

## COVID-19: Health Crisis or Wake-Up Call?

When COVID-19 struck the world, discord ensued. We panicked. We fought. We feared. However, once we understood our common peril, we united, and if only for an instant, the light shone through the terrible times.

“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

We set aside our differences and united, weathering the storm as a strong collective. This was to be taken as the final word. We expected it to simply cease and to eventually wake from the nightmare of 2020. Although, in times of such intricate crises, the solution is nowhere as simple.

Vaccines are the future. Smallpox killed 500 million people in its last 100 years of its existence, but despite it being such a deadly and transmissible virus, it was eradicated with their widespread use.

Now that the exit to the pandemic has opened, will we work together to escape? Considering recent events, it resoundingly appears not.

The United States of America reckons with the 600,000 dead fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters, whose lives have far more meaning than can be expressed in a mere statistic. Their dedication in addressing their internal crisis is justified, especially considering that they remain the country worst affected by the virus – their hospitals and health facilities decimated, their livelihood missing, their people haunted. However, being the richest nation in the world with more than 279 million COVID vaccine doses administered, whose citizens are becoming able to roam freely and without masks, it is expected that they address the preferential care required by those marginalised people in our global community who have little chance of being protected from the virus.

The world continues to suffer, and the US becomes richer – they hold a monopoly on several vaccines such as the Pfizer and Moderna jabs, creating multiple new billionaires in the country as nations that can afford it are forced to invest large sums to purchase the vaccines they require. However, other nations shrouded in poverty such as those in Africa and particularly India are forced to simply await foreign aid and rely on the scarce goodwill of the rich whilst they continue to be hit with widespread outbreaks of the virus.

One needs only to view the harrowing images from India to get some sense of the intensely traumatic situation in relation to their second wave of COVID-19. Bodies are burnt in the streets, for there is no time to mourn or respect the humans whose empty shells are all that remain. Patients gasp for air as their families scramble for oxygen, only to return empty-handed or to be taken advantage of by criminals offering false hope. 295,000 have died from a total of just over 26,000,000 cases, but it is expected that these figures could be significantly higher due to issues in reporting.

Being caught off guard by this suddenly vicious outbreak and the intense demand for vaccines resulting, India has faced significant issues in vaccinating its population of over 1.3 billion (almost 4 times that of the United States) and has riskily approved the Russian Sputnik vaccine, which underwent no human trials and whose effectiveness is questionable.

It is evident that impoverished nations face inherent issues in their exit plan for the pandemic, resulting in outbreaks that claim thousands. It is the responsibility of those with resources to assume the role of the good Samaritan and meaningfully intervene.

“Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and will be repaid in full.” (Proverbs 19:17).