

Christians for an Ethical Society

Some thoughts on the way forward

David Hunter

We are in a time of change, change that may have quickened due to COVID-19, but more than ever we need the voice of Christians for an Ethical Society.

While the pandemic seems overwhelming now, let's look back at history: the so called "Spanish" flu of a century ago lasted 2½ years (January 1918-mid 1920), which would take us to mid 2022. A vaccine might shorten or reduce the severity, but such a long pandemic period will have profound effects on all of us. Remember however, that the world did survive the flu a century ago and bounced back into the "roaring" twenties. However, the excesses of the twenties was followed by the depression of the thirties.

During this pandemic, many methods have been tried to limit its effects—the methods used are often experiments based on incomplete data which is to be expected because we just do not know enough about this disease. Some of these experiments have been more successful than others and even when the same things have been tried, they have met varying success often because of leadership (or lack of it) and cultural differences.

When it comes to coping with this pandemic, Australia has done better than most. When facing the pandemic there have been mistakes (Ruby Princess in NSW, inexperienced security guards for hotel quarantine in Victoria), but we have had one of the lowest death rates in the developed world (33 per million population vs an average of 582 for UK, France, Spain). Some Asian countries have done better than us, but their cultures are different: they more easily accept a top-down proclamation of what should be done, as does Australia to some extent, at least much more than in the USA, where "freedom" seems to be paramount. Cultural differences are real—I have found the need for considerable alterations have been needed in adapting the Australian system of biopesticide and locust control to other countries and that is continuing with my current work on helping Pakistan cope with locusts, COVID-19 and flooding due to climate change. It is refreshing to hear Directors General repeatedly mentioning the problem of climate change and asking for help in introducing international standards into Pakistan.

Australia faces complex challenges including climate change and inequality as well as adapting to this pandemic and its ramifications. There are many voices screaming out "solutions" and the internet gives credence to hearsay and prejudice, as Toni Hassan so rightfully pointed out in her CES web interview. More than ever, we need a voice of reason that proclaims justice based on factual evidence, advocating ways of meeting not only physical needs but the mental and spiritual as well—the latter so often ignored in our society. Many people are hurting in this time of uncertainty and require the healing hand of compassion that, we as Christians, can help provide through our voices and our individual and corporate actions.