionaries remained.

We are human, living in historical circumstances, but God is ultimately sovereign and these times will pass. A gospel of hope for a post-COVID world can only be forged in such times as the present.

Darrell Jackson and Jim Memory

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



Editorial Team: Darrell Jackson, Jim Memory, Jo Appleton, & Evert Van de Poll

europeanmission.redcliffe.ac.uk

redcliffecollege

Redcliffe College

College Green

Gloucester,

GL1 2LX

Telephone: 01452 308097

www.redcliffe.ac.uk

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