

## Correspondence

# Hope as fundamental human response to loss and grief experiences in the time of COVID-19

### ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced changes in almost every aspect of human life, including the process of grieving. Due to strict safety measures, the grieving experience of the bereaved becomes more overwhelming and challenging. In this testing time, Gabriel Marcel's ideas on hope can be a fundamental response to loss and grief. In situations wherein despair is experienced, responding with hope can help us cope with the complicated process of grieving.

**Keywords** COVID-19, Gabriel Marcel, grief, hope

Recent correspondences zeroed in on the complicated process of grief<sup>1</sup> and the creative ways in accepting the reality of death<sup>2</sup> in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. The World Health Organization (WHO) makes a daily report of the number of deaths due to the novel coronavirus. WHO reported that on the last day of 2020, the year the COVID-19 pandemic struck the world, an estimated 1.82 million people have died due to the virus.<sup>3</sup> One possible positive response to this reality is to have a hopeful attitude that this, too, shall pass.

The COVID-19 pandemic brings a frightening experience to many people due to its fatality rate. It is not selective of its victims; anyone can be infected, and others could not survive the pain it brings. In fact, the youngest victim of COVID-19 was a 1-year-old girl in Scotland last December 2020.<sup>4</sup> According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, many people are suffering from grieving the loss of a loved one while, at the same time, coping with the distress and anxiety related to the pandemic.<sup>5</sup> Thus, this COVID-19 grieving experience can be overwhelming and challenging to the bereaved due to need for social distancing, following stay-at-home protocols and limiting of in-person gatherings. Given the various health restrictions, mourning families lose the light of tomorrow due to the range of emotions such as anxiety, depression and even despair. We are grieving the deaths of people we knew and loved. We are grieving even our inability to grieve.

During this crisis, it is important to grieve what has been lost and to find meaning despite the wounds caused by the

pandemic. In light of such, French philosopher Gabriel Marcel suggests that, in one's experiences of trials or death, hope is the human person's fundamental response.<sup>6</sup> As human beings are symbols of, and born from, hope, one may realize that hoping is part of one's human tendencies. In the quest for light amidst the pandemic, people could awaken their consciousness that hope is a universal invitation. When we fall into despair, we give up the tendency to hope. This perspective makes us see life as absurd. As the number of COVID-19 death toll increases day by day, holding on to the power of hope could be a creative way to accept the death of a loved one.

The COVID-19 phenomenon teaches humanity that death is a real episode in life. No one can escape the various struggles brought by this global health crisis. At the end of the day, Marcel reminds us that part of the call to becoming authentically human is to hope.

### Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest in this paper.

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### References

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