

Religion in a time of pestilence

21 short prescriptions during the Covid-19 pandemic



Part 11



Many know of the devastating epidemic, the so-called Spanish flu, which arrived in the country in September 1918. This was the most devastating pandemic of modern times, killing more than 50 million people around the world (or 3%-4% of the globe's population) in just over a year.

South Africa was one of the five worst-hit parts of the world. About 300,000 South Africans died within six weeks. That represented 6% of the entire population.

No antibiotics, no almost instant communication technology, no social distancing, no state intervention as such. Among rural black people, many believed human malice was to blame and ignorance and superstition led to hundreds of cases of witchcraft-related deaths.

Some 100 years later, we have all moved on and in our country we can be proud of the state's efforts to mitigate the pandemic.

Nevertheless ... society will never be the same again. The virus will affect each one of us, if not physically, then economically and socially.

In my youth, at the height of the Cold War, we lived in the shadow of nuclear war. Later, the revolutionary war on our borders and to a lesser extent internally, chewed up young lives and funds that could have been better spent. During democracy, we have had to stand helplessly by as greed, corruption, incompetence and absurd government policies smashed our economy and re-engineered society to the detriment of many.

Many of us are now indifferent and cynical about whatever new disaster is visited on us – but is this how we want to live? Does our Christian faith give us any clear guidance or do we number ourselves among the pagans and adopt a herd mentality?

Vague, generalised statements about faith, hope, trust or quoting comforting texts from the Bible, are religiosity, not faith. Faith is always *"in spite of."* Does that principle not make us fantasists who are out of touch with reality? Shall we patiently wait for God to intervene from on high like a benevolent elf (such as Father Christmas) and bestow a silver bullet cure on the medical establishment in response to our faithful trust?

Authentic faith is about people in a relationship with God – in spite of the virus, is your relationship with God healthy and growing deeper day by day? Let not a virus order your life. Immerse yourself in God's love and comfort – remembering the word comfort means to strengthen.