

Column on time

Flu

The swine flu is coming. The first cases of influenza in the Netherlands have been observed some time ago and there are estimations that 30% of the Dutch population will catch this flu. According to the latest information it is a mild variant. Those who are more or less healthy have nothing to fear. Preventive vaccination is not necessary, except for vulnerable groups and health professionals.

There have always been outbreaks of influenza and of other contagious diseases. As there came increasingly more contacts between people, epidemics could rage freely. In that respect a continental or even worldwide epidemic is not a modern phenomenon. It was already the case when the plague struck Europe in the dark ages. Fortunately there are effective vaccinations against diseases that used to cause death and destruction; at least, for a part of humanity. In poor countries things are different. Among others because of lack of medicine and lack of resilience those diseases cause a lot of victims.

We live in a society with many securities. We ensure ourselves and we get vaccinated. We anticipate dangers and take precautions against threats. It is part of our God-given human possibilities. And: as Protestant Church we made several recommendations to dam spreading of the flu. Further we hold those responsible who must and can take measurements upon threatening danger.

However, we should keep a few things in mind.

In the first place disasters do happen and diseases do occur. It is significant that at the threat of disaster we always point accusingly at the authorities. When the water was high in the rivers and the dikes were at the verge of breaking everybody looked furiously at The Hague. And now again The Hague is blamed to lack direction; because natural disasters of course were never supposed to hit us. If they do hit us, we have to look for someone to blame in order to be able to claim for damages and find compensation that way. This is in fact the immature attitude of a spoiled child.

In the second place we should remember that we live with uncertainties. Wanting to exclude them is an illusion. Neither are we entitled to health. It is a gift, which is always threatened and never guaranteed. No state or science can help that. It is not easy to live with uncertainties. It asks for an attitude of trust that our life is not in our own hands, but in higher hands.

In the third place we should have more sight on the suffering of people in poor countries and we should make more efforts to make knowledge and medicine available to those people in countries where epidemics are so much more dangerous. Consequently we can speak in a more relativized manner about our own influenza-distress.

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Dr. A.J. Plaisier, secretary of the general synod of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands

In this column every fortnight managers and staff members of the Protestant Church shed their light on topicalities in church and society.