



Vaccines for all: more work to be done



In preparation for the G20 in the autumn, a note from the Dicastery and the Pontifical Academy for Life reinforces the need to ensure universal access to the vaccine

Many have called the unequal distribution of vaccines at an international level a moral outrage. The Global Health Summit in Rome, leading up to the G20 this autumn, provides yet another opportunity to highlight the need for universal access to Covid-19 vaccines, in line with The Pontifical Academy for Life and the Vatican Covid-19 Commission's Note "Vaccine for all. 20 points for a healthier and fairer world" (29.12.2020). In some high-income countries, we are seeing the stockpiling of doses up to five times greater than the amount needed for the population with vaccine administration being up to 30 times higher than in lower-income countries. It is simply not enough to limit ourselves to merely state the principle of universal access to avoid millions of deaths over a short period of time. Rather, our moral and political responsibility is to mobilise: each one of us is called to play our part, in order to make vaccines truly available to all around the world.

There are many reasons to take up this commitment. The first is a simple observation: By protecting others, I protect myself too. We often hear the Latin phrase *mors tua-vita mea* (your death, my life), a saying indicating that the failure of one is an indispensable requirement for success of

another. A reformulation should be: *vita tua, vita mea* (your life, my life). It is not possible to defeat the virus by only aiming for partial interventions; to uproot its circulation, no one can act on their own, let alone to the detriment of others. The logic of reciprocity prevails when faced with the many examples of sanitary systems collapsing, and the continued emergence of new variants of the virus. And yet, vaccines for all require true cooperation, one that overcomes “vaccine nationalism” and the race for disproportionate profits for pharmaceutical companies.

A second reason to take up this commitment speaks to our conscience and the meaning of human life. Coexisting is possible only if we commit to a behaviour of reciprocal care, as the moments of greater fragility of existence clearly show us: from infancy to illness, from disability to old age. “Treat others as you would like them to treat you” (Mt 7, 12): this is where solidarity and justice are rooted. The intrinsic value of reciprocal care is at the basis of the widespread appreciation for doctors and nurses, who have put their lives at risk to take care of those who have fallen ill.

The concrete actions that would follow from these principles in response to the pandemic are manifold: managing licences and vaccine patents to allow temporary suspensions so that production everywhere is possible; developing new partnership models between States and pharmaceutical companies, and reciprocal support for distribution (including supporting the COVAX programme); supporting the research of new technologies for vaccines that are more stable, and thus easier to transport and administer; developing local and global pricing policies and guidelines, using fiscal incentives to reduce the accumulation of resources in the hands of a few, favouring the redistribution for all; redirecting investments from weapons to health. Companies cannot only prioritize shareholders; rather, they should include all stakeholders – every actor and community involved. Human creativity should be engaged to a much greater extent to come up with new solutions, urging everyone’s generosity and collaboration.

Alongside effective cooperation between various international actors, a particular emphasis could be placed on the common commitments of religions. Interreligious synergy could support access to correct information, avoiding imprecise or misleading news, to reduce vaccine prejudice and increase understanding of complex ideas, such as the correlation between personal and public health, as well as imbalances in the environment, development models, and lifestyles.

The goal is to overcome a “suicidal denial,”[1] as stated by Pope Francis, and, more broadly, to nourish attitudes of trust and reciprocal help, on

which any constructive human coexistence is based; an actual universal fraternity.

[1] Cfr. Il mondo che vorrei: parla Papa Francesco