REACH BUILD SEND
A Pattern for Anglican Ministry

What is gospel ministry all about? How can we maintain it for the long term? In this book, a group of evangelists, bishops, pastors, and theologians try to unpack what the Bible says about a sustainable pattern of ministry, with particular application to Anglican churches today. United in their conviction that God’s Spirit works through his word, they look both theologically and practically at how to reach out with the gospel, build up the church, and send out gospel workers for the next generation—without losing momentum.

Contributors: Kirsty Birkett, Mark Burkill, Lee Gatiss, Rod Thomas, Glen Scrivener, Paul G. Williams, Paul A. Williams

“Helpful, practical, full of biblical insight … this book feels like we’re eavesdropping on a lively conversation between a group of friends who are disciples, Bible teachers, and wise practitioners who care deeply about the church, the world, and the mission of Christ.”
Mark Tanner, Bishop of Berwick

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And then in our name and for our sake, he will deliver the kingdom to God the Father, a kingdom of the redeemed and in our name and for our sake, he will be subject to his Father, that God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit may be all in all (1 Cor 15:24–28). For Christ Jesus is the true worship leader, the Man who leads our song and our service, slaves no longer but sons indeed.

**Mentioning the Unmentionable**

I have a friend who used to play the organ in a crematorium during his University vacation. He told me that this helped confirm his Christian faith, as he contrasted Christian funerals with those of unbelievers. Here is where the gospel shines, as we trust in the One whose defeat of the Last Enemy is assured. The Christian funeral allows for grief, certainly. The Christian funeral allows us to take responsibility for the reverent disposal of the body. Of course. But, above all, the truly Christian funeral is an opportunity to show the world that we may be released from our fears and given a sure and certain hope. For above all the Christian funeral will preach Christ as the one who is both the resurrection and the life, for sinful worms like us.

But we are faltering. It is tragic that we now have Christian services in which the dead believer is so praised that the whole idea that we are miserable sinners saved only through Jesus is in effect roundly denied. Let us at least show forth the gospel of Jesus at such a crucial moment! May our funerals at least be Christian! As it is, my organist friend would not have had his faith confirmed but only denied.

And so, let us talk about death.

You may or may not be surprised that I am writing about death and its conqueror at such a time as this. Perhaps it is in bad taste. But wherever we are on the timetable of providence, it is good that Christians of all people should think and speak of death and turn once more to the gospel which tells us that this “Last Enemy” too will be defeated. Our confidence that this is so will be all the greater the more our hearts and minds are filled with the vision of the Lord of Glory, now ruling in the kingdom of God and assuredly bringing in the day of his return and the day when he will meet his saints and be with them for ever, the day of Resurrection.

**PETER JENSEN**

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**Protestants and Plagues**

*Mark Earngey*

There were varied pastoral and theological responses to plagues during the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation. Touring through Zürich, Wittenberg, Geneva, and London, this article highlights similarities and differences between various contexts, before offering some concluding reflections on our contemporary situation.

**Introduction**

It was unprecedented. Indeed, it was only a matter of time before the outbreak of plague in China, spread over the seas to wreak havoc in Italy, and from there, spread like wildfire throughout the whole of Europe. No, this is not COVID-19. Rather it was the infamous wave of Bubonic plague that haunted humanity in the fourteenth century. Known as the “Black Death,” probably due to the black spots it produced on skin, this pestilence killed around a third of the population between India and Iceland during the years 1345 to 1352 alone. Indeed, in the second half of the fourteenth century around half the population of England perished due to this plague. To put that into perspective, as a proportion of the total population of Europe, this wave of the plague killed more people than all the wars of the twentieth century combined. Not only was it an effective killer, but it was a rapid killer—death ensued around three days after the appearance of symptoms. The disease struck with such terrible speed, that the Italian humanist Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375) remarked,

> How many gallant gentlemen, fair ladies, and sprightly youths, who would have been judged hale and hearty by Galen, Hippocrates and Aesculapius (to say nothing of others), having breakfasted in the morning with their kinsfolk, acquaintances and friends, supped that same evening with their ancestors in the next world?

As we grapple with the catastrophe of COVID-19, it helps to understand something of the history of plagues. In a matter of months our lives have...

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turned upside down (and antipodeans like me have mercifully been spared a great deal of suffering). As individuals face isolation and churches face complex challenges, it can be comforting to hear how Christians have responded to epidemics and pandemics throughout history. This is, of course, why various social media threads, blogposts, and online articles have turned to historical precedents pertaining to pestilence—often from the Reformation period—in order to gain some perspective on the present.

The present article is an attempt at precisely that. In what follows, we will enter a world not altogether dissimilar to our own. It is a sixteenth-century world in which men, women, and children anxiously avoid infection and desperately seek cures to seemingly incurable diseases. It is a world, recently impacted by the arrival of a new social media platform: the printing press, where historical, theological, biological, and even astrological publications, all present the story of the plague. Last of all, it is a world caught up in controversies about the Holy Scriptures, the church, and above all the nature of salvation. This is the world of the Reformation, and as we tour through four plague-infected places and pause along the way for theological reflection, we will learn not only something about the history of the period, nor even something about the persons within that history, but ultimately we will learn something about the God who stands behind this history, and who entered into this history in order to save suffering sinners.

Zürich

We begin our journey in Zürich. In January of 1519, the thirty-five-year-old Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531) had been appointed the people's priest of the Grössmunster, which was the main church in the middle of the city. The plague had moved up the Rhine, decimating Basel and Schaffhausen by spring, and descending on Zürich by August. At that stage, Zwingli was out of town, recuperating at a mineral spring after an exhausting first eight months of ministry. But he immediately returned to visit and care for the sick. He went rapidly from parishioner to parishioner, attending to them personally, and applying the comfort of the gospel everywhere he could. His friends were nervous about his sacrificial attitude, especially given his important responsibilities. "Perform your duty," one said, "but

at the same time be careful to guard your own life." In the course of a few months, one third of the population of the city perished—that is, around two and a half thousand people who fell victim to the plague.

It was not long before Zwingli succumbed to the disease and was infected with the plague. His body was already weak from rushing about caring for the sick and dying, and now the people's priest of Zürich seemed as if he would not recover. The news about Zwingli's impending death spread far and wide, and his friends were desperately sad. Heinrich Bullinger later said that intercessions were continually made for Zwingli's recovery. Family in Zwingli's hometown of Toggenburg, and friends such as Caspar Hedio in nearby Basel were downcast by the report. However, in the Lord's kindness, Zwingli's strength returned, little by little, until he reached a full recovery.

Intermittently throughout his whole sickness he composed stanzas of poetry which would eventually form his famous Plague-Hymn, the Pestlied. This influential poem captures the range of emotions he experienced during the stages of sickness, and was written in three stages: firstly, at the beginning of his illness, secondly during his illness, and thirdly during his convalescence. It reflects his trust in God when the end drew near:

Thy purpose fulfill:
nothing can be too severe for me.
I am but thy vessel
to be made whole or broken in pieces.

It also displays his heartfelt praise of God when he was in the clear:

With thy help,
without which I can do nothing
I will gladly endure the knocks
and noise of this world
as the price of health.

Historians of the Reformation describe this episode as a real turning-point in Zwingli's theological outlook. From this point onwards his writings attest to God's strong providence over all things—even plague. This, in turn, points to a broader point about plague and providence. Zwingli

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5 Potter, Zwingli, 69–70.
gracious favour to preserve his universal church, our most godly sovereign
Lord and King, King Edward the sixth, his Majesty's most honourable
council, and the whole realm. So be it. 7

Further examples of the disobedience-pestilence nexus abound, and
many are commonly found among the liturgies of the Reformation. John
Calvin's Form of Ecclesiastical Prayers prayerfully commends to God "the
peoples that you afflict with plague." Indeed, so dedicated to prayer was
Calvin during plague, that he set aside an additional day for intercessions,
which prayers included the following: "even if the curses with which you
previously corrected the faults of your people Israel were to fall upon us—
we confess that it would truly be just, and we would not dispute that we
derive it." Due to the circumstances of its production (exile, not plague),
whole sections of Calvin's occasional Genevan prayers of repentance
were copied and pasted into the regular weekly Dutch liturgy written by
Petrus Dathenus, bequeathing a penitential tone to the Dutch Reformed
liturgical tradition. A similar tone can be detected in John Knox's
liturgical productions which characteristically speak of people being
"justly menaced" by God during plague, and in the Middelburg Liturgy
of the Puritans which understood plagues as "evident tokens of God's
wrath." The service for the visitation of the sick in Archbishop Cranmer's
Book of Common Prayer (1552), exhorted the sick person, "Whatsoever
your sickness is, know you certainly, that it is God's visitation." Thus,
the idea of suffering sat squarely within the realm of God's sovereignty for
these early Reformers. This too, was the view of Martin Luther, and so to
Wittenberg we now turn.

Wittenberg

It was 1527, ten years after he nailed his Ninety-five theses to the door
of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. In early August the plague came
to Wittenberg and, while others around him fled, Martin Luther, along

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7 John Hooper, An homelye to be read in the yme of pestyle nce (Worcester: Oswen, 1553), RSTC 13759, sig. E11.
8 Jonathan Gibson and Mark Earney, eds., Reformation Worship: Liturgies from the Past for the Present (Greensboro, NJ: New Growth Press, 2018), 313, 320 (Calvin); 558 (Knox); 662 (Middelburg).
9 The boke of common praiery, and administracioun of the sacramentes, and other rites and ceremonies in the Churche of Englelunde (London: Whitchurch, 1552), RSTC 16280.5, sig. Q1i.
with his pregnant wife Katie, stayed—against the advice and request of Elector John—to care for the sick. Although he was never personally infected, Luther—like Zwingli—felt a pastoral responsibility to stay and serve. Indeed, Luther penned his famous hymn “A Mighty Fortress is Our God” around this time. But what was the right response to plague—fight or flight, remain or retreat? This was a pressing question for many, and Pastor Johann Hess from Breslau (modern day Wroclaw in Poland) wrote to Luther and asked for his advice. So, Luther responded, with a thoughtful piece of pastoral theology, entitled: “Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague.”

What is clear from the outset is that Luther recognizes that Christians may in good conscience hold different ethical answers to this question. He notes that the “strong” may firmly believe that “one need not and should not run away from a deadly plague.” That is good and commendable. But since it is generally true that there are few strong Christians like this, then we ought not place the burden to remain on everyone. Indeed, the two main groups who Luther believes must remain during the plague are ecclesiastical office holders and civil office holders such as mayors, judges, and so forth. Preachers and pastors must remain because that is what good shepherds do: just like Christ Jesus, good shepherds lay down their life for their sheep. Public office holders must remain because God has appointed governing authorities and they ought not to abandon the care of their communities. There is a third group of which Luther speaks, a more ambiguous but nevertheless important group: persons who stand in a relationship of service or duty toward one another, such as masters and servants; mistresses and maids; parents and children, and so forth.

So, it is a very thoughtful piece of pastoral theology. Nevertheless, it does have some quirks, such as Luther’s warning that those who remain for selfish motives will likely suffer infection, or disfigurement, or death; and Luther’s exhortation that those who remain for God-honouring motives will likely be protected and cared for by God. But it also contains some good counsel for those in Christian ministry: first, admonish the people to attend church and listen to the sermon so they can learn through God’s word how to live and how to die; secondly, everyone should prepare themselves to meet God by confessing their sins, taking the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, and being reconciled with their neighbours; and thirdly, if someone wants a pastoral visit, ensure it is done quickly before the patient is overwhelmed with disease. Surpassing even that eminent wisdom, Luther’s treatise provides one of the most profound Christological motivations for staying to serve the suffering. He writes:

This I well know, that if it were Christ or his mother who were laid low by illness, everybody would be so solicitous and would gladly become a servant or helper. Everyone would want to be bold and fearless; nobody would flee but everyone would come running. And yet they don’t hear what Christ himself says, ‘As you did to one of the least, you did it to me’ [Matt 25:40].

That insight holds immense pastoral relevance, and to further our thinking about pastoral and practical wisdom, we turn next to John Calvin.

Geneva

The French reformer, John Calvin, is often perceived as one of the most stern and ice-cold leaders of the Reformation. However, when one begins to read his letters, especially on the subject of plague, a very different picture emerges. Having heard about the outbreak of plague in Strassburg in 1541, Calvin wrote to his dear friend Guillaume Farel in great distress. He spoke of his brother having fled to a neighbouring village, and his own wife likewise fleeing to safety. “Day and night,” he wrote, “my wife was constantly present in my thoughts, in need of advice, seeing as she was deprived of her husband.” However, Calvin was most devastated with the news that his “singularly esteemed” friend Claude Ferey had been carried off by the plague. He lamented:

these events have produced in me so much sadness, ... you cannot believe the grief which consumes me on account of the death of my dear friend Claude. ... I cannot arrive at any other conclusion, than that the Lord, in taking him away, has meant to chastise me severely for my sins.

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12 Luther articulates this as “going to confession.”


Calvin had seen so many suffer by this point, and often little children: Huldrych Zwingli’s son William, Johannes Oecolampadius’ son Euzebe, and even his own children. In a letter to Lausanne reformer Pierre Viret (known as “The Smile of the Reformation” for his persuasive preaching!) in 1542, he wrote that “The Lord has certainly inflicted a severe and bitter wound in the death of our infant son.” In a letter to Farel in 1544, he wrote that “The pestilence again alarms us, and seems to be on the increase. My little daughter labours under a continual fever.”

We can, therefore, understand something about Calvin’s extensive efforts to care for others who suffered the plague. Writing after Calvin’s death, Theodore Beza remembered how, when he was suffering from the plague in Lausanne during 1551, it was John Calvin and Pierre Viret who went to great lengths to care for him from afar.

But Calvin’s efforts to care for people went beyond pastoral correspondence. When the plague ravaged Geneva in 1542, the city’s plague hospital in the Plainpalais quarter was reopened to care for the sick and suffering and the city magistrates decided to appoint a pastor for this important role. Such was the significant degree of hesitation among the Company of Pastors to volunteer for this role, that Calvin vented to Viret, “But so long as we are in this ministry, I do not see that any pretext will avail us, if, through fear of infection, we are found wanting in the discharge of our duty when there is most need of our assistance.”

Pastor Pierre Blanchet—praised as a man with a “big heart”—volunteered and was appointed to take up this dangerous position, but one year later contracted the plague and lost his life through brave service. Despite the expectations of their pastoral responsibility, no-one could be found to replace Blanchet. Though he was selflessly willing to serve, the Genevan magistrates deemed Calvin too important to lose and thus excluded him from candidacy. The position was determined by invoking the name of God and casting lots, but even this did not produce a replacement, since those selected refused to volunteer. Eventually a replacement was found in an inexperienced minister named Mathieu de Geneston, but sadly he too died, and only shortly after beginning the service of the sick and suffering. This episode—rightly described as “hardly the Company of Pastors’ finest hour”—highlights the complex realities of pastoral ministry during the plague, not least of which involves the difficult deliberation about what constitutes selflessness and selfishness, bravery or cowardice, and faithfulness or fearfulness, in the course of ministerial duties.

This episode also brings us to the matter of health and healing during the Reformation. This is important to understand, since there exists a vast gulf between modern and early modern understandings of medicine. During the time of the Reformation, there were two key thinkers who loomed large in medical discussions: the ancient Greek physician Hippocrates, and the Roman physician Galen. The former established the theory of the four bodily humours: blood, phlegm, black bile and yellow bile, which was modified and advanced in the system of the latter, such that an illness was believed to be a result of an imbalance in bodily humours and temperaments of the body. So, for instance, someone with too much phlegm (which was cold) could eat something hot, like a red chilli, and be cured. In addition to the theory of opposites, there were other medical treatments on offer, such as blood-letting which involved the use of leeches or temporary cutting of veins (or a visit to the local barber-surgeon, as per the Worshipful Company of Barber-Surgeons in London), or purging through self-induced vomiting and laxatives, or through various remedies, the latter being particularly relevant insofar as plague is concerned.

The invention of the printing press enabled huge swathes of medical advice to be printed—sometimes officially authorised texts, sometimes classic treatises reprinted on account of tried and trusted methods, and other times new works produced simply on account of the credentials of the physician. For instance, The Grete Herball was first printed in French and then reprinted multiple times in other languages. It encouraged people to seek out a plant called the tormentilla (also known as fistularia or taglafayre) which grew on hills and moist places. The powder of this plant when taken with scabious water was apparently good against the pestilence if taken at the beginning of the sickness. The internationally regarded English doctor of physics, Andrew Boorde, who trained at Montpellier along with the vanguard of early modern medical experts, gave rather longer instructions for dealing with the plague. Among other

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13 Calvin to Viret, 19 August 1542, in Calvin’s Tracts and Letters, 4:344.
14 Calvin to Farel, 30 May 1544, in Calvin’s Tracts and Letters, 4:420.
16 Calvin to Viret, late October 1542, in Calvin’s Tracts and Letters 4:358.
things, he encouraged making a pomander—a ball of ingredients which would fumigate houses against the plague. His receipt required: three drams of lapdanum, one dram of the wood of aloes, two and half drams of Grecian amber, a dram each of nutmeg and storax calamite—then—confect these all together with rosewater, and make a ball. “And this aforesaid pomander,” says Dr. Boorde, “does not only expel contagious air but also comforts the brain” (a handy bonus)!

Among the myriad concoctions for plague, one of the most bizarre comes from the mysterious and pseudonymously authored work, *The Secrets of the Reverend Master Alexis of Piemount Containing Excellent Remedies against Diverse Diseases*. After his remedy against the plague, his perfect recipe against the plague, his preservative against the plague “oftentimes proved,” he gives us this unusual remedy, under the simple heading, “another”:

Take the dung or excrement of a young boy between ten and twelve years of age, and dry it, and afterwards beat it into powder. This done, put of it at the most two spoonfuls in a glass of white wine, and give it to the patient to drink at the least six hours after the grief taketh him, and the sooner the better. This hath been found true in many men.

Just as strange to modern ears is the subject of astrology—which at the time of the Reformation was understood as basically the same as astronomy. Because of the way early moderns understood celestial objects to have connection with earthly objects, they understood the star system to relate to everyday life. Just as the stars would relate to seasons and crops and tides, so too did they relate to health and wellbeing. A fine example of this is the twelfth-century Norman church in the parish of St Mary the Virgin in Ifley, Oxford, where the stars of the zodiac were carved into the stonework in the entrance to the building. This was not done out of superstition but out of reverence for the God who had designed the universe to work together in this way. So physicians would look at star charts and horoscopes during diagnosis of the plague, and different operations (e.g., blood-letting) would be more or less successful depending on what time of the year it was. The so-called *Excellent Treatise* of Italian astronomer Anthony de Montulmo predicted sudden death and pestilence on 6 August 1553 depending on the conjunction of

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22 Andrew Boorde, *Hereafter foloweth a compendious regiment or dyetary of betth made in Montypyller*... (London: Wyer, 1542), RSTC 3378.5, sigs. L.ii'-L.iv'.
23 Anon, *The secrets of the reverende Maister Alexis of Piemount Containing excellent remedies*... (London: Kingston, 1558), RSTC 293, sig. K.iii'.
25 For example, Michael Nostradamus, *The prognostication of maister Michael Nostradamus*... (Antwerp: n.p., 1559), RSTC 492.3; *An excellent treatise shewing suche perilous, and contagious inforrmities, as shall issue. 1559 and 1566*... (London: Day, 1559), RSTC 18694.
26 Cited from the 1561 translation by “G.G”: John Calvin, *Admonicion against astrology judicail and other curiosities, that rainge now in the world*... [London: Hall, 1561], RSTC 4372, sig. C.iii'.
27 Calvin, *Admonicion*, sig. C.iii'.
28 In contemporary parlance, this would be understood as deliberately spreading contagious material.
been spreading the plague throughout the city. Apparently, these plague-spreaders (les engraisseurs) had been smearing the doorposts and passages throughout houses with their poisonous ointment. Understandably, the full force of the law came down upon this secret society of “greasers” and Calvin gave the approval for them to be prosecuted for sorcery, with the penalty of execution.

**England**

Let us head over the Channel to the Kingdom of England, Wales, and Ireland (as well as some snippets of France, for a little while longer). England had to deal not only with the Black Death, but another plague called the Sweating Sickness, which, though not always fatal, could kill in a matter of hours. According to the future royal physician John Caius, the initial symptoms were rushing bursts of pain in the back or shoulders, arms or legs, then secondly grief in the liver or the stomach, thirdly pain in the head, uncontrolled bodily actions, and then outbreaks of hot sweat, and finally an overwhelming desire to sleep.  

The Sweating Sickness killed thousands, and was indiscriminate about class: plenty of the Tudor court, such as Anne Boleyn’s brother and father, two of the Duke of Suffolk’s sons, and—as Hilary Mantel has vividly brought to our imagination through the Wolf Hall series, and Diarmuid MacCulloch more academically through his masterly biography—it killed Thomas Cromwell’s wife and daughters, all during 1528.11 Unsurprisingly, King Henry VIII was utterly terrified of this epidemic. Whenever news of an outbreak of Sweating Sickness reached him, he would break up his court and take off to safety, often abandoning his wife and mistresses to other places so he could self-isolate. One wonders how differently world history would have turned out if King Henry was less of a hypochondriac and died of contagion!

A similar question may be asked about Thomas Cranmer’s successful flight from the plague in 1529. When the plague came to Cambridge he escaped and moved to Waltham Holy Cross in Essex. It was here that he discussed King Henry VIII’s “Great Matter” with Stephen Gardiner and Edward Foxe. During this conversation, Cranmer suggested a European-wide consultation of the Universities about the legitimacy of the planned annulment of Henry’s marriage to Katherine of Aragon. His idea was excitedly taken up by Gardiner and Foxe, and most importantly, the King himself. The rest is history, but this episode reminds us about the sorts of surprising by-products that sometimes spring from the hardest of circumstances, even plague.

The last account of the Sweating Sickness occurred in 1551, and it struck down two thousand in London alone, which by today’s standards is small but by sixteenth-century standards was a significant proportion of the London population. Nevertheless, the presence of plague continued, and so we ought to ponder the pastoral provisions setup by Archbishop Cranmer and his team of Reformers. Cranmer’s 1547 *Book of Homilies* made clear that “when God doth show his dreadful countenance towards us; that is to say, he sends dreadful plagues, of sword, famine, or pestilence upon us, it appears that he is greatly wrathful towards us.”32 That would, of course, give extra emphasis to the response, “good Lord, deliver us” in the prayer for deliverance from plague in the Great Litany.

Easily the most illuminating liturgical response to the presence of plague is the Order for the Visitation of the Sick in the *Book of Common Prayer*. Here, Cranmer and his liturgical team set forth a powerful and sensitive pastoral strategy for caring for the sick. It is theologically rich and holds a huge relevance for ministry in the context of COVID-19. In fact, it has featured regularly in various discussions about the validity of conducting the Lord’s Supper over the internet.33 Many modern ministers and laypersons alike have been quick to point out the possibility of so-called “spiritual communion.” That is, where for various reasons the sick person cannot receive the Sacrament of Christ’s Body and Blood, then the curate is to instruct the sick person that he eats and drinks the body and blood of Christ by faith, even though he does not receive the Sacrament by mouth. So, spiritual communion is a real thing. Nevertheless, the presence of spiritual communion does not mean we should practise remote or online holy communion. It simply means that if we cannot physically celebrate the Lord’s Supper together, we nevertheless ought to be overjoyed with the fellowship with have with Christ Jesus, even now.

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30 John Caius, *A boke, or counsell against the disease commonly called the sweate, or sweating sicknesse*. (London: Grafton, 1552), RSTC 4343.


32 “A Sermon, How Dangerous a Thing it is to Fall From God”, in *Certayne sermons, or homelies appoynted by the kynges Majestie ...* (London: Grafton, 1547), RSTC 13640, sig. N-ii.r.

Another noteworthy response to plague was the upswing in church attendance. That is, plague and pestilence did not cause a cessation of churchgoing in Reformation London—rather, the opposite happened. In the great plague of 1563, large gatherings for prayer and preaching were indeed banned since they “in this contagious time might be occasion to spread the infection.” However, the smaller parish assemblies were not subject to such a blanket ban. Indeed, Queen Elizabeth set forth a letter encouraging more corporate prayer at this time of necessity. Curates and pastors were notified to exhort all families, that unless essential business or personal sickness prevents them, that they ought to attend their parish church on Sundays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and all Holy Days to pray. The Wednesday service consisted in Morning Prayer, fifteen minutes of quiet personal prayers in silence, the Great Litany, Holy Communion, and a sermon. The Friday service consisted in Morning Prayer, the Great Litany, and several other profound prayers, including one which went as follows:

Grant us, O most merciful Father, that we fall not into the uttermost of all mischiefs, to become worse under thy scourge; but that this thy rod may by thy heavenly grace speedily work in us the fruit and effect of true penitence, unfeigned turning and converting unto thee, and perfect amendment of our whole lives; that, as we through our impinency do now most worthily feel the sweet comfort of thy mercies, graciously pardoning our sins, and pitifully releasing these grievous punishments and dreadful plagues. This we crave at thy hand, O most merciful Father, for thy dear Son our Saviour Jesus Christ’s sake. Amen.

The ecclesiastical provisions during plague did not stop there. Publications with extra prayers and meditations for homes were printed, just as many good liturgical resources were made for our time under COVID-19. Also, the Queen and Archbishop Parker pushed hard for a General Fast throughout the Kingdom, and when the plague abated, additional liturgies were published for the purpose of praise. Interestingly, Archbishop Parker wanted to celebrate with a momentous Communion Service at St Paul’s Cathedral in London, whereas Bishop Grindal of London wanted a simple service of thanksgiving. Grindal feared a mere public spectacle reminiscent of the recently dispatched High Mass, and Parker feared Grindal’s liturgical proposal was too didactic and too remote from the forms in the Book of Common Prayer. While this illustrates slight differences in churchmanship and personalities during the early Elizabethan Settlement, it also illustrates the need to mark the cessation of suffering with some careful deliberation, a salient point for contemporary readers considering our own post-plague ecclesiastical celebrations. Indeed, the eschatological thrust of London’s prayers then could be well repeated in such celebrations here today: “that we ... as a taste here in earth of thy heavenly joys, and as a pledge of thy eternal mercy, may always in this life render therefore all laud and honour to thee, and after this transitory and miserable life may ever live and joy with thee.”

In addition to the ecclesiastical legislation enforced during plague, there was also civil legislation set forth, such as the social isolation laws in response to overpopulation in the city of Westminster. In light of greedy landlords who squeezed tenants into their dwellings (“as it were swarming in every room”), these abodes were also limited to the single household. Further, every house, lodging, or shop which had an infected person inside was ordered to shut up its windows and doors for forty days. The penalty for breaking either the household or business quarantine (from the Venetian “quarantena” meaning forty days), was seven days in the stocks before forty days in gaol. Such shutdown laws worked in conjunction with church provisions. Just as the Queen and Privy Council exhorted people to pray, so the Bishop of London exhorted people to obey. Indeed, Grindal published a short admonition to be read in all parish churches, such that worshippers would “diligently observe and obediently keep those good laws which have lately been set forth by the Lord Mayor of this City for avoiding the danger of the infection of this contagious sickness.” This was both “charitable” towards neighbour and “godly” in respect of the obedience due the Lord, and provides a fine example of commendable cooperation between church and civil rulers.

36 An edifying example of this is the Common Prayer for Homes: Resources for Family Worship which can be found online at http://bettergatherings.com/ (an initiative of the Anglican Diocese of Sydney).
37 Collinson, Archbishop Grindal, 165.
39 Wylliam Cecil knight, high stewarde of the citie of Westminster ... (London: Steward, 1564), RSTC 16704.9.
40 An admonition to be rede in the churches of the citie and suburbes of London ... (London: Seres, 1563), RSTC 16704.7.
Conclusion

We have toured through Zürich, Wittenberg, Geneva, and London, and we could have surveyed much more territory. We have opened up a mere fifty-year window of investigation into a history full of pestilence and could have extended out our examination into the seventeenth century (e.g., the great plague of London in 1665). Much more could be said about the geographical advantages of the Scottish highlands, or the use of “plague” and “pestilence” terminology in Protestant and Catholic polemical discourse, of the role of plague in the production of the Heidelberg Catechism, or even the long list of all the Reformers who succumbed to the plague. But we have had enough of an inspection to draw some threads together.

Clearly there are major differences between protestant responses to plague then, and protestant responses to plague now. First, the medical advances and national health systems which exist today should give us great cause to praise God. Secondly, although many in our world unfortunately know the realities of wars, plagues, and serious suffering, some of us are less acquainted with these experiences. Indeed, some of us today are far less familiar with death than were our Reformation forebears. The wonderful blessings of being two generations removed from war and preserved from other serious plagues has the flipside of being less accustomed to the perils and dangers that most of humanity has faced throughout history. Thirdly, the Reformers consistently believed that God was intimately involved in this world—even during plague—in ways foreign to many of us today. This raises the question of whether COVID-19 should be understood as a form of divine punishment for particular sins? It may well be, though we need a healthy degree of caution here. These are questions which require careful theological and pastoral answers beyond the scope of this essay. Nevertheless, we ought to ask ourselves what it might say about our theology if we have no place for understanding COVID-19 as a possible means of admonishment or fatherly discipline (Heb 12:4–12).

This leads us to some similarities between plague then and our situation today. First, spread of plague remains very similar: airborne, and contagious through physical contact. Therefore, secondly, practical measures were also very similar: locking down borders; self-isolation in homes; hospital system of care; social welfare (though through churches rather than the state), etc. Thirdly, there is great need for ministerial wisdom and godliness. While shepherds serving the flock are, in principle, always required to lay down their lives for their sheep, what this might look like would differ widely depending on pastoral circumstances. It would also differ widely depending on what civil legislation governed ecclesiastical activity (e.g., whether certain assemblies are permitted, whether there are any clerical exemptions, etc.). Finally, there are still eternally significant ministry opportunities at hand, despite ministry under the constraints of plague. Indeed, during the Reformation, pestilence boosted church attendance. Men and women streamed into churches to confess their sins and receive forgiveness in the name of Jesus Christ. So too, in our own day, as men and women stream church online, there are superb opportunities to repent and believe while the kingdom of God is at hand. In the strange and stressful times of suffering, then and now, men and women may find solace for their souls in Christ, the saviour of the world. We must trust the Lord, as articulated in the Homily Concerning the Justice of God, or whether we live or die, we are his.

For if, as God by affliction goes about, as our heavenly schoolmaster, to teach us thus to flee from sin, and to follow righteousness, to condemn this world, and to desire the life to come, with such other godly lessons, so we, like his good disciples, do well learn the same; we shall not need much to fear this plague as [ultimately] dreadful and horrible, but with the blessed man of God, Job, to trust in him, yea, though he should kill us bodily, and patiently to take our sickness as God’s good visitation and fatherly correction, and in it quietly and constantly to commit ourselves wholly to the holy will of our most merciful Father, by our Saviour Christ, whether it be to life or death; knowing that he is the Lord of life and death, and that whether we live or die, we be the Lord’s. For it cannot perish which is committed unto him; in whom, they that believe, though they die, shall live, and in whom all that live and trust faithfully in his mercy, shall not die eternally; and by whom, through our Saviour Christ, all that die in him have life everlasting; which I beseech the same our most merciful heavenly Father, for the death of our Saviour Jesus Christ, to grant unto us all: unto whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost, one eternal Majesty of the most glorious God, be all honour, glory, and dominion, world without end. Amen.\footnote{Grindal, Remains, 109–110.}

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