

Breaking Ground: Charting Our Future in a Pandemic Year

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Breaking Ground is a masterful essay collection that wrings meaning out of a pandemic year.

Moving from the summer of 2020 to the spring of 2021, these essays trace the changing face of the Covid-19 pandemic, from lockdowns to Black Lives Matter protests to the release of the vaccines. *Breaking Ground* collects the work of more than thirty contributors, including pastors, academics, and lay observers, on topics that are far from resolved. It is a blend of on-the-ground reportage, thoughtful conversations, theological studies, and philosophy; while rooted in a pandemic, it also covers racial justice and politics.

The essays highlight spiritual ideas that the pandemic made more obvious. Entries like Doug Sikkema's "The Atmosphere" reflect on how understandings of home changed after edifying months of sheltering in place. Heather Ohansen's "Preparing for Death," written in the winter of 2020, ties Plato and Aristotle together with Christian theology to argue that contemplating death both prepares people for dying and helps them live better lives.

Understanding is also sought in the politics of the pandemic: "Portland: On the Ground" reports on the protests in the city; an interview with Marilynne Robinson from October of 2020, "Story Culture and the Common Good," explores the cultural implications of the pandemic. Elsewhere, "When Place Becomes Paramount" is hopeful in discussing means of bridging the US's deep political divide, one conversation at a time; it asserts that individuals have the power to make a difference. Still, as the book progresses, its sense of hope ebbs, leaving behind what Anne Snyder's closing essay calls an "ache"—but also a sense that, from all of this, something new will grow.

Breaking Ground is a fascinating essay collection that seeks the strength to move on from Covid-19.

JEREMIAH ROOD (January / February 2022)

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