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SHEPHERDING THE SAINTS IN THE FACE OF DISEASE
AND DEATH: PASTORAL MINISTRY DURING
THE GREAT PLAGUE OF LONDON (1665-66)

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Benjamin Bruce Purves
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AND DEATH: PASTORAL MINISTRY DURING
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Benjamin Bruce Purves

Read and Approved by:

Faculty Supervisor: John D. Wilsey

Second Reader: Shawn D. Wright

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With gratitude to the plague martyrs who “loved to live to the good of the church”
and did not count their lives as more precious than obedience to Christ.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ODNB *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 60 vols. Prepared under various editors. New York: Oxford University Press, 1885–2004. Also available at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/>

PREFACE

This project began during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. The struggle and debate over how churches should respond to contagion and public health orders provoked a search to find wisdom and help from church history. My reading took me from Eusebius to Abraham Kuyper as I looked for examples of pastoral care in past public health crises. The earliest description of ministry during the plague that I found was in Eusebius's works, along with pastoral instruction from Cyprian. After the Black Death in 1348, localized plague outbreaks continued in mainland Europe, and the Reformers and subsequent generations of pastors responded to the plague in letters, sermons, treatises, and dissertations.¹ Crossing over into British literature, I read Thomas Vincent's personal account of ministry during the Great Plague of London and John Newton's pastoral counsel from the smallpox inoculation controversy of the 1720s.² Finally, Abraham Kuyper applied Christian theology to public health in *Our Program: A Christian Political Manifesto*.³ In reading these works, the strangeness of navigating COVID-19 faded as it was reframed in the context of many events that were far more devastating and the ministerial guidance and wisdom of those who loved and shepherded their churches well in the midst of disease and death. In beginning work on this research

¹ This includes the plague writings of Martin Luther, John Calvin, Huldrych Zwingli, Jerome Zanchi, Theodore Beza, Heinrich Bullinger, Zacharias Ursinius, Ludwig Lavater, and Gisbertus Voetius

² This blog post from 2021 introduces John Newton's letter of pastoral counsel regarding the smallpox inoculation: Ben Purves, "Vaccine Mandates and the Christian's Liberty of Conscience: From 2021 to 1721 and Back Again," *Founders Ministries* (blog), accessed September 18, 2023, <https://founders.org/articles/vaccine-mandates-and-the-christians-liberty-of-conscience-from-2021-to-1721-and-back-again/>.

³ Abraham Kuyper, *Our Program: A Christian Political Manifesto*, trans. Harry Van Dyke (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015).

thesis, the counsel and recommendations of Dr. John Wilsey and a few others narrowed my focus to consider pastoral ministry during the Great Plague of London (1665-66).

This project has been a journey of rediscovering the people, stories, and literature of 1665 London. Aside from a few republished works by Thomas Vincent and Richard Baxter, the majority of primary source material has recently been made available by the preservation efforts of libraries to digitize out-of-print works and manuscripts. Like needles in a haystack, narratives, books, letters, and unpublished manuscripts have been threaded together in an attempt to present a composite portrait of pastoral ministry during the Great Plague.

During the height of the plague in 1665, an Anglican rector wrote an open letter to the clergy who fled London and called for the city's pastors to return and "love to live to the good of the church."⁴ Such love and courage is needed for all who would shepherd the church in such times. It is my hope that the ministerial examples of those who shepherded the saints through public health crises will serve as a help and encouragement for all who serve as shepherds. May the Lord give conviction, courage, and hearts that will "love to live to the good to the church."

Many words of thanksgiving are due. First, thank you to my wife Ricki and our children Andrew, Elizabeth, and Jack. Without your patient encouragement and loving support in this multi-year effort, this project would not have started or finished.

Thank you to my supervisor, Dr. John Wilsey. Your guidance, redirection, and feedback has been invaluable in focusing and shaping this project over the past few years. Thank you also to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and the faculty who have invested in me over my course of study. I am grateful for the faculty of other institutions who have offered counsel during this project, including Dr. Paul Slack and Dr. Lyndal Roper at Oxford, Dr. David Appleby at the University of Nottingham, and Dr. Todd

⁴ J.W., *A Friendly Letter to the Flying Clergy* (London, 1665), 2.

Rester at Westminster Theological Seminary. Thank you also to the research assistants at the British Museum and the Bodleian Library for their work in scanning unpublished manuscripts for this project.

Finally, thank you to my brothers and sisters at Occoquan Bible Church. I am thankful for my fellow elders' faithfulness and wisdom in the countless hours we spent navigating all things surrounding COVID-19. In times of sickness and in health, fellowship with the local church is such a precious gift. Thank you for your encouragement and prayer. My prayer is that this thesis will promote the glory of Christ and serve the church well.

Benjamin Purves

Woodbridge, Virginia

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Throughout these past years, the church has experienced the difficulty of navigating the COVID-19 pandemic. Disease, death, and an array of public health measures have heightened fear, grief, isolation, and loneliness. In addition, responding to this increased need for pastoral care has been complicated by circumstances which made it difficult to give and receive care. Churches have had to determine which ministries they would close, modify, or continue. Some churches, looking to Romans 13, closed their doors or limited fellowship in response to government mandates, while others remained open and proclaimed the Lordship of Christ over conscience in Romans 14. Differences of conscience were a significant source of division when it came to masking, social-distancing, and vaccinations. From this maelstrom of pandemic and controversy, the Barna Group reported that 29 percent of pastors considered leaving ministry altogether.¹ Despite these challenges, the shepherds Christ has given to the church must be faithful in caring for their charge. To this end, how ought a pastor to shepherd his congregation during a public health emergency, and what pastoral convictions will sustain him in this work of shepherding?

In considering these questions, pastors do well to look to church history. Though a global pandemic is unprecedented in our lifetime, far more devastating outbreaks have confronted past generations. Following the Black Death of 1348, outbreaks of the bubonic plague continued to ripple through Europe. In London alone,

¹ Barna Group, “Rick Warren on Leading Amidst Grief,” *Church Pulse Weekly Conversations*, March 24, 2021, <https://www.barna.com/research/cpw-rick-warren/>.

there were five outbreaks of the bubonic plague in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with the final outbreak being the most destructive as about 20 percent of London's population succumbed to the plague. The Great Plague lasted from 1665-66, and 68,596 deaths are recorded in London's bills of mortality.² Given the difficulty of recording deaths and those from London who died outside the city, the true death toll has been estimated by many to be greater than 100,000.³

When the plague was first discovered in 1665, panic surged through London as citizens who had means gathered their families and joined the exodus out of the city. *Cito, Longe, Tarde*—leave quickly, go far, and come back slowly. Many pastors joined the wealthy in heeding this medieval plague counsel as they evacuated London. The death toll was staggering as the sheer number of burials caused rising soil levels in the churchyards. Fearful congregants stayed away from worship services, while others packed into overcrowded sanctuaries with the expectation that they too would soon be taken by the plague.

Out of London's 109 churches,⁴ David Appleby recorded that at least nineteen Anglican clergy remained in the city, and only eight of them survived the plague.⁵ Of those who fled the city, Symon Patrick is a unique example of a pastor who returned to care for his flock. In addition to Patrick, multiple Nonconformist ministers entered the plagued city. Having previously resigned their pulpits in response to the Act of Uniformity, upon hearing of the death toll and the absence of clergy, they decided to enter

² Anonymous. *Flagellum Dei: OR, A Collection of the several Fires, Plagues, and Pestilential Diseases that have hapned in London especially, and other parts of this Nation, from the Norman Conquest to this present, 1668* (London, 1668).

³ Christopher Morris, "Plague in Britain," in *The Plague Reconsidered: A New Look at Its Origins and Effects in 16th and 17th Century England* (Stafford, England: Hourdsprint, 1977), 37.

⁴ Walter G. Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665* (London: The Bodley Head, 1951), 178.

⁵ David J. Appleby, "From Ejection to Toleration in England, 1662-89," in *The Great Ejection of 1662: Its Antecedents, Aftermath, and Ecumenical Significance*, ed. Alan P. F. Sell (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012), 92.

London for the sake of gospel ministry. Every congregation was affected. In one example, John Vernon reported that twenty-eight of his church members had died from the plague, and fifty had recovered. In the midst of the plague year, twenty new members were added to the congregation, some of whom were newly orphaned.⁶

In this chaotic context, pastors had to determine how to continue to care for their congregations and respond to the needs around them. Pastoral care throughout the plague's visitation included the ordinary ministry of preaching and administering the ordinances, while other aspects were heightened, such as preparing the congregation for death, ministering to the dying, innumerable burials, and providing ethical instruction on one's duty to family, servants, household, and neighbors. Different theological convictions regarding the plague and medicine had significant implications for how one went about pastoral ministry. Harkening back to the first Passover, red crosses and the prayer "Lord, have mercy" were painted on doors throughout the city. Some argued that there would be no Passover with this visitation of the plague, while others believed they possessed divine protection if they had sufficient faith to appropriate Psalm 91. When the plague finally abated, services of thanksgiving were held throughout London, and Nonconformist preachers were removed once again as "fugitive" clergy returned. Public animosity toward those who fled was harsh, with many calling for censure while others called for forgiveness.

Public health crises are not without precedent in the history of the church, and much could be learned from the example of those who faithfully shepherded their congregations in past epidemics. An examination of pastoral practices and convictions during the Great Plague of London will reveal parallels and contrasts that provide a helpful point of reference. How did pastors shepherd and lead their congregations

⁶ John Vernon, "Memoirs of Caleb Vernon," in *Brief History of the Dissenters; Memoirs of Miss Ann Price, also of Daniel Cuxon, Caleb Vernon, and Charles Whitfield; and an Introductory Address on the Constitution of the Baptist Churches*, ed. Joseph Ivimey (London: Wightman and Cramp, 1827), 144.

through the Great Plague of London? How did they shape their congregations' theological understanding of the plague and medicine? How does one minister to the sick? Understanding the different ways these questions have been answered would serve the church well in the present. As knowledge of the past fades, a rediscovery and examination of the pastoral convictions and practices of those who shepherded during the Great Plague of London provides helpful wisdom and ministerial guidance for today. This thesis will survey how pastors shepherded in London during the plague's visitation in 1665-66, and pastoral applications will then be drawn out in relationship to the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

Familiarity with the Literature

Primary Sources

This thesis will examine primary source writings from both Anglican and Nonconformist clergy and from Londoners who lived through the plague. The religious works published during the Great Plague of London span multiple genres, including autobiography, diaries, treatises, sermons, *ars moriendi*, correspondence, poetry, and prayers. While most medical manuals are beyond the scope of this thesis, some will be reviewed because of how they addressed the plague from a theological vantage point in their understanding of medicine and as they spoke to the spiritual care of the sick.

On Plague Flight

Multiple publications of anonymous verse were written in condemnation of the clergy who fled London. In *A Pulpit to be Let*, the author composed a poetic rebuke of the clergy who fled London, followed by praise for the clergy who remained.⁷ This poetic verse revealed public sentiment and anger toward those who fled the city. It can be

⁷ Anonymous, *A Pulpit to be let. With a just applause for those worthy divines that stay with us* (London, 1665).

deduced that the clergy who fled made some arguments in their defense, to which an open letter signed by the initials J. B., titled *The Shepherd's Lasher Lash'd*, was published in refutation of their defense.⁸ In contrast to these anonymous works, William Austin's *Epiloima epē* is a poetic work that decried plague flight with language similar to *The Shepherd's Lasher Lash'd*.⁹ Austin wrote of the flight of both doctors and clergy and then described the condition of the city and causes and treatments for the plague.

Another work, *A Friendly Letter to the Flying Clergy Wherein is Humbly Requested and Modestly Challenged the Cause of their Flight*, is signed by the initials J. W.¹⁰ The author represented himself as an Anglican priest who remained to care for his parish, and he outlined the damaging effects of their flight as it brought grief, fear, and doubt into the church and created an opportunity for those outside the church to mock and look at pastors with contempt. He questioned the biblical basis of their flight, citing Augustine's teachings against flight and a previous Bishop of Exeter's instructions for clergy to remain with their churches, and condemned their actions as an act of betrayal and urged them to return and care for the church.

In contrast to the works condemning the fugitive clergy, Charles II's relocation of his court to Oxford received anonymous poetic praise. *Upon the Present Plague at London and His Majesties Leaving the City* provided four pages of verse in which the plague is described as divine judgment which "punish'd a faithles and ungrateful Land."¹¹ The author described God's providence as the cause of the plague, and that "Justice and Mercy, jointly this Plague sent, Past sins to punish, future to prevent."¹² The

⁸ J. B., *The Shepherd's Lasher Lash'd, Or a Confutation of the Fugitives Vindication* (London, 1665).

⁹ William Austin, *Epiloima epē, or The Anatomy of the Pestilence* (London, 1666).

¹⁰ J. W., *A Friendly Letter to the Flying Clergy* (London, 1665).

¹¹ Anonymous, *Upon the Present Plague at London and His Majesties Leaving the City Wherein is Humbly Requested and Modestly Challenged the Cause of their Flight* (London, [1665?]).

¹² Anonymous, *Upon the Present Plague*, 2.

author defended Charles II's flight to Oxford: "Nor is it fear, but *prudence* now to flie."¹³

Biography

Biographical notes from Richard Baxter, John Vernon, Thomas Vincent, and Edmund Calamy serve to illuminate events in London during the Great Plague. A narrative leading up to the administration of baptism can be found in Joseph Ivimey's collection, *Miscellaneous Tracts*.¹⁴ In this work, John Vernon presented memoirs of his son Caleb's discipleship and baptism during the plague. In Richard Baxter's autobiography *Reliquiæ Baxterianæ*, he provided notes on the hardships experienced by Nonconformist ministers in London, some of whom fled the city because of the plague, and others who entered it to preach.¹⁵ Thomas Vincent is perhaps the most famous of the Nonconformist clergy who ministered in London during the plague. He recorded a narrative of his experiences that year in *God's Terrible Voice in the City*.¹⁶ This sobering and tragic account is filled with personal narrative and highlights the need for pastoral care and gospel ministry in London. Additional biography of Vincent is provided by Samuel Slater in the sermon he preached at Vincent's funeral.¹⁷ Calamy's *Nonconformist Memorial* recounts the ministries of those ejected in 1662, many of whom continued to serve during the plague.¹⁸

¹³ Anonymous, *Upon the Present Plague*, 3.

¹⁴ Vernon, "Memoirs of Caleb Vernon," 144.

¹⁵ Richard Baxter, *Reliquiæ Baxterianæ: Or, Mr. Richard Baxter's Narrative of the Most Memorable Passages of his Life and Times*, 5 vols., ed. N. H. Keeble (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 2:290.

¹⁶ Thomas Vincent, *God's terrible voice in the city: wherein are set forth the sound of the voice, in a narration of the two terrible judgements of plague and fire, inflicted upon the city of London, in the years 1665, and 1666* (London, 1667).

¹⁷ Samuel Slater, *Vicentius Redivivus, a funeral sermon preached Octob. 27, 1678 upon the occasion of the much bewailed Death of that Reverend and Eminent Servant of CHRIST, Mr. THOMAS VINCENT, Formerly Preacher at Mandlins Milk-street, London* (London, 1679).

¹⁸ A.G. Matthews, *Calamy Revised: Being a Revision of Edmund Calamy's Account of the Ministers and Others Ejected and Silenced, 1660-2* (1934; repr., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

Plague Treatises

When it comes to longer works, the treatises of Thomas Rosewell, Theodore Beza, and William Boghurst provide substantive theological treatments of the plague. Thomas Rosewell's *The Causes & Cure of the Pestilence* is perhaps the most lengthy treatise on the plague from this period. Rosewell writes that this treatise was intended to open the eyes of "this poor dying Nation to a sight of their highly provoking evils," and cause "a speedy return unto the Lord by unfeigned repentance."¹⁹ He argued against plague flight, accusing England of fifteen sins and instructing the reader on repentance and faith in Christ.

Originally written in Latin in 1580 Geneva, Theodore Beza's *A Learned Treatise of the Plague* was translated into English and published in London in 1665 through the efforts of Edward Percivall.²⁰ Percivall believed it would be an aid to help address the challenges of the plague in London, and in the introduction to the work, he presented it to Sir John Robinson of the Tower of London. Beza's treatise affirmed the infectious nature of the plague while decrying plague flight that arose from fear instead of faith. The influence of Beza's work is seen in William Boghurst's *Loimographia*.²¹

Loimographia was written in 1665 but continued in manuscript form (MS 349) in the Sloane collection until publication in 1894 for the Epidemiological Society of London. Though unpublished during the plague, *Loimographia* provides a window into the theological conversation of the day. Boghurst was an apothecarist in St. Giles in the Fields, and his contemporary account chronicled the plague while interacting with the literature of his day. *Loimographia* interacted with fifteen works published in London in

¹⁹ Thomas Rosewell, *The Causes and Cure of the Pestilence* (London, 1665).

²⁰ Theodore Beza. *A Learned Treatise of the Plague: Wherein, the Two Questions: Whether the Plague be Infectious, or no: And Whether, and how farr it may be shunned of Christians, by going aside? are resolved* (London: Thomas Ratcliffe, 1665).

²¹ William Boghurst, *Loimographia: An Account of the Great Plague of London in the Year 1665*, ed. Joseph Frank Payne (London: Shaw and Sons, 1894).

1665, while citing past plague writings from Eusebius, Dionysius, Cyprian, and Beza. His comments and the introduction by Joseph Franklin Payne provide a helpful starting point in surveying the literature of the Great Plague of London.²² To contextualize the plague in London, Boghurst began with a historical review of plagues ranging from Ancient Greece to 1665, and concluded his first chapter with a discussion on the causes of the plague and God's judgment against sin.²³ Chapters 2 through 12 are medically focused, and chapters 13 to 14 addressed plague ethics in which he described Beza's plague treatise in application to London.²⁴ The remainder of Boghurst's work is medical in nature.

Theology of Medicine

In the body of early modern plague literature from 1665-66, many works engaged with the disciplines of theology, medicine, and ethics. Among these are the writings of Theophilus Garencières, Gideon Harvey, Nathaniel Hodges, Richard Kephale, an author identified only by the initials T. D, and an anonymous author. While these are primarily medical works, they also contain theological and ethical instruction.

The anonymous *The Shutting-Up of Infected Houses as it is Practiced in England Soberly Debated* addressed ethical concerns of the health orders that mandated quarantine for all the infected with their entire households for a period of forty days.²⁵ The author presented seven arguments against quarantining the entire household. The first argument is theological and grounded in the communion of the saints and illustrated with Eusebius's reporting of how early Christians visited and cared for the sick even if it cost them their lives.²⁶ He argued from 1 Corinthians 12 about the interconnectedness of

²² Boghurst, *Loimographia*.

²³ Boghurst, *Loimographia*, 15-19.

²⁴ Boghurst, *Loimographia*, 20-61.

²⁵ Anonymous, *The Shutting-Up of Infected Houses as it is Practiced in England Soberly Debated* (London, 1665).

²⁶ Anonymous, *Shutting-Up of Infected Houses*, 4.

the body of Christ, saying that the church “did not Excommunicate whole Families when it pleased God to visit them [with the plague]; no, then the Elders of the Church carefully attended them, prayed with them, and the effectual fervent prayer of those righteous Men availed much.”²⁷ Other arguments were largely based on the author’s thoughts on the nature of the contagion and what would bring the plague to conclusion. He also reported on the harms of quarantine policy as people suffered confinement without medical care, with pregnant women suffering through childbirth in which they and their infants often died. The author concluded with a plea for London to “Be yee merciful as your Heavenly Father is merciful.”²⁸

John Gadbury’s *London’s deliverance predicted* is rather unusual in that he engaged in theology, astrology, medicine, and biblical exposition.²⁹ Gadbury elevated astrology and discounted medicine while engaging in theological instruction. He acknowledged God as the first cause of all things and that “it is in his power to alter or suspend second causes.”³⁰ He was nuanced in that he condemned those who fled the city out of fear and was gracious in allowing room for those who left the city out of prudence. After this point, Gadbury’s assertions shifted to the fantastical as he denied that any cause to the plague can be discovered except for astrology and that planetary conjunctions had caused London’s previous plague outbreaks. Gadbury dismissed the infectious nature of the plague and insisted that God directly afflicts whoever he wills. In light of this, he argued against plague flight, saying that if one could escape the plague, then the creature could frustrate the intent of the Creator. He then announced “good news” with an astrological prediction for the abatement of the plague toward the end of September

²⁷ Anonymous, *Shutting-Up of Infected Houses*, 4-5.

²⁸ Anonymous, *Shutting-Up of Infected Houses*, 19.

²⁹ John Gadbury, *London’s deliverance predicted in a short discourse shewing the cause of plagues in general, and the probable time (God not contradicting the course of second causes) when the present pest may abate* (London: J.C. for E. Calvert, 1665).

³⁰ Gadbury, *London’s deliverance predicted*, v.

1665.³¹ After this eccentric claim, he concluded with reflections on quarantine practices in London in relationship to the book of Leviticus.³²

Richard Kephale's *Medela Pestilentiae* is a work that includes theological, medicinal, and ethical instruction.³³ Beginning with the sins for which he believed God brought judgment upon London, he then prescribed directions for preservation from the plague (perfumes, medicines, powders, purges, blood-letting, etc.). Kephale then addressed the ethical question of plague flight for individuals, clergy, and magistrates, and argued that military, magistrates, ministers, spouses, servants, and nurses are bound to their duties to care for those who are infected. To support his argument, he reviewed church history and Dionysius of Alexandria's letter of guidance, which instructed the church to care for the sick in time of plague. This work concludes with a section on divine judgment, followed by recommendations for surviving the plague, recipes for potions, and descriptions of symptoms and treatments.

In a work that is more focused on theological and ethical instruction, T. D.'s *Food and physick for every householder* provided theological meditations on the meaning of the plague as God's judgment, a call for care for the poor who remained in the city, and ethical instruction on how to live during the plague.³⁴ Not only ought one to avoid sin against one's soul by being absent from church, but one ought to avoid sin against one's body by being careless against the plague.

³¹ Gadbury, *London's deliverance predicted*, 40.

³² Gadbury, *London's deliverance predicted*, 40.

³³ Richard Kephale, *Medela Pestilentiae: Wherein is Contained Several Theological Queries Concerning the Plague wherein is contained several theological queries concerning the plague, with approved antidotes, signes and symptoms: also an exact method for curing that epidemical distemper, humbly presented to the Right Honourable and Right Worshipful the lord mayor and sheriffs of the city of London* (London: J.C., 1665).

³⁴ T. D., *Food and physick for every householder & his family during the time of the plague very useful, both for the free and the infected, and necessary for all persons in what condition or quality soever: together with several prayers and meditations before, in, and after infection, very needful in all infectious and contagious times, and fit as well for the country as the city* (London: T. Leach, 1665).

In *A Mite Cast into the Treasury of the Famous City of London*, Theophilus Garencières began with an assertion that he is writing to counter the work of fraudulent doctors who sell false prescriptions.³⁵ Garencières affirmed the contagious nature of the plague and reports on symptoms but then proceeds to present a cure for the plague. He speaks theologically in that he perceived medicine to be a divinely appointed means by which God removes his judgment from the sick. Similar to Gadbury, Garencières added notes on astrology but then presented his recipes as an antidote to the plague. In the introduction to Boghurst's *Loimographia*, Joseph Payne dismissed this work as a "trivial catch-penny publication" in which Garencières is seeking to advance his medical practice.³⁶ Boghurst likewise rejected Garencières's volume outright, stating that he "spoke nothing from experience," as his work was published very early in the outbreak.³⁷

In *Loimologia*, Nathaniel Hodges documented the growth of the plague throughout London.³⁸ Though his work is medical in nature, it includes significant commentary on the providence of God. In addition to this, Hodges critiqued the public health measures adopted or neglected by the magistrates of London. When writing regarding the cure for the plague, Hodges offered spiritual counsel and encouraged the infected to look to God, confess their sins, and pray for blessing upon the care given by physicians. Similar to this, one anonymously written medical manual entitled *The Plague's Approved Physician*³⁹ upheld the goodness of both medicine and divine aid, and

³⁵ Theophilus Garencières, *A mite cast into the treasury of the famous city of London being a brief and methodical discourse of the nature, causes, symptomes, remedies and preservation from the plague, in this calamitous year, 1665: digested into aphorisms* (London: Thomas Ratcliffe, 1665).

³⁶ Joseph Frank Payne, ed., "Introduction," in Boghurst, *Loimographia*, x.

³⁷ Boghurst, *Loimographia*, 3.

³⁸ Nathaniel Hodges, *Loimologia: An Historical Account of the Plague in London in 1665* (London: Oxford-Arms, 1721).

³⁹ Anonymous, *The Plague's approved physitian Shewing the naturall causes of the infection of the ayre, and of the plague. With divers observations to bee used, preserving from the plague, and signes to know the infected therewith. Also many true and approved medicines for the perfect cure thereof. Chiefely, a godly and penitent prayer unto almighty God, for our preservation, and deliverance therefrom* (London: R. Raworth, 1665).

included a prayer for God's blessing on the means he has ordained through medicine for preserving life. Another work, Gideon Harvey's *A Discourse of the Plague*, did not engage the spiritual condition of those who are ill, but he argued for those in the city to "Shun all publick meetings," and avoid places thought to be infected such as churchyards.⁴⁰

Another medical volume, George Thomson's *Loimologia: A Consolatory Advice*, presented the plague as God's "Pestilential Arrow."⁴¹ He went on to write about the ethics of avoiding the sick, likening the abandonment of the ill in quarantine to the priest and Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan who neglected the man who had been wounded (Luke 10:29-37). Instead of leaving "poor wretches to a *Lord have mercy on them*," he argued that "presence ought to comfort." Thomson also expressed his anger against doctors who fled, arguing that they ought to "force these Fugitives to return to do their duty, and compel them to visit the sick."⁴² In a second medical treatise entitled *Loimotomia: The Pest Anatomized*, Thomson argued that it is "prudent Providence to stand upon our guard, and discreetly suspecting the worst, to fortify ourselves as well as possibly may be."⁴³ When describing the illness and recovery of four in his own home, he announced God's mercy upon them.⁴⁴ Thomson believed in God working through medicine and described sulphur treatments as having "Divine effect."⁴⁵ He spoke highly of another treatment from a vegetable, writing "by that means the good God of Nature

⁴⁰ Gideon Harvey, *A Discourse of the Plague: Concerning the Nature, Causes, Signs, and Presages of the Pestilence in General, Together with the State of the Present Contagion* (London, 1665), 15-16.

⁴¹ George Thomson, *Loimologia: A Consolatory Advice* (London, 1665), 9.

⁴² Thomson, *Loimologia*, 10.

⁴³ George Thomson, *Loimotomia: The Pest Anatomized: In These Following Particulars* (London: Rose and Crown, 1665), 53-54.

⁴⁴ Thomson, *Loimotomia*, 94.

⁴⁵ Thomson, *Loimotomia*, 147.

hath bountifully provided for us.”⁴⁶ In this way those who benefit from medicine receive the mercy of God.

Calls to Repentance

Numerous titles focused on calling the city of London and the nation of England to repentance. These calls to repentance span multiple genres, including lament, poetry, sermons, and single page broadsheets. In one anonymous lament, *Lamentatio Civitatis*, the city of London is personified and calls out to her children who have deserted her in their fearfulness.⁴⁷ The author bewailed the condition of the church in London, and called those who fled to repent:

I see Shepherds smitten with feare, sheep scattered, hearers fickle, for want of due ordering, church-discipline rejected, Sacraments neglected, the bread of life vilified, yourselves in counsel and example despised . . . Observe (I pray you, especially the most of you that are fled) how your people grow dissolute, their natures insolent, their ears itching, their appetite greedy, their heads distracted, their hearts unsettled.⁴⁸

In addition, the author decried the sins of the city and the nation, describing 1662’s Act of Uniformity as “sacrilegiously robbing my Churches of their Orthodox Ministry” and imposing “Oaths and Covenants on my children, contrary to the Lawes of God.”⁴⁹ The author also recognized the plague as an example of God’s mercy in judgment, looking to King David’s decision to fall into the hands of God and receive a plague instead of receiving war or famine (1 Chr 21:13).⁵⁰ The remainder of lament expounded on the guilt of the nation and concluded with a call to repentance.

Richard Kephale’s *The mourning-cross* is a one-page broadsheet accusing

⁴⁶ Thomson, *Loimotomia*, 156.

⁴⁷ Anonymous, *Lamentatio Civitatis, Or, Londons Complaint Against Her Children in the Countrey* (London, 1665).

⁴⁸ Anonymous, *Lamentatio Civitatis*, 4-5.

⁴⁹ Anonymous, *Lamentatio Civitatis*, 5-6

⁵⁰ Anonymous, *Lamentatio Civitatis*, 7-10.

London of the sins of Sodom (Ezek 16:49).⁵¹ Kephale recounted previous plagues throughout world history and compared the mortality statistics with tables from previous plague outbreaks in London. In conclusion, Kephale added a prayer for mercy which recognized God as both judge and physician and echoed David's prayer for mercy from 1 Chronicles 21:16. In this prayer, Kephale alluded to the Passover, praying for the slayer to pass them by because of the blood of Christ on their hearts.⁵² In a similarly styled broadsheet, the anonymous *London's Lord have mercy upon us* rebuked the city for stubbornness in her sins, calling the readers to repent, and placing blame upon the unrepentant for the continuation of the plague: "The Plague among us is not yet removed because that sin of us is still beloved."⁵³

The Plague Checkt, only signed by the initials T. M., was written for distribution to his friends.⁵⁴ In this text of spiritual counsel, he described the plague as a consequence for London's sin and called his friends to repentance. Some discussion is given to Psalm 91 and whether one might be invulnerable to the plague if one without hesitancy pleads and believes the psalm as a promise for the present. He encouraged them to not be afraid of the plague and to know that flight is futile as no one can flee from God (Ps 139). In contrast, he noted Richard Baxter's influence in preventing him from visiting those infected with the plague, and recommended the provision of printed instruction and counsel for those who are sick.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Richard Kephale, *The mourning-cross: or, England's Lord have mercy upon us: Containing the certain causes of pestilential diseases; with an accompt of several modern plagues or visitation in times past, as well in other countries as in the city of London; as also, the number of those that then died, not onely on the plague, but of all diseases, Continued down to this present day, August 29. 1665. To which is likewise added, a necessary prayer for this present time* (London: Tho. Milbourn, 1665).

⁵² Kephale, *The mourning-cross: or, England's Lord have mercy upon us*, 1.

⁵³ Anonymous, *London's Lord Have Mercy Upon Us* (London, 1665).

⁵⁴ The identity of T. M. is uncertain, but it seems that he was an associate of Richard Baxter.

⁵⁵ T. M., *The Plague Checkt: Piety will either prevent or alter the property of the plague together with sundry other things in a letter written by a friend to sundry of his godly friends with respect to the present times* (London, 1665).

In *London's plague-sore discovered*, E. N. gave a call to repentance in poetic verse and accused those who fled the city of leaving the place God had appointed for them.⁵⁶ He then presented a catalogue of the sins for which God's judgement had come against them. Both those in the city and those who have fled from the city must repent, for no one can escape God's judgment. Quoting Psalm 2, he called for all to kiss the Son. The author then noted that the publisher added an antidote against the plague at the end without his consent, and the thought of it being attributed to him was detestable. The "antidote" is a satirical call to repentance in the form of a medical potion, and E. N.'s reaction to this false attribution is well justified.⁵⁷ This is strikingly similar to another anonymous single-page presentation of a spiritual recipe for protection from the plague.⁵⁸

In another call to repentance, Matthew Mead's *Solomon's Prescription for the Removal of the Pestilence* argued for God's providential purposes in the plague.⁵⁹ He announced God's wrath as a scourge for sin to drive the nation to obedience. Mead asserted that the plague was divine medicine for a morally sick nation and expressed hope that with God's providence the plague would do some good for England. Mead's work is based on Solomon's prayer in 1 Kings 8:37-39.

Stephen Hubbersty's call to repentance entitled *England's Lamentation* is dramatically styled after Jesus weeping over Jerusalem and the voices of the Old Testament prophets.⁶⁰ He interpreted England's sufferings under the plague as a

⁵⁶ E. N., *London's Plague Sore Discovered. Or, Some serious notes and suitable considerations upon the present visitation at London wherein is something by way of lamentation, information, expostulation, exhortation and caution: whereunto is annexed, A never-failing antidote against the plague* (London, 1665).

⁵⁷ E. N., *London's Plague Sore Discovered*.

⁵⁸ Anonymous, *An Unparel'd Antidote Against the Plague: Or, A Special Remedy for a Sick Soul; Whereby a Sinner May Recover Himself from the Vale of Teares to the Hill of Joy* (London, 1665).

⁵⁹ Matthew Mead, *Solomon's Prescription for the Removal of the Pestilence: Or, The Discovery of the Plague of our Hearts, in order to the Healing of that in our Flesh* (London, 1665).

⁶⁰ Stephen Hubbersty, *England's Lamentation, Or Her Sad Estate Lamented as also a Call to the Heads and Rulers, and all Sorts to Repentance, and Shewing them the Cause Why so Many Disasters,*

consequence of the nation's sinfulness and hardness of heart. Hubbersty specifically blamed Charles II's coercive measures against the church such as the Act of Uniformity and argued that restoring liberty of conscience to the church was how to bring about peace once again.⁶¹

In another call to repentance, Edward Reynolds, the Lord Bishop of Norwich, preached a sermon from Philippians 4:5 at the Abbey Church in Westminster on November 7, 1666, entitled *Being a Day of Solemn Humiliation for the Continuing Pestilence*.⁶² Reynolds argued that they must pursue holiness and obedience to Christ, for God's hand was still stretched out against them. When the nation turned to Christ, then the plague would be lifted.⁶³

Theological Instruction

While some works focused on calling the nation to repentance, others sought to provide theological instruction on divine providence, a theology of disease, and to strengthen the faith of the church. Thomas Blake's *Living Truths in Dying Times* is an exposition of Luke 21:30 focused on the providence of God in which he speaks of the plague as God's judgment, God's mercy, and an opportunity for communion with Christ.⁶⁴ It is worth noting that histories place Blake's death prior to his plague writings, so there is a need for historical correction on this point.⁶⁵ In addition to this, William

and the Judgments of God which are in the Earth, and also a Way how to Remove the Same, with an Answer to some Objections (London, 1665).

⁶¹ Hubbersty, *England's Lamentation*, 5.

⁶² Edward Reynolds, *Being a Day of Solemn Humiliation for the Continuing Pestilence* (London: Tho. Ratcliffe, 1666).

⁶³ Reynolds, *Day of Solemn Humiliation*, 47-48.

⁶⁴ Thomas Blake, *Living Truths in Dying Times: Some Meditations Upon Luke 21:30 Occasioned by the Present Judgment of the Plague* (London, 1665).

⁶⁵ Multiple histories place Blake's death in 1657, while also listing these works as published in 1665-66. One example of this is in volume 11 of John McClintock's *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*. It is likely that this is due to an error in printing, and that Blake died in 1667, or that multiple Thomas Blakes have been conflated.

Bridge's exposition of Psalm 91 in *The Righteous Man's Habitation in the Time of Plague and Pestilence* is a classic example of how this plague psalm was appropriated during this time.⁶⁶ Bridge announced preservation and protection for those who trust in God: "Though the danger, evil, and misery of the Pestilence be exceedingly great, yet God will in an especial manner protect and deliver those that do trust in him in the time of a plague."⁶⁷ In this way, those who truly trust God are presumed to be able to appropriate the promises of Psalm 91 for themselves.

Thomas Brooks's *A Heavenly Cordial* is a work of theological instruction for believers. Brooks wrote about divine protection, addressing both believers who have recovered and those who are still sick, while also providing a theological interpretation as to why Christians have died from the plague.⁶⁸ In addition, Brooks's *The Privie Key of Heaven; or Twenty Arguments for Closet Prayer* is introduced with an opening letter with twenty lessons "that we are to learn by that severe rod, the pestilence, that now rageth in the midst of us."⁶⁹ This lengthy opening to his work on prayer is slightly over one hundred pages in length and speaks of God's providential discipline and correction of his people throughout the Scriptures. Brooks exhorted his readers to trust the Lord who is sovereign over illness, for "God is the author of all the diseases, maladies, and sicknesses, that be in the world, and that he sets them on and calls them off at his own good will and pleasure."⁷⁰

Robert Tatnall's *An Antidote Against the Sinfull Palpitation of the Heart* is an exposition of Hebrews 2:15 to rebuke and give comfort to those who were afraid of

⁶⁶ William Bridge, *The Righteous Man's Habitation in the Time of Plague and Pestilence* (London, 1665).

⁶⁷ Bridge, *The Righteous Man's Habitation in the Time of Plague and Pestilence*, 6.

⁶⁸ Thomas Brooks, *A Heavenly Cordial* (London, 1666).

⁶⁹ Thomas Brooks, *The Privie Key of Heaven; or Twenty Arguments for Closet Prayer* (London, 1665).

⁷⁰ Brooks, *Privie Key of Heaven*, 78-79.

death.⁷¹ Tatnall opened this work by introducing himself as a Nonconformist who lost his position in London, and he expressed his grief over the suffering in the city. He then proclaimed Christ's deliverance and victory over death to encourage any who were suffering fear from the plague. Those who are afraid must look to the resurrected Lord.

Care for the Sick

Anglican and Nonconformist authors alike wrote pamphlets to be published and distributed to those in quarantine. In this way, Symon Patrick and Richard Baxter provided pastoral care through writing. In *A Brief Exhortation to Those who are shut up from our Society*, Patrick wrote to prepare the reader for death.⁷² In this pamphlet, he assumed the salvation of the reader, describing the sickness that is being experienced as punishment that is less than what is deserved and that one ought to praise God for his goodness. Patrick called the reader to hate sin more than the plague and to embrace personal reformation while he lives. He concluded by encouraging the reader to entrust oneself to the Lord while remembering Christ's victory over death. In contrast to Patrick, Baxter's *Short Instructions for the Sick* is primarily evangelistic.⁷³ Baxter's pamphlet is a gospel presentation to those who may be on their deathbed with the plague. It is directed to those who are unprepared for death, in which he called the reader to consider whether one's soul will go to heaven or hell upon death, and to repent of sin, trust in Christ from the heart, and praise God for his mercy.

William Dyer's *Christ's Voice to London, and the Great Day of God's Wrath* contains two sermons preached in the city during the epidemic, and it is dedicated to

⁷¹ Robert Tatnall, *An Antidote Against the Sinfull Palpitation of the Heart* (London: J. Hayes, 1665).

⁷² Symon Patrick, *A Brief Exhortation to Those who are shut up from our Society, and deprived at present of Publick Instruction. Which may be useful to others also who have any feelings of God's Judgments* (London: J. R., 1669).

⁷³ Richard Baxter, *Short Instructions for the Sick, Especially Who for the Contagion or Otherwise are Deprived of the Presence of a Faithful Pastor* (London, 1665).

those in the Parish of St. Ann Aldersgate.⁷⁴ The first sermon is an evangelistic message from Revelation 3:20, and the second sermon is a pronouncement of God's judgment and a call to repentance. This is followed by an exposition on prayer for Christians, and concludes with "Considerations of Death," in which Dyer provided a question-and-answer dialogue as to why one ought not fear death.

Thomas Willes was a former minister in Shadwell, and his *A Help for the Poor Who are Visited with the Plague* is a two-part work which speaks of the duties of those who are sick with the plague, and the second part includes meditations, prayers, and praise as a means of providing spiritual care to those who are sick and unable to receive the care of a minister.⁷⁵ Like Baxter, Willes's work is evangelistic in nature.

Preparation for Death

These works are the *ars moriendi* of the Great Plague. Nonconformists Samuel Shaw and Thomas Doolittle both wrote works to prepare believers for death. Samuel Shaw's *The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness* was communicated first to his family as they experienced the plague and published after his recovery.⁷⁶ In an opening note to the reader Shaw describes his family's experience and the deaths of two of his children, one servant, his sister, a friend's child, and another Nonconformist minister by the name of George Crosse. Shaw praised the goodness of God's character, and he dismissed those who presumptuously asserted that God was judging him for sin because of the plague in his household. Shaw emphasized the truth that God is love (1 John 4:8), and that sin is

⁷⁴ William Dyer, *Christ's Voice to London, and the Great Day of God's Wrath: Being the Substance of Sermons Preached in the City in the Time of the Sad Visitation, Together with the Necessity of Watching and Praying, with a Small Treatise of Death* (London: Black Spread Eagle and Matthias Walker, 1668).

⁷⁵ Thomas Willes, *A Help for the Poor Who are Visited with the Plague: To be Communicated to them by the Rich Or, by any Pious Christian, Whose Bowels of Compassion are Moved Towards Them, in the Apprehension of their Comfortless Condition, and the Great Danger of their Dying in their Sins* (London, 1666).

⁷⁶ Shaw, *The Voice of one crying in a wilderness*.

the worst of plagues. This is followed by three sermons which serve to prepare one for death: “A Welcome to the Plague,” “A Farewell to Life,” and “The Angelical Life.” Similar to Shaw, Thomas Doolittle’s *A Cordial for Believers in Dying Times* is written to prepare the believer for death.⁷⁷ He surveyed the Bible’s teaching on the plague, and then presented a list of twenty-one spiritual duties to aid one in preparation for death. He advised the reader to be certain of one’s spiritual standing before the Lord, to entrust one’s family members to the Lord, and to look forward to Christ’s coming.

Comfort for the Grieving

In *A Consolatory Discourse*, Symon Patrick wrote to comfort the bereaved.⁷⁸ He described the great fear and grief of the city and the public’s response to the weekly reports of deaths and burials in the bills of mortality. Patrick called his reader to look to God for deliverance and seek security in the Lord (Ps 91:1-2). One should trust in the promise of Psalm 91, the promise of God’s presence (Heb 13:5), and God’s promise to work for good (Rom 8:28). Patrick argued that God has not promised one would never be sick and pointed instead to the promise of forgiveness and eternal life. Instead of doubting God’s goodness, one must cast his cares on him and rest in his providence.

In a letter that ultimately was not sent, John Rawlet wrote to his mother in anticipation of his death from the plague.⁷⁹ Rawlet’s writing is an example of pastoral comfort in a time of grief, and it emphasizes faith in divine providence even when facing

⁷⁷ Thomas Doolittle, *A Cordial for Believers in Dying Times with a Corrosive for Wicked Men in Dying Times. At first written as a letter to private friends in daily expectation of death by the plague, and afterwards printed for more public good* (London, 1665).

⁷⁸ Symon Patrick, *A Consolatory Discourse Persuading to a Cheerful Trust in God in These Times of Trouble and Danger* (London: J. R., 1699).

⁷⁹ John Rawlet, “A Consolatory Letter of that Reverend and Pious Man, Mr. Rowlett, the Author of *The Christian Monitor*, to his Mother, upon his Apprehension of Dying by the Plague,” in *A Brief Account of the Life of the Reverend Mr. John Rawlet, Author of The Christian Monitor. Together, With a Valuable Remain of His, never before Printed, viz. His Consolatory Letter to his Mother, Written on Occasion of his Apprehension of Dying by the Great Plague, 1665*, by Thomas Bray (London: W. Roberts, 1728), 1-24.

loss. This letter also recounts Rawlet's connections with Samuel Shaw in London.

Counsel for Plague Survivors

Thomas Doolittle's *A Serious Enquiry for a Suitable Return, for Continued Life, in and after a Time of Great Mortality, by a Wasting Plague* is a work of ethical instruction for those who survived the plague.⁸⁰ With an introduction by Thomas Vincent, Doolittle presented thirteen directions in answer to the question, "How should those that have been preserved by God from the Grave in this time of Plague, live in some measure Answerably to so great a Mercy?"⁸¹ In addition to this, Thomas Blake's *Eben-ezer: OR, Profitable Truths after Pestilential Times* is a biblical exposition of Isaiah 4:2, and gave ethical instruction on the duties of those who survived the plague.⁸² Finally, Ralph Venning's *Sin: The Plague of Plagues*, published in 1669, is a compilation of sermons that he preached previously at Southwark.⁸³ In his opening letter to the reader, Venning wrote that he began and almost finished this work "before the late Sore and great Plague began," but that it was finished and published in 1669 following the Great Fire of London.⁸⁴ This theological volume on sin is aptly named and illustrated by the destructive and contagious nature of the plague.

Secondary Sources

Secondary sources on church history during the Great Plague of London include works by David Appleby, Joel R. Beeke, Thomas Bray, and Randall J. Pederson. Plague histories include those by Walter G. Bell, Daniel Defoe, Alan Dyer, A. Lloyd

⁸⁰ Thomas Doolittle, *A Serious Enquiry for a Suitable Return, for Continued Life, in and after a Time of Great Mortality, by a Wasting Plague* (London: R. I., 1666).

⁸¹ Doolittle, *A Serious Enquiry for a Suitable Return*.

⁸² Thomas Blake, *Eben-ezer: OR, Profitable Truths after Pestilential Times* (London, 1666).

⁸³ Ralph Venning, *Sin, The Plague of Plagues; or Sinful Sin the worst of Evils* (London, 1669).

⁸⁴ Venning, *Sin, The Plague of Plagues*, A3-A4.

Moote, Dorothy Moote, Paul Slack, and J. F. D. Shrewsbury. Sources on early modern plague literature include Andrew Cambers, Ernest Gilman, Stephen Greenberg, and Byron Grigsby.

Church History

Appleby's "From Ejection to Toleration in England" provided an overview of the ejection of dissenting clergy under the Act of Uniformity in 1662 and their persecutions which continued until the Act of Toleration in 1689. Appleby counted clergy who remained in London, recording that nineteen Anglican clergy stayed and only eight survived the plague.⁸⁵ In addition, in reviewing Edmund Calamy's works, he counted fourteen Nonconformist ministers who preached in London during the plague. Appleby noted that the people of London spoke highly of these men, while numerous pamphlets and writings condemned the fugitive clergy and damaged the reputation of the Anglican church.⁸⁶ Appleby distanced the Five Mile Act from the plague ministry of Nonconformists, arguing that this measure was already in motion before the plague arrived.⁸⁷

Beeke and Pederson's *Meet the Puritans* is an anthology of Puritan biographies which provides historical background for the following authors who ministered in London or contributed to this body of plague literature: Richard Baxter, Thomas Brooks, Thomas Doolittle, Matthew Mead, and Thomas Vincent.⁸⁸

Plague Histories

Daniel Defoe's classic the *History of the Plague in London* is believed to be

⁸⁵ Appleby, "From Ejection to Toleration in England, 1662-89," 92.

⁸⁶ Appleby, "From Ejection to Toleration in England, 1662-89," 93.

⁸⁷ Appleby, "From Ejection to Toleration in England, 1662-89," 94.

⁸⁸ Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson. *Meet the Puritans: With a Guide to Modern Imprints* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006).

based on the journals of Defoe's uncle.⁸⁹ Defoe's narration includes numerous historical details and statistical reports from the plague year. This work also provides a social commentary on the events of that year and a scathing critique of the government's failure in dealing with the outbreak. Defoe also interacted with the backlash against the clergy who fled London and called for their forgiveness.

Walter Bell's *Great Plague of London* chronicles the plague's spread through London, the public health measures that were taken, and the toll of the outbreak upon the city. In describing the plague's impact on the parish of St. Giles Cripplegate, Bell gives attention to the flight of John Pritchett and the work of the dissenting ministers who cared for the church in his absence.⁹⁰ In contrast to Pritchett's flight, he notes Bastick's ministry to London prisons and his subsequent death from the plague.⁹¹ Perhaps his most valuable contribution is a list of clergy who fled and stayed, with a list of those who died while serving London's 109 churches.⁹² Bell argues that the influence of Nonconformist preachers had an enduring impact: "We must not overlook it, for it has vastly influenced English life and thought in all subsequent generations. The Great Plague established English Nonconformity."⁹³ Bell interprets the Anglican church's loss of credibility due to flight and the contrasting courage of Nonconformist preachers as a leading cause of the establishment of Nonconformity in England.

Shrewsbury's survey of the history of the plague in Britain details the effects of the plague on society and economics from 1348 to 1665. In discussing the Great Plague of London, Shrewsbury compared Bell's appraisal of the significance of Nonconformist

⁸⁹ Daniel Defoe, *History of the Plague in London* (New York: American Book Company, 1894).

⁹⁰ Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 148-49.

⁹¹ Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 190.

⁹² Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 225-27.

⁹³ Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 227.

ministry during the plague with J. R. Green's *A short history of the English people*, and noted that Green "does not attach to this epidemic of plague the religious significance that Bell accords to it . . . Nevertheless there seems to be some substance in Bell's argument; perhaps some future historian will assess its value."⁹⁴

Perhaps the preeminent plague historian of our time, Paul Slack has contributed a lifetime of work to plague studies. Slack's work on the plague includes multiple books and articles in which he provides an overview of plague history and contrasts the plague outbreaks in England from 1485-1665. In *The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England*, Slack provides an overview and comparison of plague outbreaks in England from 1485-1665 and compares the literature from each plague outbreak.⁹⁵ In his article "Responses to Plague in Early Modern Europe," Slack also interacts with different views of providence in relationship to disease, and the reaction of the church to different government health measures.⁹⁶

In observing the plague's impact on church leadership in London, historian Alan Dyer repeated Bell's observation on the significance of Nonconformist clergy's plague ministry.⁹⁷ He observed that parishes "left untended through death or flight were sometimes taken over unofficially by nonconformists, especially in 1665 when there existed a large stock of recently deprived clerics," and likewise credits this with advancing Nonconformity in England.⁹⁸

A. Lloyd Moote and Dorothy C. Moote presented a detailed overview of the

⁹⁴ J. F. Shrewsbury, *A History of the Bubonic Plague in the British Isles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 451.

⁹⁵ Paul Slack, *The Impact of the Plague in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 401.

⁹⁶ Paul Slack, "Responses to Plague in Early Modern Europe: The Implications of Public Health," *Social Research* 55, no. 3 (Autumn 1988), 433-53.

⁹⁷ Alan D. Dyer, "The Influence of the Bubonic Plague in England: 1500-1667," *Medical History* 22, no. 3 (July 1978): 308-26.

⁹⁸ Dyer, "The Influence of the Bubonic Plague in England: 1500-1667," 325.

events of the plague year in *The Great Plague: The Story of London's Most Deadly Year*.⁹⁹ Chapter 12 is focused on the clergy who remained inside the city and provides George Bobbington's first-person account of church attendance during the plague. This work provides commentary on the tension between church and state, and the health risks clergy took upon themselves as they ministered in London.

On Plague Literature

Ernest B. Gilman and Stephen Greenberg interact with early modern plague literature. Gilman's *Plague Writing in Early Modern England* provides some analysis of Samuel Pepys and Daniel Defoe's accounts of the Great Plague of London, in which he highlights Pepys's immorality in contrast to Defoe's theology, but he does not interact with the body of literature on the Great Plague beyond those works.¹⁰⁰ Greenberg's "Plague, the Printing Press, and Public Health in Seventeenth-Century London" provides commentary on the importance of bills of mortality in keeping the citizens of London informed on the progression of the plague throughout the epidemic and the emergence of demography with John Graunt's subsequent analysis of mortality in London.¹⁰¹ Greenberg limits his analysis to the bills of mortality and does not engage the theological literature of that period.

Void in Literature

While COVID-19 has sparked renewed interest in reprinting primary source plague writings from church history, little has been written with a focus specific to

⁹⁹ A. Lloyd Moote and Dorothy C. Moote, *The Great Plague: The Story of London's Most Deadly Year* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2006).

¹⁰⁰ Ernest Gilman, *Plague Writing in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

¹⁰¹ Stephen Greenberg, "Plague, the Printing Press, and Public Health in Seventeenth-Century London," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 67, no. 4 (December 2004): 508-27.

pastoral ministry during public health crises.¹⁰² One example is William J. Dohar's *The Black Death and Pastoral Leadership: The Diocese of Hereford in the Fourteenth Century*.¹⁰³ This work is similar in focus, but its subject of study is Roman Catholic instead of Protestant and limited to one diocese during the fourteenth century. Moote's *The Great Plague* provides a single chapter that is focused on clergy during the plague. Aside from these works, additional treatment of pastoral ministry during the Great Plague of London can be found in plague and medical histories and in some church history works, but these sections are generally brief and narrowly focused.

When it comes to primary source engagement, Slack's *The Impact of the Plague in Tudor and Stuart England* notes the volume of religious plague writings published in London during that time: "I have traced seventeen religious works on plague published in 1665-6, out of a total of forty-six. It is possible that not all the sermons on the subject have been unearthed."¹⁰⁴ Aside from this mention in a footnote, Slack's engagement with these works is minimal as his concerns are more social than theological. Slack also underestimates the volume of religious plague writings from 1665-66 as additional writings outnumbering his list have become available with the digitization of early modern books in databases such as ProQuest.

There is a significant void when it comes to study and analysis of church history and public health. More specifically, little work has been done in analyzing the religious plague writings from the Great Plague of London and the ministries and convictions of the Anglican and Nonconformist clergy who ministered in London

¹⁰² In 2020, Canon Press republished Beza's *A Learned Treatise of the Plague*, and Puritan Publications published a collection of Puritan writings entitled *Godly Directions in a Time of Plague*. In 2021, Reformation Heritage Books released a new volume of Ludwig Lavater's sermons on the plague entitled *Disease, Scarcity, and Famine*. Westminster Press also released *Faith in the Time of Plague*, which is an anthology of newly translated primary sources. See Stephen M. Coleman and Todd M. Rester, eds., *Faith in the Time of Plague* (Glenside, PA: Westminster Seminary Press, 2021).

¹⁰³ William J. Dohar, *The Black Death and Pastoral Leadership: The Diocese of Hereford in the Fourteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

¹⁰⁴ Slack, *The Impact of the Plague in Tudor and Stuart England*, 401.

throughout the plague. Given the challenges that were brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, this is a relevant and timely field of study that has been neglected and is ripe for further scholarship.

This thesis examines this body of plague writings to observe how pastors shaped their congregations' theological understanding of the plague, particularly concerning divine providence and human agency. In addition, the plague's impact on church leadership is explored as differences in pastoral conviction caused some to remain and care for the church and caused others to flee, leading to consequences for both groups. A composite portrait of pastoral ministry during the plague is assembled from these sources with observations on pastoral faithfulness, different approaches to ministry during the time of plague, and the unique challenges of ministry and church life during a public health crisis. Pastoral priorities are then identified for application to present and future public health crises.

CHAPTER 2

DIVINE PROVIDENCE AND THE PLAGUE

The writings of the Great Plague of London reveal a wide consensus that the plague's visitation was seen as an act of divine judgment. In contrast to this, disagreement abounded when it came to assigning secondary causes for how the plague was transmitted to its victims. While all generally affirmed the providence of God and God himself as the first cause, some denied secondary causes altogether, while others argued that the plague came about through the work of the devil, the corruption of the air, the corruption of the blood, celestial movements of the planets, or an infectious disease. Theological and medical convictions intersected with one another in ways that frequently created misshaped responses to the plague. This is chiefly seen in the medical community's limited understanding of the nature of the disease and with those who held a narrow view of God's providence.

If the plague was an act of divine judgment, how ought the people to respond? While a chorus of authors called the nation to repentance, there was significant conflict when it came to understanding how to live under God's providence. Some argued against the use of means to escape for no one can hide from God's omnipresence and judgment. Others insisted that the use of means for the preservation of life is to receive providentially given gifts and that such gifts are not to be neglected. Those who fled the city to escape the plague defended themselves with "charity begins at home."¹ Some denounced the doctors of the day, while others considered medicine to be one of the God

¹ J. B., *The Shepherd's Lasher Lash'd, Or a Confutation of the Fugitives Vindication* (London, 1665).

given means to care for the sick. Others insisted that those who trusted in the promise of Psalm 91 received divine protection, while those who doubted might perish.

The Theology of Providence

In the decades preceding the Great Plague of London, Reformed theology had flourished under Parliament and Cromwell's protectorate. The episcopal polity of the Church of England had been abolished. The Westminster Assembly (1643-46) produced the *Westminster Confession*, the *Larger Catechism*, and the *Shorter Catechism*, and these indelibly marked the ecclesial landscape of seventeenth-century England. The *Westminster Confession* defined the doctrine of divine providence as follows:

God, the great Creator of all things, doth uphold, direct dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, according to His infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will, to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.

Although in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first cause, all things come to pass immutably and infallibly, yet, by the same providence, He ordereth them to fall out according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently.

God, in His ordinary providence, maketh use of means, yet is free to work without, above, and against them, at His pleasure.

As the providence of God doth, in general, reach to all creatures, so, after a most special manner, it taketh care of his church, and disposeth all things to the good thereof.²

In this articulation of divine providence, God is the first cause, all secondary causes receive their causality from him, and through them, he works out his providence and governs creation.

Following Oliver Cromwell's death and his son Richard's resignation, the monarchy was restored with Charles II, and the Church of England pivoted away from Reformed theology and congregationalism and returned to a more Laudian position. Episcopal polity was reestablished in 1660, and the authorities of the Church of England

² The Westminster Divines, *The Westminster Confession* (1647; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2012), chap. 5.

resumed persecution of Puritans and Nonconformists, with one of the more consequential examples of this being the Act of Uniformity in 1662. This resulted in the Great Ejection in which about 2,000 pastors lost their pulpits and residences rather than submit their consciences to the demands of the state on worship.³ This was followed by the Conventicle Act in 1664, which prohibited the gathering of five or more persons who were not part of the same household for worship. It is into this context of tension between Anglicanism and Nonconformity that the Great Plague arrived. Though both Anglicans and Nonconformists affirmed the doctrine of Divine Providence and considered the plague to be an act of God's judgment, significant differences often led to divergent outcomes.

Anglican Voices on Divine Providence

In the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* (1662), a prayer for times of plague reads as follows:

O Almighty God, who in thy wrath didst send a plague upon thine own people in the wilderness for their obstinate rebellion against Moses and Aaron, and also in the time of king David didst slay with the plague of pestilence therefore and ten thousand, and yet remembering thy mercy did save the rest; have pity upon us miserable sinners, who now are visited with great sickness and mortality, that like as thou didst then accept of an atonement, and didst command the destroying Angel to cease from punishing; so it may now please thee to withdraw from us this plague and grievous sickness, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.⁴

This prayer reveals an understanding of the plague as God's punishment upon his people as it pleads for God to withdraw his wrath on the basis of the atoning work of Christ. This prayer speaks as if the atonement of Christ must be applied to remove temporal punishment from God's people, which raises question to the extent of the cross's propitiating work. Along these lines, the painting of red crosses on the household doors of

³ This is chronicled in Edmund Calamy's *The Nonconformist's Memorial: Being an Account of the Ministers, Who Were Ejected or Silenced After the Restoration, Particularly by the Act of Uniformity, Which Took Place on Barthomew-day, August 24, 1662*, 3 vols., ed. Samuel Palmer (London, 1775).

⁴ *The Book of Common Prayer* (London: John Bill & Christopher Barker, 1662), D.

the infected accompanied by “Lord, have mercy” harkened back to the lamb’s blood over the doorposts of Israelite homes as the final plague struck Egypt in Exodus 12. With red crosses painted on the doors of London’s sick, the blood of Christ is pleaded for deliverance from divine wrath.⁵ Distinctions should be observed in that crosses were not painted over all doors but were used as a means of identifying the homes quarantined by the city government. This response to the plague created theological difficulties as there was no land of Goshen that was free from the plague. The Lord did not pass over the homes of many Christians, and both saint and sinner alike perished from the plague.

Richard Kingston, an Anglican minister who preached at Saint Paul’s Cathedral in Covent Garden, described the plague as having come to “take revenge of us for our sin,” and he prayed for God to “withdraw his Sin-revenging scourge which is still among us.”⁶ Similar to the *Book of Common Prayer*, God is depicted as wrathful toward his people. In addition to this, Kingston’s writing revealed more of an Arminian view of human agency in which God punishes when “impenitency stops the progress of his mercy.”⁷ Another example was Kingston’s call for England to reduce plague mortality “by resolution of better obedience.”⁸ After cataloguing the sins from which they must repent (Sabbath breaking, pride, swearing, uncharitableness, rebellious murmuring, intemperance, excess, etc.), Kingston prescribed national humiliation, prayer, and repentance so that God might heal their land (2 Chr 7:14).⁹ In this way he observed a

⁵ See Anonymous, *London’s Lord have mercy upon us. A true relation of seven modern plagues or visitations in London, with the number of those that were buried of all diseases; viz. the first in the year of Queen Elizabeth, anno 1592. The second in the year 1603. The third in (that never to be forgotten year) 1625. The fourth in anno 1630. The fifth in the year 1636. The sixth in the year 1637. and 1638. The seventh this present year 1665* (London: 1665).

⁶ Richard Kingston, *Pillulæ Pestilenciales, or A Spiritual receipt for cure of the plague delivered in a sermeon preach’d in St. Paul’s Church London, in the mid’st of our late sore visitation* (London: W. G. for Edw. Brewster), x-xii.

⁷ Kingston, *Pillulæ Pestilenciales*, 4.

⁸ Kingston, *Pillulæ Pestilenciales*, 10.

⁹ Kingston, *Pillulæ Pestilenciales*, 32-49.

parallel with Israel as he applied Old Covenant promises to England in 1665.

Providence was also seen as giving human agency to take measures for the preservation of life. Charles II's *A Proclamation Prohibiting the Keeping of Bartholomew Fair, and Sturbridge Fair* stated, "No good means of Providence may be neglected to stay the further spreading of the great infection of the plague," and that as such it was "necessary to prevent all occasions of public concourse."¹⁰ In this regard, the English government considered public health measures such as banning fairs to be a "good means" of providence against the plague, and the individual should not neglect that which may provide protection. It is worth noting that "good means of Providence" did not include suspending church gatherings. Instead, Nathaniel Hodges's plague history recounted how the state added worship services by instituting "publick prayers" to seek God's mercy to bring an end to the plague.¹¹ This addition of services followed the precedent established under previous monarchs as recorded by George Sipek: "Although most Elizabethans regarded the plague as a curse or God's chastising his sinful people, its communicability was well known. In times of plague all public meetings except church services were suspended by law so as to decrease the frequency of human contact."¹² The role of the church was seen to be critical to the nation's repentance and the turning away of God's judgment.

Nonconformist Voices on Divine Providence

Though Presbyterianism and Congregationalism were persecuted under Charles II, the writings of the Westminster Assembly continued in wide use among

¹⁰ Charles II, *By the King. A Proclamation Prohibiting the Keeping of Bartholomew Fair, and Sturbridge Fair* (London, 1665).

¹¹ Nathaniel Hodges, *Loimologia: An Historical Account of the Plague in London in 1665* (London: Oxford Arms, 1721), 13.

¹² George Stephen Sipek, "The Elizabethan Justice of the Peace: An Image Inspected, 1558-1603" (Masters thesis, Loyola University, 1965).

Nonconformists and Puritans. Thomas Vincent, a Nonconformist minister who preached in London throughout the plague, authored an exposition of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* that was published in 1674. In expounding on God’s works of providence, Vincent wrote that “God governeth things when he ruleth over them, disposeth and directeth them to his and their end,” and “the “subject of God’s providence is . . . all causal actions.”¹³ He described God’s providential workings as “most holy,” “most wise,” and “most powerful.”¹⁴ Among those commending Vincent’s exposition on the *Shorter Catechism* include fellow Nonconformists and authors of plague literature: Edmund Calamy, Thomas Brooks, Thomas Watson, and Thomas Doolittle.¹⁵

Thomas Watson’s sermons on the Westminster Assembly’s catechism were compiled into *A Body of Divinity* and published in 1692. He decried the concept of fate, insisting that there was no such thing but that God’s providence is what guides and governs everything. Watson defined providence as “God’s ordering all issues and events of things, after the counsel of his will, to his own glory.”¹⁶ In making a distinction between God’s providence and decrees, he explained the difference in that “God’s decree ordains things that shall fall out,” and “God’s providence orders them.”¹⁷ This applies to all events as “God orders all events of things, after the counsel of his will, to his own glory, his glory being the ultimate end of all his actings, and the centre where all the lines of providence meet.”¹⁸ No event can be divorced from God’s providential work.

Watson described God’s providence of protection and affliction and that

¹³ Thomas Vincent, *The Shorter Catechism Explained from Scripture* (1647; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2010), 50.

¹⁴ Vincent, *The Shorter Catechism Explained from Scripture*, 51.

¹⁵ Vincent, *The Shorter Catechism Explained from Scripture*, vi.

¹⁶ Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* (1692; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1978), 119.

¹⁷ Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, 119.

¹⁸ Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, 119-20.

sometimes he “shields off dangers from his people, and sets a life-guard of angels about them,” while at other times his providence afflicts and humbles. When this happens, “Better is the loss that makes them humble than the success that makes them proud.”¹⁹

God has providential purposes in the sufferings of the church:

If the godly were not afflicted, and suffered an eclipse in their outward comforts, how could their graces be seen, especially their faith and patience? If it were always sunshine we should see no stars; so if we should have always prosperity, it would be hard to see the acting of men’s faith. Thus you see God’s providences are wise and regular, though to us they seem very strange and crooked.²⁰

In this way, nothing is accidental, but all is pre-determined and ordered by God. “Things that seem . . . by chance, are the issues of God’s decrees, and the interpretation of his will.”²¹ All causality finds its origin in God. Though occurrences may be mixed with both sweet and bitter providences, Watson argued that the believer should respond to this doctrine with several applications: “Admire God’s providence, learn quietly to submit to divine providence, believe that all God’s providences shall conspire for your good at last, let it be an antidote against immoderate fear, and let the merciful providence of God cause thankfulness.”²² Watson concluded by stating that “there is no providence but we shall see a wonder or a mercy in it.”²³ In contrast to Kingston’s view of God as vengeful, Watson upheld the mercy of God in his providences.

In considering the work of the Godhead when it comes to Divine Providence and the plague, Thomas Blake wrote about the operations of the Trinity, and in exposition of John 5:22 asserted that “Christ hath the management of all Providences . . . a sword

¹⁹ Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, 120-21.

²⁰ Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, 121.

²¹ Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, 123.

²² Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, 124-26.

²³ Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, 127.

goes not through a land, nor a plague through a city, but Christ has a hand in it.”²⁴ The Father “hath committed the management of all Providences into his hands; he hath given him the power of life and death in the world.”²⁵ In addition to this, “The power of Christ is absolute, he can do and govern in this matter as he pleaseth The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son.”²⁶ In this way, the plague should “have this effect on our hearts, to teach us to honor the Son as we honor the Father.”²⁷ The plague was seen as coming to London by the hand of Christ and for his glory.

The Plague as Providential Judgment for Sin

As many voices attributed the plague as God’s response to the sins of the nation, some spoke of sin generally, while others catalogued particular sins they believed were responsible for the plague. Apothecarist William Boghurst, in his plague history *Loimographia*, framed his understanding of the plague by starting in the beginning with Genesis, writing that all disease and death were “the fruits of the first curse denounced upon man for his apostasy and disobedience to God.”²⁸ In this way, all disease and death is a consequence of sin.

Matthew Mead was a Nonconformist who had been ejected from his lectureship at St. Sepulchre, Holborn.²⁹ Mead wrote *Solomon’s Prescription for the Removal of the Pestilence* and identified God as “the Supreme efficient cause of all the

²⁴ Thomas Blake, *Eben-ezer: OR, Profitable Truths after Pestilential Times* (London, 1666), 10.

²⁵ Blake, *Eben-ezer*, 10.

²⁶ Blake, *Eben-ezer*, 10.

²⁷ Blake, *Eben-Ezer*, 11.

²⁸ William Boghurst, *Loimographia: An Account of the Great Plague of London in the Year 1665* (London: Shaw and Sons, 1894), 5.

²⁹ Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans: With a Guide to Modern Reprints* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 444-45.

sufferings we are under.”³⁰ He interpreted the plague as a judgment from God because of “some heinous transgressions which have deserved them. If the plague, or any such calamity, seize a nation, it speaks this much, that there is a plague in the hearts of the people; some such wickedness which provok’d God to pour out his wrath upon them.”³¹

Thomas Willes, a former minister at Shadwell, likewise affirmed the providence of God over the plague and exhorted his readers to “look up to God, and be sensible of his hand in your visitation.” The plague did not come by chance but had been determined and ordered by God in his wisdom and holiness: “Though our calamities do often immediately proceed from second causes, yet God, who is the first cause, orders, directs, and determines them.”³² God is the primary cause, and he orders all second causes.

While most of the plague literature in 1665 was written in response to the ongoing epidemic, Theodore Beza’s *A Learned Treatise of the Plague* was newly translated into English and published for London.³³ Though Beza had written in response to the plague in Geneva in the prior century, this work entered London’s public discourse as evidenced by Boghurst’s discussion of Beza in *Loimographia*. Beza likewise argued for the divine causality of the plague, and that “the very wrath of God . . . is the chief cause of this sickness.”³⁴

In *Flagellum Dei*, as stated by the title, the anonymous author described the

³⁰ Matthew Mead, *Solomon’s prescription for the removal of the pestilence, or, The discovery of the plague of our hearts, in order to the healing of that in our flesh* (London, 1665), 10.

³¹ Mead, *Solomon’s prescription for the removal of the pestilence*, 9.

³² Thomas Willes, *A Help for the Poor Who are Visited with the Plague: To be Communicated to them by the Rich Or, by any Pious Christian, Whose Bowels of Compassion are Moved Towards Them, in the Apprehension of their Comfortless Condition, and the Great Danger of their Dying in their Sins* (London, 1666), 3-4.

³³ Theodore Beza, *A Learned Treatise of the Plague: Wherein, the Two Questions: Whether the Plague be Infectious, or no: And Whether, and how farr it may be shunned of Christians, by going aside? are resolved* (London: Thomas Ratcliffe, 1665).

³⁴ Beza, *A Learned Treatise of the Plague*, 2.

plague as a scourge from God with his hand being heavy upon London for their sins, with the burning of the city confirming God's displeasure.³⁵ In speaking about the plague and the fire, the author concluded that God's providence determined the extent of each judgment: "The suburbs, where the Plague reigned most, was in a great measure spared by the Fire, and the City . . . where the Fire was most active, suffered little by the Pestilence; as if it were designed by Divine Providence, that each part should have its punishment, and none a double one."³⁶

Known and anonymous authors alike pronounced the guilt of the nation and God's justice in punishing London. In N. E.'s *London's Plague Sore Discovered*, the author³⁷ catalogued the sins for which God "sends his arrows of destruction."³⁸ In *Upon the Present Plague at London and His Majesties Leaving the City*, an anonymous poet described the plague as punishment on "a faithfulness and ungrateful land."

Sure 'twas kind Providence that wisely spy'd
The bad effect of o're successful Pride. . .
'Twas Providence that saw we had forgot
Heavens wonderful assistance, and like Lot,
In floods of Drink (from flaming Deluge free)
Of past deliverance drown'd all memorie:
And therefore into Pyres our Bonfires turn,
And every Sack-bowl straight becomes an Urn:
Justice and mercy, jointly this Plague sent,
Past sins to punish, future to prevent.³⁹

These are but a few examples of how authors attributed the plague to the sins of the

³⁵ Anonymous, *Flaggelum Dei: OR, A Collection of the several Fires, Plagues, and Pestilential Diseases that have hapned in London especially, and other parts of this Nation, from the Norman Conquest to this present, 1668* (London, 1668).

³⁶ Anonymous, *Flaggelum Dei*, 11.

³⁷ The author is unknown, choosing only to be identified by the initials E. N.

³⁸ E. N., *London's plague-sore discovered. Or, Some serious notes and suitable considerations upon the present visitation at London wherein is something by way of lamentation, information, expostulation, exhortation and caution: whereunto is annexed, A never-failing antidote against the plague* (London, 1665), 5.

³⁹ Anonymous, *Upon the Present Plague at London and His Majesties Leaving the City* (London, [1665?]), 1-2.

nation. While some did so generally such as Boghurst, others were more specific in their condemnation of particular sins.

A Plague for Particular Sins

Thomas Rosewell, a Nonconformist minister who suffered under the Great Ejection, wrote *The Causes and Cure of the Pestilence* in which he catalogued sins of the nation that he believed had provoked divine judgment by plague, particularly the Anglican persecution of Nonconformists. Rosewell began his argument by comparing England's oppression of God's people to Pharaoh's oppression of Israel, therefore resulting in the judgment of plagues. Rosewell accused the Anglican Church of "setting up a worship of their own devising" and that they do "hate, persecute, and oppress the true spiritual and sincere worshippers of Jesus."⁴⁰ He leveled charges against state church leadership of "idolatry" and of "all human inventions and traditions of men, thrust into the divine worship and service of God."⁴¹ For Rosewell, these human inventions were the Anglican traditions imposed on churches throughout the nation in 1662, leading to the Great Ejection and the subsequent persecutions that continued in England even during the Great Plague. Drawing a parallel with Saul's persecution of the church in Acts 9, Rosewell described this as follows:

What shall we say to those furious, blind, zealous, pharisaical spirits of those times, who did breathe out threatenings, persecutions, and slaughters even against the disciples and servants of the Lord, because they could not conscientiously (and not factiously, as they termed it) conform to a public directory for worship, or submit to some unwarrantable and unscriptural impositions and injunctions, whereby many were cast into prisons, their goods violently taken away, and themselves and their families exposed to great misery, necessity, and want?⁴²

Rosewell's prosecution of Anglican sins was severe, and he argued forcefully against

⁴⁰ Thomas Rosewell, *The Causes and Cure of the Continuing Pestilence* (London, 1665), 7-8.

⁴¹ Rosewell, *The Causes and Cure of the Continuing Pestilence*, 21.

⁴² Rosewell, *The Causes and Cure of the Continuing Pestilence*, 110.

state authority being wielded over the church and against individual consciences:

What force and compulsion is there still exercised upon conscience, to beat men as it were into religion, the certain mark and character of antichrist, that man of sin, who Satan-like, works with all powers, signs, and lying wonders (2 Thess 2:9). Whereas *religio docenda, non coercenda*, religion is to be taught, and not to be forcedly thrust and imposed upon the conscience.⁴³

Rosewell interpreted the plague as judgment upon the nation for the state's corruption of worship and persecution of Nonconformity. Therefore, he prescribed that repentance of these things "shall be prevailing with the Lord for the removal of the pestilence out of the land" and that this repentance must be from the heart before God will lift his judgment of the plague.⁴⁴

It is worth noting the weakness of identifying particular sins as being responsible for the plague. Contrary to Rosewell's diagnosis and prescription for the removal of the plague, the plague abated without his remedy. Persecution of Nonconformity continued with the addition of the Oxford Act in 1665, which restricted Nonconformist clergy from residing within five miles of the parish from where they had been ejected. Decades of persecution continued to follow Nonconformity after the abatement of the plague.

A Plague for Saints and Sinners

As some identified particular sins for which they believed the plague had come, these interpretations were often simplistic and without a view of the complexity of the situation. If the plague was an act of divine judgment for specific sins, why then did it strike the righteous with the wicked, instead of specifically targeting those guilty of the particular offense? Richard Baxter reported that both saint and sinner "fell alike."⁴⁵ While

⁴³ Rosewell, *The Causes and Cure of the Continuing Pestilence*, 111.

⁴⁴ Rosewell, *The Causes and Cure of the Continuing Pestilence*, 74.

⁴⁵ Richard Baxter, *Reliquiæ Baxterianæ, or, Mr. Richard Baxters narrative of the most memorable passages of his life and times faithfully publish'd from his own original manuscript by Matthew*

few would argue that every single plague death was an expression of God's wrath upon the wicked, many theologians observed broader purposes in the plague as they noted that it was not restricted to the wicked alone.

William Austin, in his *Anatomy of the Pestilence*, traced plagues through history from Egypt to Rome and concluded that the plague is indiscriminate when it comes to religion: "We might have hope to lie out of [the plague's] road, and escape its touch; for being of Christian blood. If our spirits to theirs be different; our bodies be of the same element. As when fortress is took, the conqu'ring foe puts all to sword, whether baptiz'd or no."⁴⁶ Baptism did not protect anyone from the plague.

William Boghurst's *Loimographia* likewise surveyed the plague throughout history and showed that Christians were not immune from suffering under disease, but it was the shared experience of all who descend from Adam. He reported one example from Dionysius of Alexandria who noted that Christians also suffered under the plague as "no house was free from the dire effects of the rage."⁴⁷ In addition, Cyprian of Carthage's sermon *On Mortality* was preached "to animate and strengthen the Christians" who were "joint and fellow sufferers with the Heathens."⁴⁸ Observing the same in London, Boghurst wrote that they can "clearly see that good men have fallen under this common scourge of mankind as well as bad" and recorded that Christians "stumbled at this piece of providence" in Cyprian's time and that this reality had been a consistent pattern throughout history.⁴⁹

Sylvester, 3 vols. (London: Printed for T. Parkhurst, J. Robinson, F. Lawrence and F. Dunton, 1696) (London, 1696), 2:1-2.

⁴⁶ William Austin, *Epiloimia epē, or The Anatomy of the Pestilence* (London, 1666), 77.

⁴⁷ Boghurst, *Loimographia*, 6.

⁴⁸ Boghurst, *Loimographia*, 6.

⁴⁹ Boghurst, *Loimographia*, 8.

Interpreting the Deaths of the Righteous

The death of the righteous by the plague required interpretation. Thomas Brooks, a Nonconformist minister ejected from St. Margaret's, wrote about how "some of the best of Christians . . . fall by the pestilence, when many of the worst of sinners have their lives . . . these are some of those mysterious providences that many times make some of the best Christians to stagger in their judgments."⁵⁰ Using the analogy of a straight stick partially submerged in water, the stick will appear crooked "because we look upon it through two mediums, air and water." Similarly, God's judgments may seem crooked "because we look through a double medium of flesh and spirit."⁵¹ Though "in this world divine providences seem to run cross to divine promises . . . yet in the conclusion all issues in the will, purpose, and glory of God."⁵² Those who die by "these sad providences they are but hastened to heaven, to their father's house, to their eternal homes, and to those blessed mansions that Christ hath prepared for them."⁵³ In this way, God has purposes for the plague deaths of the righteous which must not be reduced to divine wrath.

In continuity with this, Matthew Mead asserted that the plague may come upon the righteous, who ought to make use of it for the cause of God:

They [the plague] may befall thee for the cause of God, and a testimony of a good conscience, and then thou hast more cause to rejoice in them, than impatiently seek for their removal. Whatever they be, see thou make this use of them, to be more deeply humbled, and set against sin, which is remotely at least, the cause of all suffering; and to demean thyself patiently and submissively under the mighty hand of God, and in due time he will exalt thee.⁵⁴

Though some providences are bitter, Mead called the Christian to submit to providence in

⁵⁰ Thomas Brooks, *A Heavenly Cordial* (London, 1666), 61.

⁵¹ Brooks, *A Heavenly Cordial*, 60-61.

⁵² Brooks, *A Heavenly Cordial*, 60-62.

⁵³ Brooks, *A Heavenly Cordial*, 60-67.

⁵⁴ Mead, *Solomon's prescription for the removal of the pestilence*, 12.

faith.

Thomas Blake also labored to explain the death of the righteous in *Eben-Ezer*. Though God's people are not exempted from temporal sufferings and death, their deaths are fundamentally different from the wicked. Death brings "eternal misery" for sinners, but for the saint it "opens a door unto him into his Father's presence."⁵⁵

The death of the saints is precious to God (Ps 116:15), and they "shall not lightly fall to the Earth, but if they do fall, it shall be because he knows how to make their fall promote his glory."⁵⁶ Comparing plague deaths to martyrdom, Blake asserted that "The death of a saint furthers the interest of Christ more than his living could do, and so it is here."⁵⁷ In addition to that, when saints die, God displays his holiness to the world, and gives testimony to the world that "temporal death . . . is a high testimony of God's purity and contrariety unto all sin."⁵⁸ In this way, every death is an indictment of sinful humanity and displays the holiness of God.

Characterizations of Providence

Characterizations of the plague were greatly varied, as some characterized the plague as a merciful providence, while others described it as a merciless judgment upon London. Some viewed the plague only as divine judgment, while others observed broader purposes in the plague's visitation.

The Plague as Mercy

The anonymous author of *Upon the Present Plague at London and His Majesties Leaving the City* described God's providence in the plague as a "kind

⁵⁵ Blake, *Eben-ezer*, 96.

⁵⁶ Blake, *Eben-ezer*, 97.

⁵⁷ Blake, *Eben-ezer*, 97.

⁵⁸ Blake, *Eben-Ezer*, 97.

Providence,” and that God in his justice and mercy sent the plague as a punishment for past sins and to prevent future sins. Seeing the plague as God’s kindness stands in contrast to other plague writings of the time.⁵⁹

In a call for plague exiles to return to the city of London, *Lamentatio Civitatis* sought to encourage readers with God’s love in the midst of the plague:

If God does touch thee with the plague, thou shalt have the pledge of his love: if with the pest, and not mortally, yet he hath the test and reproof of thee, and thou the prooffe and trial of him. If he give thee the blow of death, and the word of life also, he doth thee no hurt. . . Come therefore to your old habitations, not to your old sinnes: and as God hath swept my house, to desire him to garnish it with virtue, and Furnish it with graces, least worse things happen to me and you. And glorie not in your inventions, or worldly policie, or care, but in God’s power and mercy that we may safelie rejoyce together.⁶⁰

Like a house swept clean, the plague is a purifying influence to bring them from sin to virtue. God’s purposes are worked out in the plague, and so by humble repentance the people of London should accept the plague as “kind correction: which God turneth unto good, and seal unto your souls, that the remembrance hereof may be a scourge sufficient to you upon every falling into sin.”⁶¹

In addition, the plague was seen as having brought London “into the right way,” and that God’s mercy is observable in that he has not given London to be slaughtered by enemies, or to famine, but instead the city received merciful chastisement by plague. As a consequence for the census, King David had to choose between war, famine, and plague. Refusing to select one of these, David chose to fall into the merciful hands of God, who sent a plague. In this way, the plague is observed as the more merciful correction from God (2 Sam 24).

Thomas Willes, late minister of Shadwell, in *A Help for the Poor Who Are*

⁵⁹ Anonymous, *Upon the Present Plague at London and His Majesties Leaving the City*, 1.

⁶⁰ Anonymous, *Lamentatio Civitatis, Or, Londons Complaint Against Her Children in the Countrey* (London, 1665), 38-39.

⁶¹ Anonymous, *Lamentatio Civitatis*, 38.

Visited with the Plague wrote about loving correction of God and exhorted the reader to trust the mercy that brings the dying one into his presence:

The children of God, as they are not without faults (Heb 12:6-7), so they escape not without correction. But still the child is in the Father's arm, and the rod is in a hand of love . . . God has secret chambers of providence, wherein he preserves his saints in a time of common calamity. . . God's promise is his saints security from the noisome plague (Ps 91:5-10). It shall not touch you; or if it do, not hurt you. If it do not touch you, you may live longer on earth; and it will not hurt you, if it bring you sooner to heaven. Fear not the arrow that flies by day, and sends so many thousands to the shades of night: If wounded, you shall bleed in your Father's arms; if mortally, you shall die in your Father's bosom; and so sweet a death is better than the longest life.⁶²

In this way, saints who fall under the plague ought not to be afraid but instead are to entrust themselves to God's mercy that brings them to heaven.

The Plague as Merciless

All did not see the plague as a bitter yet merciful providence. William Austin's *The Anatomy of the Pestilence* characterized the plague as having "merciless dominion" over London.⁶³ Austin recognized the failure of human means against the plague, describing physicians' inability to successfully treat plague victims and their impotence against the plague.⁶⁴

Austin's praise of Charles II in other works revealed an alignment with the Church of England in opposition to the Westminster divines and Nonconformists.⁶⁵ His writing also contains numerous references to Catholic doctrines of the pope and purgatory. Though he recognized divine causality, this was overshadowed by his emphasis on the work of the devil: "Plague, as 'tis plague, must be concluded evil: So fit

⁶² Willes, *A Help for the Poor Who are Visited With the Plague*, vi-vii.

⁶³ Austin, *The Anatomy of the Pestilence*, i.

⁶⁴ Austin, *The Anatomy of the Pestilence*, 10.

⁶⁵ Austin wrote poetry celebrating the wedding of Charles II as well as praising the heroism of his achievements. One example of this is *Atlas under Olympus: An Heroick Poem* (London, 1664).

to be a present from the Devil.”⁶⁶ The manner in which Austin characterized the plague was detached from providence as he wrote of destiny and fate and described God as having abandoned them to suffer under the devil: “Our lethal curse making our friends afar’d: Like wounded deer we’re horn’d off from the herd. God leaves us too. Hell falls from heaven, while thus the Devil rains his kingdom upon us.”⁶⁷ Austin’s emphasis on Satan as the active agent in the plague is a good example of the hopeless tenor of his writing.

Controversy of Secondary Causes

Though there was general agreement that God is the first cause of all things, what was the secondary cause by which the plague came to London? There is a wide array of opinions when it came to assigning secondary causes for the plague.

***De Novo* Creation as a Secondary Cause**

Some argued that the plague was a *de novo* creation of God subsequent to the fall, and Boghurst explained their rationale: “God in Scripture is made to be the author of it,” yet “God in the beginning created all things very good, and therefore this venom which causeth the Plague can be no issue and product of the first creation, but something created *de novo* since the fall for the punishment of man’s Transgressions.”⁶⁸ In refutation of this idea, Boghurst argued that this theory runs “contrary to the joint Judgment of all Divines and meta physical writers whatsoever.” He argued that secondary causes need not be created *de novo*: “God brings war and famine not by any new-created agents, but by the ministry of known and second causes, making them the executioners of his decree

⁶⁶ Austin, *The Anatomy of the Pestilence*, 52.

⁶⁷ Austin, *The Anatomy of the Pestilence*, 42.

⁶⁸ Boghurst, *Loimographia*, 15.

upon mankind, so we cannot with reason suppose he doth otherwise in the pestilence.”⁶⁹ God’s exercise of providence does not necessitate additional special acts of creation, but rather the use of that which already has been created in order to accomplish his purposes.

Astrological Events as a Secondary Cause

While most believed in secondary causes, some argued that the plague was not contagious but was instead a special providence in which God was striking people directly. If there is no secondary cause to address, there is no recourse or response to the plague other than to repent and hope for mercy. John Gadbury argued that there were no secondary causes to be found on earth but that instead they were in the heavens: “When I speak of the causes of the plague, you are to understand that I tacitly acknowledge, God the chief and supreme Cause of all things! And that in this his power to alter or suspend second causes, even as he pleaseth; but this he seldom, nay never doth, but by miracle, as in the days of Joshua and good king Hezekiah.”⁷⁰ However, when it comes to considering the secondary cause of the plague, Gadbury asserted that “the true and certain causes of this astonishing adversary the plague are no where to be found but in the Heavens.”⁷¹ He attributed the plague to the “configuration” of Mars with Saturn, and the “rays of Jupiter.” Other causes in his opinion included comets, eclipses, and various celestial events.

Gadbury described the plague as “a broom in the hand of the Almighty! with which he sweepeth, the most nasty and uncomely corners of the universe, that the more noble parts of it, may remain secure and safe.”⁷² The plague was not infectious, for “God

⁶⁹ Boghurst, *Loimographia*, 16.

⁷⁰ John Gadbury, *London’s deliverance predicted in a short discourse shewing the cause of plagues in general, and the probable time (God not contradicting the course of second causes) when the present pest may abate* (London: J.C. for E. Calvert, 1665), v.

⁷¹ Gadbury, *London’s deliverance predicted*, 4.

⁷² Gadbury, *London’s deliverance predicted*, 9-10.

and nature punish none by proxy.”⁷³ In explaining why some did not contract the plague, Gadbury credited their protection to having “powerful stars” and a “good nativity,” speaking of the constellations that one was born under.⁷⁴ In this way he denied infection and disease as a secondary cause. Instead, it was God’s providence over when one is born and the movement of the planets which determined one’s health or sickness. Those who credited the plague to an infectious disease he considered to be denying God’s power and wrongly elevating humanity to usurp Divine control over sickness: “We blaspheme one of the greatest attributes of the Almighty, when we restrain his power: it is not we that can or are able to infect one another; but it is God by his power over us that afflicts us all! And indeed the plague carrieth not in it so much of infection, as it does of affliction, and so we mortals find it.”⁷⁵ Gadbury went on to deny the effectiveness of any means to escape the plague and predicted the plague’s conclusion in September of 1665. When the plague continued into the winter and then into 1666, the hope that Gadbury offered faded, and he was dismissed along with the charlatans of his day.

Infection as a Secondary Cause

In contrast to those who denied secondary causes, Theodore Beza affirmed the infectious nature of the plague and that the “order of necessary causes agree with themselves.” Beza instructed his reader that “infection itself is to be reckoned amongst second causes; for who can deny that many diseases are gotten by handling and touching, of the which some are deadly, and other some are less dangerous?”⁷⁶

In interpreting the plague through Scripture, Beza described the plague as “the hand of God (2 Sam 24).” The plague “is also signified by the name of arrows Ps 31 &

⁷³ Gadbury, *London’s deliverance predicted*, 10.

⁷⁴ Gadbury, *London’s deliverance predicted*, 24.

⁷⁵ Gadbury, *London’s deliverance predicted*, 26.

⁷⁶ Beza, *A Learned Treatise of the Plague*, 4.

90.” In contrast to those who used the arrows of Psalm 91 to deny secondary causes, Beza wrote, “Natural generation is not left out; and it is manifest, that in the Scripture all evils and punishments whatsoever God sendeth unto mankind, using either ordinary laws of nature only, or else using the service of angels, are called arrows.”⁷⁷ God is the one who orders creation and governs natural causes, yet Beza also held to special providences of divine protection:

The principal point is to be considered; that Almighty God doth govern natural causes and their effects, as it pleaseth him; so that hence it cometh to pass, that Infection toucheth not every one which is in danger of it, as it is written Psal. 91:6. Neither yet is it deadly unto every one that it hath infected; like as poison also drunken is not, as it is written Mark 16:18.⁷⁸

Thomas Brooks, a Puritan Nonconformist ejected from his pulpit by the Act of Uniformity, highlighted God as the primary cause of the plague, though secondary causes be used by him as tools. In *A Heavenly Cordial*, Brooks stated that the plague “is more immediately from God, than any other sickness or disease is; for it is the immediate stroke of God.”⁷⁹ In emphasizing divine causality, Brooks argued that “the scribe is more properly said to write, than the pen; and he that maketh and keepeth the clock, is more properly said to make it go and strike, than the wheels and poizes that hang upon it: and every workman to effect his work, rather than the tools which he useth as instruments.”⁸⁰ In this way, God is rightly spoken of as the one causing the plague, though he uses secondary causes.

In responding to those sought to explain the plague by pointing to heat, corruption of the air, corruption of blood, Satan, or the “malignity of the planets,” Brooks asserted that “certainly those are physicians of no value, that cannot look above second

⁷⁷ Beza, *A Learned Treatise of the Plague*, 5.

⁷⁸ Beza, *A Learned Treatise of the Plague*, 11.

⁷⁹ Brooks, *A Heavenly Cordial* (London, 1666), 2.

⁸⁰ Brooks, *A Heavenly Cordial*, 2-3.

causes, to the First Cause.”⁸¹ As all secondary causes arise from the first cause, it is “God alone that singles out the nation, the city, the town, the parish, the family, the person, that he will strike with the plague.”⁸² As far as Brooks is concerned, it is “the Lord alone that sends the pestilence amongst a people,” and that while “the cup of trembling which is this day offered to the children of God, is often very bitter at the second hand, or as it appears in second causes; and yet it is sweet at the first hand, yea, it is very sweet, as it is reached to them by a hand from heaven.”⁸³ One must not become embittered against secondary causes but remember to look to God as the source from which the plague came.

Providence and Protection from the Plague

As the doctrine of divine providence was applied to thinking about the cause of the plague, so also it was applied to one’s escape from the plague. Some held to God alone as the primary cause of one’s protection from the plague, while others held to secondary causes for the preservation of life from the plague. For those who held to secondary causes as providential means for the preservation of life, such means included the use of medicine and other options such as plague flight. In addition to those, there were some who argued for special providence, believing that if they appropriated Psalm 91 by faith, divine protection was theirs. For these, their faith functioned as the secondary cause by which they believed they were preserved from the disease.

A Case for Special Providence

William Bridge served as one of the divines in the Westminster Assembly; he was a Fellow of Emanuel College in Cambridge and a preacher at Yarmouth until the Great Ejection. In 1665, he wrote an exposition on Psalm 91 entitled *The Righteous*

⁸¹ Brooks, *A Heavenly Cordial*, 3-4.

⁸² Brooks, *A Heavenly Cordial*, 5.

⁸³ Brooks, *A Heavenly Cordial*, 7-8.

Man's Habitation in the Time of Plague and Pestilence. Bridge presented Psalm 91 as “a promise of special protection for those that trust in the Lord in the time of the plague.”⁸⁴ He applied the psalm directly to 1665, asserting that “God will in an especial manner protect and deliver those that do trust in him in the time of plague”⁸⁵ and that “it may be avoided through the goodness of God.”⁸⁶ Comparing preservation from the plague to God’s deliverance of Noah and Lot’s rescue from Sodom, he then pointed to the promise of a remnant that will survive the pestilence in Isaiah 6:13, saying that God will indeed “preserve and deliver in such a general desolation as this.”⁸⁷ Bridge repeated this assertion, that “those that honor providence; shall be kept by providence.”⁸⁸

In explaining his argument, Bridge stated that those who appropriate protection by faith by truly relying upon God “for shelter, for protection, as unto his habitation . . . this is the faith that is here spoken of in this 91st Psalm.”⁸⁹ If faith is the means for protection, why do believers die from the plague? Bridge answered this question by stating that “a believer may be out of his way, as good Josiah was.”⁹⁰ If one doubted, this promise of Psalm 91 would not be effective in protecting him. In this way, believers died from the plague for “not exercising faith and trusting in God.”⁹¹ Whether one lived or died from the plague corresponded to one’s faith.

Bridge’s interpretation is repeated by Thomas Blake in *Eben-Ezer*, as Blake asserted that there is indeed a “promise of special preservation,” but that it is conditional,

⁸⁴ William Bridge, *The Righteous Man’s Habitation in the Time of Plague and Pestilence* (London, 1665), 8.

⁸⁵ Bridge, *The Righteous Man’s Habitation*, 13.

⁸⁶ Bridge, *The Righteous Man’s Habitation*, 18.

⁸⁷ Bridge, *The Righteous Man’s Habitation*, 20.

⁸⁸ Bridge, *The Righteous Man’s Habitation*, 22.

⁸⁹ Bridge, *The Righteous Man’s Habitation*, 25-26.

⁹⁰ Bridge, *The Righteous Man’s Habitation*, 33.

⁹¹ Bridge, *The Righteous Man’s Habitation*, 35.

and therefore if “one step away in a way of unbelief,” one may forfeit the promise: “The soul that doth not live up to the condition, may forfeit the mercy promised.”⁹² Robert Tatnall also shared this interpretation, writing that the good man has “more reason than any wicked persons have, to wait upon God for a special protection; if the ninety first Psalm be a part of his charter, as no doubt it is.”⁹³

Bridge, Blake, and Tatnall insert the Londoner into the place of the psalmist, and consequentially their interpretation that one can by faith appropriate special divine protection was an unwelcome indictment against thousands of believers who died from the plague. Such a direct application of Psalm 91 collapses the distinctions between the Londoner and the original audience of Israel, negating the differences between God’s covenant relationship to Israel, his specific promises toward Israel regarding disease (Exod 15:26), and the uniqueness of those in the New Covenant. As the Law of Moses has been fulfilled in Christ, believers and participants of the New Covenant are not recipients of promises for temporal protection from physical illness. Instead, Christ’s wounds guarantee that sickness will be no more in the New Creation (1 Pet 2:24; Rev 21:4).

As a fruit of such convictions as held by Bridge and Blake, believing plague victims were often subjected to accusations of insufficient faith or presumed to be guilty of sin. In *The voice of one crying in a wilderness*, Samuel Shaw rejected these conclusions. As two of his little children had died, as well as his sister and others connected to his family, Shaw wrote that “great guilt is charged upon me, as if I were a sinner above all that dwell in this country” and that many “false and senseless aspersions” have been cast upon him. Shaw turned to Psalm 69:6, declaring that he joined with the

⁹² Blake, *Eben-ezer*, 99.

⁹³ Robert Tatnall, *An Antidote Against the Sinfull Palpitation of the Heart* (London: J. Hayes, 1665), iii.

psalmist to entrust himself “to him that judgeth righteously.”⁹⁴

A Case against Secondary Causes to Escape the Plague

A more fatalistic view of providence rejected any attempts to avoid the plague whatsoever, denying that God ordains secondary causes for the protection of one’s health. In *The Shutting Up of Infected Houses as it is Practiced in England Soberly Debated*, the author argued against human agency as a means for escaping the plague and that plague flight and shutting oneself in one’s home was futile. Seeing the plague’s visitation as synonymous with divine judgment, it was impossible for those who “kept themselves close in their houses or castles to secure themselves as they thought from the outrage of the visitation; but all this could not in any way prevail or prevent God’s Divine judgment, against whom the strongest fortification never defended.”⁹⁵

In another example, Stephen Bing, who served at St. Paul’s in London, wrote about plague flight in a July 27, 1665, letter to Dean Sancroft. Bing equated plague flight as a response of fear and a disregard for God’s presence in London: “The increase of God’s judgment deadens people’s hearts so that trading strangely ceaseth. They shut up their shops, and such a fear possesseth them as is wonderful to see how they hurry into the country, as though the same God was not there that is in the city.”⁹⁶ If God is omnipresent and within London, the people should trust him there instead of fleeing the city.

Bishop Hall’s “A Discourse of Fleeing or Stay in the Time of Pestilence,” in

⁹⁴ Samuel Shaw, *The voice of one crying in a wilderness, or, The business of a Christian, both antecedaneous to, concomitant of, and consequent upon, a sore and heavy visitation represented in several sermons / first preachd to his own family, lying under such visitation, and now made publike as a thank-offering to the Lord his healer* (London, 1667), ii-iii.

⁹⁵ Anonymous, *The Shutting Up of Infected Houses as it is Practiced in England Soberly Debated* (London, 1665), 7.

⁹⁶ Stephen Bing, “Letter to Dean Sancroft,” July 27, 1665, MSS Harliean 3785, folio 20, British Library, London.

Kephale's *Medela Pestilentiae*, argued that no one can escape divine judgment: "Whither shall we fly from God, say you? Where shall he not find and lead us? Wither shall not our destiny follow us? Vain man, we may run from our home, but not our grave. Death is subtil, our time is set, we cannot, God will not alter it. . . . Our time is neither capable of prevention, nor delay."⁹⁷ Hall assumed that use of means to escape the plague was futile, as if one was seeking to escape the omnipresence of God.

In N. E.'s *London's Plague Sore Discovered*, the author also argued for the futility of plague flight, for if it is God's intention to bring judgment upon you, "He in the country will go search about, and never leave until he find you out, and when the angel takes his journey thither, and findeth you, and all your sins together, the fearful dregs of this destroying cup shall be your portion, you must drink them up."⁹⁸ Instead of flight from the plague, all must repent of their sins and "kiss the Son" (Ps 2). The futility of plague flight is echoed by Thomas Rosewell in *The Causes and Cure of the Pestilence*. Using Psalm 139 to speak of God's omnipresence, Rosewell asserted, "I would let such persons know, who are running away from God, that his hand can find them out, and overtake them."⁹⁹

While arguments against plague flight contain many true propositions regarding God's omnipresence and man's inability to escape the workings of God, these writings ignore or reject the possibility that God in his providence may have ordained means for the preservation of life in the midst of plague. While upholding the omnipresence and omnipotence of God, they reflect a low view of God's use of means.

⁹⁷ Richard Kephale, *Medela pestilentiae wherein is contained several theological queries concerning the plague, with approved antidotes, signes and symptoms: also an exact method for curing that epidemical distemper, humbly presented to the Right Honourable and Right Worshipful the lord mayor and sheriffs of the city of London* (London: J. C., 1665), 28-29.

⁹⁸ E. N., *London's Plague Sore Discovered. Or, Some serious notes and suitable considerations upon the present visitation at London wherein is something by way of lamentation, information, expostulation, exhortation and caution: whereunto is annexed, A never-failing antidote against the plague* (London, 1665), 7.

⁹⁹ Rosewell, *The Causes and Cure of the Pestilence*, i.

A Case for Secondary Causes to Escape the Plague

In contrast to Bing, Hall, and Rosewell, Beza asserted that secondary causes should be taken advantage of to prolong life, and he dismissed the fatalism of those who argued that plague flight was in vain: “This is also a very dull reason; For if this reason be good, shall it not be lawful to affirm the same of all second causes of death? If so, let us neither eat, nor drink, nor seek any remedy against diseases; let soldiers go unarmed to battle, because death ordained by God cannot be avoided.” Instead of such fatalism, Beza insisted that the reader ought to use what God has given to provide for life, and that it was sinful to reject what God has provided:

[N]ature telleth us [that those things] be ordained by him to prolong our life so long as it shall please him; which if we do not, we shall worthily be deemed to tempt and most grievously to offend God, so far off is it, that using the means set down by him to avoid death, we should sin against him, although that sometimes use them in fain, that is to say, when as the end doth plainly shew, that even when we must die, when as we thought our life should yet for a time have been prolonged.¹⁰⁰

Beza argued that God’s providence had appointed secondary causes to preserve from the plague. Not only had God decreed for some to be spared, but he had also appointed means of escape: “God hath appointed . . . remedies, by which so far as in them lieth, men may avoid the plague. And it is one and the same providence of God in all kind of diseases with which he hath ordained.”¹⁰¹

Rosewell likewise affirmed the use of means to escape the plague and qualified them as being those which were lawful and had biblical warrant. With this, he also condemned Asa for going to physicians instead of seeking the Lord (2 Chr 16:12).¹⁰² Here, Rosewell seems to advocate ignoring the medical establishment altogether, though he left open the possibility that the Lord might bless secondary means for one’s health.

¹⁰⁰ Beza, *A Learned Treatise of the Plague*, 4.

¹⁰¹ Beza, *A Learned Treatise of the Plague*, 9.

¹⁰² Rosewell, *The Causes and Cure of the Pestilence*, 2.

In a parallel example, Rosewell compared England's sins to the nation of Israel's in that they entered into treaties with other nations for national defense instead of trusting in God alone. Rosewell laid obligations upon the nation of England to function as if they had a covenantal identity with God like the nation of Israel and condemned them for sin because they had not trusted in God alone. In this way, it is difficult to discern what secondary means were acceptable in his view as he consistently called for trust in God alone while rejecting any means that required dependence upon the actions of people. From Rosewell's perspective, the only action to remove the plague from London was true repentance, and then God's destroying angel would stop plaguing the nation.

Nonconformist minister Richard Kephale credited divine providence for giving secondary means for escaping the plague, and that these divinely given means were indeed lawful and warrantable means one should take advantage of to escape disease if possible, provided that one was not forsaking the calling that God in his providence had given to them:

All the lawful and warrantable means are the visible hand of God's invisible Providence: to reject or neglect means, is to refuse to take God by the hand when he reacheth it out unto us, and to follow his visible direction. It is therefore foolish presumption, rather than a prudent resolution, either to accompany those that are as it were in the fire of God's judgment, or not to go from them when a fair and warrantable opportunity is offered.¹⁰³

The question as to whether use of means was lawful and warrantable was a significant ethical debate of the time, as many condemned plague flight while others argued for it as a means of divine providence to preserve life.

Plague Flight and Providential Calling

Though there were means to escape the plague, not all means were lawful. One must respond to the plague in ways that are lawful and have biblical warrant. According to Kephale, examples of unlawful use of means included the abandonment of those to

¹⁰³ Kephale, *Medela pesilentiae*, 39.

whom one was obligated, such as a husband neglecting his wife, parents their children, or a pastor his congregation. In these cases, “it is not lawful or warranted for one to abandon their calling.” These callings “come from Divine Providence, and so they must walk in them.” Kephale directly addressed ethical questions about responsibility and calling during the plague, calling for pastors to remain in places of public health crisis, so that they may “instruct, direct, comfort, and encourage the people under their charge.”¹⁰⁴

Kephale bound his audience to submit to the duties they had received in God’s providence. They must not presume to survive the plague or die from it, as either outcome might be ordained under God’s providence. However, if they should die, and if they had not abandoned those the Lord has entrusted to them, they “with greatest comfort may yield up their souls into God’s hands, as dying in that place wherein God hath set them, in these cases God has called them to venture their lives for their brethren, and thereby to give evidence of their true brotherly love.”¹⁰⁵ Kephale’s convictions were largely influenced by the example of early Christians whose deaths were likened to martyrdom as they loved and cared for others during the plague in Alexandria as reported by Dionysius.¹⁰⁶

Medicine and Divine Providence

London’s medical community in many ways had an experience similar to the church. When the plague appeared, many physicians fled the city. Among those who remained were profiteers who marketed false cures. Some offered chemical cures that sickened those who received them, while others in the medical establishment were more focused on traditional medicine and surgery. Those who fled the city were loudly condemned and had a difficult time resuming their practice after the plague subsided.

¹⁰⁴ Kephale, *Medela pesilentiae*, 32-33.

¹⁰⁵ Kephale, *Medela pesilentiae*, 33-34.

¹⁰⁶ Kephale, *Medela pesilentiae*, 34.

Some of those who remained died. Among the plague literature from the medical community are some scientific works that include symptoms, general descriptions of the course of the plague from its onset to death and recovery, and even autopsy descriptions of plague victims. Others are recipe books promising to prevent or cure the plague by their potions. One prime example of this is Garencieres's *A Mite Cast into the Treasury of the Famous City of London*, in which he announced toward the beginning that "the plague is one of the easiest diseases in the world to be cured," and that his cure was effective "by the grace of the Almighty."¹⁰⁷ Garencières concluded with an invitation for the people of London to employ him as their physician. His work is soundly condemned by Boghurst's *Loimographia* as he is dismissed as a dishonest pamphleteer seeking to profit from the outbreak.¹⁰⁸

Medical treatises and pamphlets described God's workings through medicine to bring healing to the citizens of London. T. D.'s *Food and Physick for Every Householder*¹⁰⁹ promised in the first recipe that this potion taken for nine days would "by God's help" keep them safe from the plague for a year.¹¹⁰ Outlandish claims like this were normal for the time and offered false hope while exploiting the poor. T. D.'s work also included prayers against the plague. T. D. argued that how God brought the plague in "no man can absolutely determine," but he conjectured that it was a lack of charity and neglect of the poor and crowded and filthy living conditions that caused the infection to

¹⁰⁷ Theophilus Garencières, *A mite cast into the treasury of the famous city of London being a brief and methodical discourse of the nature, causes, symptomes, remedies and preservation from the plague, in this calamitous year, 1665: digested into aphorisms* (London: Thomas Ratcliffe, 1665), 2.

¹⁰⁸ Boghurst, *Loimographia*, 3.

¹⁰⁹ The identity of T. D. is unknown. Instead of providing a name or writing anonymously, some writers chose to provide initials.

¹¹⁰ T. D., *Food and physick for every householder & his family during the time of the plague very useful, both for the free and the infected, and necessary for all persons in what condition or quality soever: together with several prayers and meditations before, in, and after infection, very needful in all infectious and contagious times, and fit as well for the country as the city* (London: T. Leach, 1665), 1.

arise.¹¹¹

George Thomson promoted chemical remedies against the plague and competed against the Galenist's school of medicine. His works are more scientific in nature than those hawking potions. In *Loimologia*, Thomson attributed the discovery of medicines to the providence of God.¹¹² In *Loimotomia: The Pest Anatomized*, Thomson wrote about the difficulty of knowing when one first begins to have symptoms of the plague, and that God alone who is omniscient knows when one's illness begins, and "none but he that knows things *a priori*, can punctually discover that such a one carries about in him a mortal Arrow shot into his *precordia*."¹¹³ God is the first cause of all things and his providential arrows are experienced through secondary causes such as the corruption of the air by which plague victims are infected. Thomson also stated that it is "prudent Providence to stand upon our guard, and discreetly suspecting the worst, to fortify ourselves as well as possibly may be."¹¹⁴ To protect against the plague is to receive and exercise providentially given means for preserving life.

In writing about his treatment of the sick, Thomson recounted his own experience with the plague and the deaths of two of his colleagues. In his notes upon recovery, Thomson credited the loss of his friends, Dr. Joseph Dey and Dr. George Starkey, and the timing of their illness to divine providence:

It was a most unhappy malevolent juncture of things at that instant, that we should all three fall sick at the same time, neither of us being able to relieve each other; for, I am persuaded, had Divine Providence been pleased to have spared any one of us from the severe stroke of his indignation, we might have been at this day all three alive.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ T. D., *Food and physick for every householder*, 18.

¹¹² George Thomson, *Loimologia: A Consolatory Advice* (London, 1665), 11.

¹¹³ George Thomson, *Loimotomia: Or the Pest Anatomized: In These Following Particulars* (London: Rose and Crown, 1665), 52.

¹¹⁴ Thomson, *Loimotomia*, 53-54.

¹¹⁵ Thomson, *Loimotomia*, 97-98.

Nathaniel Hodges recounted how the city government “neglected not to add what assistances might be had from medicine.”¹¹⁶ In addition to this, he lauded the magistrates’ attention to raise funds to provide food for the sick and their efforts to bring food into the city to keep markets open as providential help from the Lord. In contrast, Hodges condemned the corruption and abuse of the “chemists and quacks . . . who spread their antidotes . . . and thrust into every hand some trash or other under the disguise of a pompous title.”¹¹⁷ Gadbury affirmed medicine “physick” and chemists, but protested “the practices of many, who . . . so impudently and falsely boast of their success and skill in physick, painting both posts and walls with their lying oracles in print: everyone one crying up his own stuff, for the elixir, or panacea, etc. and all but to delude the credulous multitude!”¹¹⁸ Though there were many such abuses, Gadbury’s critique of the medical profession could not be separated from his unusual view of celestial events as the cause of the plague.

In writing about the origin of the plague, Hodges declared God as the primary cause of the plague. He dismissed celestial causes and stated that he would observe natural causes of the plague such as can be discovered:

The sacred pages clearly and demonstratively prove, that the Almighty, by his authority, and at his pleasure, may draw the sword, or shoot the arrows of death; and a retrospective into times past, shows many convincing proofs of this terrible truth; and in times this contagion before us, the footsteps of an over-ruling power are very legible, especially so far as concerns his divine permission: But the great God’s purposes are secrets too awful for mortals to pry into, although we know that he punishes as a parent, and chides for our good, which makes it our duty to kiss the rod, and submit. But enough of this, lest I should be thought to invade another’s province: It is sufficient to the purpose of a physician to assign natural and obvious causes; and where such are discoverable, it is unworthy of him and the divine art he professes, as well as an affront to good sense, to have recourse to any other.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Hodges, *Loimologia*, 13.

¹¹⁷ Hodges, *Loimologia*, 21.

¹¹⁸ Gadbury, *London’s deliverance predicted*, iii.

¹¹⁹ Hodges, *Loimologia*, 31.

When it comes to the treatment of patients who were sick with the plague, Hodges encouraged physicians to “exhort the infected, that they have due regard to the Almighty Power, not only in confessing and seeking forgiveness for sin, but in imploring his blessing upon those remedies and means for recovery, which even the most skillful physician can prescribe.”¹²⁰ In this way, the attending physician not only sought to care for the bodies of the sick, but sought to care for their souls.

Providential Purposes in the Plague

Though divine judgment was the common understanding of God’s providential purposes for the plague, many other purposes were ascribed to the Great Plague of London. Interpretation of providential purposes must not be limited to the destruction of the wicked. Beza had previously pointed to a multiplicity of purpose of divine action, that “all things which are mentioned in the holy Scriptures, of the ministry of Angels not only of the plague, but also of famine and other calamities, both to destroy the wicked, and also to correct and exercise the good, doth bring unto us great profit, that we may learn both to fear and love God.”¹²¹ Though the providential purposes of God include judgment against sin, God is also working for the good of the saints.

A Plague to Refine

William Austin wrote about how God had used disease to accomplish his purposes: “Egyptian pest gave Hebrews liberty; who’d by the Assyrian pest too victory. David’s plague . . . made him found by penitence and tears. Could mortal eye reach its desire . . . we should from cursed bed of present fate discern how many blessings germinate.” Austin argued “In recompense of its strokes bruise and pain, chaff is to fly

¹²⁰ Hodges, *Loimologia*, 31.

¹²¹ Beza, *A Learned Treatise of the Plague*, 8.

and leave refined grain. Let's comfort take."¹²² Despite this, his writing revealed an unsteadiness as he vacillated between speaking highly of God's providence and a decrial of God's absence. He described God's severity as "the kindest grace,"¹²³ followed by "our soul's great shepherd, then, now seems to sleep, while murrain plays the wolf among the sheep."¹²⁴

In *Lamentatio Civitatis*, the anonymous author wrote about God's purifying work, referencing Hebrews 12:5-6: "This plague is God's purge, to make me more healthy in soul and body. In soul, for it is good to be afflicted, and those whom God loves he chastiseth. I hope it is God's rod not his sword to correct me, not to destroy me. His fire to purify, not to inflame and consume me."¹²⁵

Matthew Mead likewise presented the plague as a divine tool to remove sins from the nation. Seeing the plague as a direct consequence for particular sins, Mead argued that the removal of "the plague of our hearts" would bring recovery, as "the cause being removed, the effect will follow."¹²⁶ The remainder of his work is a jeremiad against the sins of the nation as he decried England's violence, division, and uncharitableness. He described his hope that the plague might serve to cure the hearts of sinners and bring transformation to the nation. Though Mead hoped for this outcome, testimony from the city reported a different story. One witness described the profane nature of many in the city during the plague: "In one house you might hear them roaring under the pangs of death, in the next tippling, whoring and belching out blasphemies against God; one house shut up with a red cross and 'Lord have mercy upon us!' the next open to all uncleanness

¹²² Austin, *The Anatomy of the Pestilence*, 79-80.

¹²³ Austin, *The Anatomy of the Pestilence*, 81.

¹²⁴ Austin, *The Anatomy of the Pestilence*, 104.

¹²⁵ Anonymous, *Lamentatio Civitatis*, 35.

¹²⁶ Mead, *Solomon's prescription for the removal of the pestilence*, 10.

and impiety, as if altogether insensible of the vengeance of Heaven.”¹²⁷

In *The Great Plague in London 1665*, Walter G. Bell offered additional commentary, stating, “Not all the horrors of the plague could purge humanity of its grossness, or destroy the vice and profligacy and crime inseparable from a large town.”¹²⁸ Similar comparisons are drawn by Daniel Defoe in his *Journal of the Plague Year*.¹²⁹

A Plague to Convert the Sinful

While the entirety of the city was not changed, the plague was not without an effect. Richard Baxter reported that great spiritual fruit that was born out of the ministry of “Silenc’d Ministers” as God had sent an “awakening Providence” to bring many to salvation. As many ministers had fled London, so also a group of Nonconformist ministers that included Thomas Vincent entered the city to minister to the sick and dying and fill the Anglican pulpits that had been abandoned. Baxter described the fruitfulness of their illegal ministry:

Those often heard them one day, who were sick the next, and quickly died. The face of death did so waken preachers and hearers, that the former exceeded themselves in lively fervent preaching; and the latter heard with a peculiar ardor and attention. And through the blessing of God, many were converted from their carelessness, impenitence, and youthful lusts and vanities; and religion took that hold on the people’s hearts, as could never afterward be overlooked.¹³⁰

Adding to Baxter’s testimony, Joseph Boyse reported in 1678 that many of those who received Vincent’s ministry during the plague years had gathered into a congregation under Vincent’s pastoral care which continued to that day.¹³¹

¹²⁷ An unidentified quote of Echard, quoted by Walter G. Bell in *The Great Plague in London 1665* (London: The Bodley Head, 1951), 223.

¹²⁸ Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 223.

¹²⁹ Daniel Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year* (New York: Dover, 2001), 172.

¹³⁰ Richard Baxter, *An abridgment of Mr. Baxter’s History of his life and times* (London: Printed for John Lawrence, 1702), 583.

¹³¹ Joseph Boyse, *Epitaph on Thomas Vincent*, 1678, MS 4275, fol. 84, London: British Library.

A Plague to Encourage Faith

In addition to the conversion of sinners, the plague was seen as an opportunity to grow in faith. Nonconformist Robert Tatnall, who had lost his place of ministry in the Great Ejection, wrote *An Antidote Against the Sinfull Palpitation of the Heart, or Fear of Death* to encourage faith in the time of plague. He called the people of London to lament and pray and called the saints to trust in the Lord. When the church is fearful, “Christ by their despondency hath the less honor.”¹³² Christ has delivered the church from the fear of death (Heb 2:15), and Tatnall expounded on his death and resurrection that guarantees the saint’s eternal life in glory: “What saint then dares fear death, that considers the unquestionable sufficiency of the value of Christ’s death, for the purchasing this great privilege for him that he should not fear death?”¹³³ Tatnall exhorted his readers to apprehend the promises of the gospel and the assurance of knowing that the Lord is good, to trust the Scriptures, and take refuge in Christ.

In anticipation of his own death from the plague, John Rawlet, who served as a chaplain at the home of John Pynsent, authored a letter to encourage his mother’s faith. In this letter, he counseled his mother to trust in the providences of God, appealing to her to “not to be immoderately afflicted with the providence of our heavenly Father in my removal out of this world.”¹³⁴ Instead of disagreeing with God’s will, he encouraged her to consider that “this providence as dark and sad as it seems, proceed[s] from infinite wisdom and goodness.”¹³⁵ In the face of death, he challenged her not to question God’s character or let one event shape her perception of God, reminding her of the mercy

¹³² Tatnall, *An Antidote Against the Sinfull Palpitation of the Heart*, iii.

¹³³ Tatnall, *An Antidote Against the Sinfull Palpitation of the Heart*, 25.

¹³⁴ John Rawlet, “A Consolatory Letter of that Reverend and Pious Man, Mr. Rowlett, the Author of *The Christian Monitor*, to his Mother, upon his Apprehension of Dying by the Plague,” in *A Brief Account of the Life of the Reverend Mr. John Rawlet, Author of The Christian Monitor . Together, With a Valuable Remain of His, never before Printed, viz. His Consolatory Letter to his Mother, Written on Occasion of his Apprehension of Dying by the Great Plague, 1665*, by Thomas Bray (London: W. Roberts, 1728), 4.

¹³⁵ Rawlet, “A Consolatory Letter,” 4.

“which you have had so full and frequent experience of all your days, and can you think hardly of any providences of that God who has ever manifested himself so good to you?”¹³⁶ He encouraged her to consider how she might encounter the goodness of God in his death:

Moreover through the blessing of God, I hope, this Providence may be very much to your advantage. Hereby you will have more opportunity and help to discover your own heart, how great your love was to any creature, how much of your comfort came purely from God, and what mistakes of carnality there were in it, and what strength your faith is of now it comes to the trial.¹³⁷

In considering death, he instructed her to consider all things in light of eternity, and that all will die whether it be of the plague or something else. Instead of anxiety, she should trust that in God’s providence her grief would be to a good purpose.¹³⁸

Rawlet concluded his letter with the resurrection hope they share in Christ: “I believe it is but a very little while before we that now part with some sadness for those we leave behind, shall all meet in the general assembly of saints, and be forever with the Lord and with one another; wherefore be comforted with these words.”¹³⁹ Ironically, Rawlet survived the plague and his letter was later discovered and published to encourage the faith of those who suffer bereavement.

A Plague to Glorify Christ

As the Puritans confessed the glory of God as the chief end of man, so also did they consider the glory of God to be the end of the plague. Thomas Blake, in *Eben-ezer*, exhorted plague survivors to glorify Christ: “What should they do that out-live such Providences? You shall see the fruit that would grow upon this root, ‘Kiss the Son lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way.’” In quoting Psalm 2, Blake argued that for those

¹³⁶ Rawlet, “A Consolatory Letter,” 5.

¹³⁷ Rawlet, “A Consolatory Letter,” 9-10.

¹³⁸ Rawlet, “A Consolatory Letter,” 12-13.

¹³⁹ Rawlet, “A Consolatory Letter,” 23-24.

who survived, Christ “expects higher thoughts of himself, and to be more esteemed by them.”¹⁴⁰ They are to fear the Lord, keep the Sabbath, and love and delight in Christ. This is “the fruit that this escaping remnant should bring forth, and is that which God expects from preserved ones in a day of slaughter.”¹⁴¹ Having survived the plague, Christ should be seen and known in his glory. “Let not a poor heart think it is at present in a capacity of valuing Christ according to all his worth and excellency, for that the soul cannot fully know.”¹⁴² Those who have survived the plague should be encouraged to press after treasuring and loving Christ more. The “slaughter shall terminate in the glory of Christ, in this respect: He shall be glorious in his Kingly power, he shall be owned as the Head, and Lord, and Law-giver,” and “when Christ shall be made glorious,” he alone will be exalted, and the world will be humbled at his feet.¹⁴³

Providence and the End of the Great Plague of London

How might the plague be removed from London? Many had prescribed the plague’s removal as being contingent upon the repentance of the people. In the anonymous broadsheet *London’s Lord Have Mercy Upon Us*, the author explained the plague’s ongoing presence: “Say to thyself, this plague may be removed, if I repent,” and “The plague among us is not yet removed, because that sin of us is still beloved.”¹⁴⁴ In this way, the plague’s continuation was credited to human sin, and its removal likewise was credited to repentance. Others credited the plague’s abatement to God alone. The author of *Lamentatio Civitatis* argued that London must not take pride and “bestow your deliverance on your ends, but on God’s honour, which hath cost the life of so many

¹⁴⁰ Blake, *Eben-Ezer*, 7.

¹⁴¹ Blake, *Eben-Ezer*, 9.

¹⁴² Blake, *Eben-Ezer*, 59.

¹⁴³ Blake, *Eben-Ezer*, 117-18.

¹⁴⁴ Anonymous, *London’s Lord Have Mercy Upon Us*.

thousand.”¹⁴⁵

In *Journal of the Plague Year*, Defoe described how human efforts had failed to bring about an end to the plague:

The contagion despised all medicine; death raged in every corner; and had it gone on as it did then, a few weeks more would have cleared the town of all, and everything that had a soul. Men everywhere began to despair; every heart failed them for fear; people were made desperate through the anguish of their souls, and the terrors of death sat in the very faces and countenances of the people. In that very moment when we might very well say, “Vain was the help of man,”—I say, in that very moment it pleased God with a most agreeable surprise, to cause the fury of it to abate even of itself.¹⁴⁶

Defoe considered state and public health measures to have ended in failure and credited God alone for removing the plague from them: “Nothing but the immediate finger of God, nothing but omnipotent power, could have done it.”¹⁴⁷ Defoe described the excitement, relief, and thanksgiving that filled the city as news of the plague’s abatement traveled through London:

It might have been perceived in their countenances that a secret surprise and smile of joy sat on everybody’s face. They shook one another by the hands in the streets, who would hardly go on the same side of the way with one another before. Where the streets were not too broad they would open their windows and call from one house to another, and ask how they did, and if they had heard the good news that the plague was abated. Some would return, when they said good news, and ask “What good news?” and when they answered that the plague was abated and the bills decreased almost two thousand, they would cry out, “God be praised!” and would weep aloud for joy, telling them they had heard nothing of it; and such was the joy of the people that it was, as it were, life to them from the grave.¹⁴⁸

It was the providence of God that had brought the plague to London, and it was the providence of God that brought the plague to its conclusion.

¹⁴⁵ Anonymous, *Lamentatio Civitatis*, 40.

¹⁴⁶ Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*, 184.

¹⁴⁷ Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*, 184.

¹⁴⁸ Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*, 184.

Findings

In review of this body of plague writings, Anglican clergy and Nonconformists alike consistently upheld Divine Providence as the primary cause of the Great Plague of London, and this was accompanied by the interpretation of the plague as an act of God's judgment for sin. This unity, however, did not extend into secondary causes as there was a diversity of interpretations. Many of these secondary causes (celestial events, corruption of the blood, air, or soil, etc.) were proven incorrect as the plague is no longer understood to be an "unaccountable disease,"¹⁴⁹ but is known to have been caused by the bacillus *Yersinia pestis* and carried by fleas.¹⁵⁰ In this way, many plague responses were grounded on faulty premises.

In addition, an over-contextualized reading of Scripture also served to misshape the plague response, as promises specific to Israel were directly applied to England. For example, promises of healing the land (2 Chr 7:14) and protection from pestilence (Ps 91) were rooted in covenantal promises God had given to the nation of Israel (Exod 15:26; Deut 7:15). Without this unique covenant relationship, these promises could not be appropriated by the church in London as they were intended for Israel and fulfilled by Christ.

When it came to interpreting the plague as judgment for particular sins, these interpretations were overly narrow and failed the test of time. If the plague was divine judgment for particular sins, with repentance as the prescription to bring about the plague's removal, such diagnoses ultimately failed as the plague indeed concluded while those sins continued. In contrast, interpretations with specific biblical warrant continue to serve the church, such as Boghurst's interpretation of all disease as a consequence of sin arising from mankind's fall in Genesis 3. In this way, though the plague was a

¹⁴⁹ Shaw, *The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness*, ii.

¹⁵⁰ Paul Slack, *The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 7.

consequence of sin for fallen humanity, it was not a plague given to purge particular sins from the nation of England.

Those who viewed the plague as judgment alone characterized God's providence as vengeful, while those with a broader view of Divine Providence observed mercy in God's purposes. Those whose view of secondary causes was restricted to demonic workings had a limited view of God's presence and power, while those with a broad view of God's providential purposes observed his presence, power, and love as he used the plague to accomplish his purposes. Those who can only see suffering as judgment upon sin were censorious toward sufferers, while those with a wide view of God's providence observed many purposes in divine workings that bring glory to Christ. Similarly, the characterization of Christians suffering under the plague as having insufficient faith or suffering due to their sin has modern parallels with charismatic faith healing movement. Finally, those who emphasized secondary causes as the source of the plague found it "very bitter." In response to this, Thomas Brooks offered wise pastoral counsel in calling for sufferers to lift their eyes beyond secondary causes to recognize the hand of God and trust the goodness of his providence.¹⁵¹

The impact of these convictions and interpretations of providence and secondary causes shaped the plague response of many throughout the Great Plague of London, and this will be observed as church leadership and pastoral ministry is considered in the following chapters.

¹⁵¹ Brooks, *A Heavenly Cordial*, 7-8.

CHAPTER 3
THE IMPACT OF THE PLAGUE ON
CHURCH LEADERSHIP

This chapter will survey the impact of the plague upon church leadership and the pastoral convictions of those who ministered in London during the plague. Distinctions will be studied between the pastoral convictions of those who remained to minister in the city and those who fled to escape the plague. Finally, the consequences faced by both groups will be surveyed.

The Ecclesial Landscape of London in 1665

A general understanding of London's Anglican churches and Nonconformist conventicles is necessary context for understanding what unfolded during the Great Plague of London.

The Churches of London

In 1665, there were 130 churches inside the walls and around the city. Ninety-seven parishes were within the old city walls, and sixteen were immediately outside. Twelve more parishes were organized in the outer parts of London, and then there were the five adjacent parishes of Westminster, and at least ten private chapels.¹ London's bishop Herbert Humphrey had oversight of the churches of the city, while Gilbert Sheldon, who served as the Archbishop of Canterbury, had oversight over the Anglican bishops. Among the offices in each parish, a rector led the church as priest, a curate served as his assistant, and church wardens served in a diaconal role to care for the

¹ J. F. D. Shrewsbury, *A History of the Bubonic Plague in the British Isles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 456-58.

property and maintain order in services. In addition to these roles, a clerk or secretary was responsible to record the marriages, births, and deaths in that parish.

The Conventicles of London

In response to the Act of Uniformity of 1662, at least fifty-five clergy of London's 130 churches resigned or were forced out of their places of ministry, while the remaining clergy conformed to the state's demands.² Many ejected ministers continued in pastoral ministry despite the persecution of the Clarendon Code. Congregations that did not conform to Anglican liturgy were called conventicles and declared illegal in Parliament's Conventicle Act in March of 1664. The size of private religious gatherings that did not submit to the Church of England's liturgy was restricted to no more than four persons in attendance above the age of sixteen, which still allowed for Nonconformists to hold private family worship with the young children in their households. Any gathering of five or more persons above the age of sixteen was subject to a fine of five pounds or three months imprisonment for the first offense, with penalties doubling for a second offense. A third violation of the Conventicle Act resulted in a fine of one hundred pounds or seven years of indentured servitude in one of the colonies.³

When it comes to London's conventicles, records are more obscure due to the illegal nature of their gatherings and the absence of official church records until later decades. Thomas Vincent and Thomas Doolittle ministered together, and their dissenting congregation had a building constructed that became known as the meeting house of Hand-Alley at Bishopsgate-Street. After the fire of London, it was temporarily seized for the use of the parish church that had lost their building in the great fire of London.⁴

² Walter G. Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665* (London: The Bodley Head, 1951), 223.

³ Henry W. Clark, *History of English Nonconformity from Wiclif to the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1965), 2:53-54.

⁴ Walter Wilson, *The History and Antiquities of Dissenting Churches and Meeting Houses in London, Westminster, and Southwark* (London: R. Edwards, 1808), 1:399.

Edward Turner also ministered at a conventicle that later became Moravian Chapel at Fetter Lane.⁵ Two brothers, Robert and Henry Danvers, led a conventicle in Cheapside. John Allin served at a conventicle in Southwark.⁶

Many ministers moved to London after their ejection in 1662 as the city provided opportunities for new employment and further ministry. The crowded city made it more difficult for authorities to discover the illegal conventicles, whereas they were more easily targeted in smaller communities. Among the ejected ministers who moved to the city and resumed ministry were William Carslake, Robert Chambers, Abraham Janeway, Stephen Ford, Robert Franklin, and John Mortimer. Ford had raised up a conventicle in Oxfordshire, but after threats of murder, fled to London where he preached throughout the plague.⁷ Chambers moved to Ireland, but after becoming involved in political intrigue, he had fled to London and changed his name to John Grimes. He also preached in London during the plague. Robert Franklin was ejected from Westhall, Suffolk, and he moved to London and served as a private chaplain to one Mr. Eastland. Franklin survived the plague and continued in ministry after the fire, leading a conventicle in Blue Anchor Lane.⁸

The Changing Demographics

When the plague arrived at London, some project that the population of the city was about 500,000. The exodus from the city reduced London's population by about 200,000, leaving 300,000 remaining in the city.⁹ Those who remained stayed for varying

⁵ Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 227.

⁶ A. Lloyd Moote and Dorothy C. Moote, *The Great Plague: The Story of London's Most Deadly Year* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2006), 306.

⁷ Wilson, *The History and Antiquities of Dissenting Churches and Meeting Houses*, 1:472.

⁸ A. G. Matthews, *Calamy Revised: Being a Revision of Edmund Calamy's Account of the Ministers and Others Ejected and Silenced, 1660-2* (1934l repr., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 212.

⁹ John Graunt, *Natural and Political Observations Made on the Bills of Mortality* (London, 1665).

reasons; as many did not have the means to leave, their livelihood depended upon staying, or they were bound by duty and conscience to remain in their vocational roles. Among those who remained in the city, one in three perished from the plague. Approximately 68,590 plague deaths were recorded in 1665 alone.¹⁰ In addition, plague deaths continued into 1666. Walter Bell wrote, “It is unlikely to exaggerate if the actual loss be put at 110,000,” as the high mortality was unexplainable by other causes, and no full records were kept of the thousands brought to burial pits by the dead-carts.¹¹

The Plague Response of Church and State

Given the nature of the Church of England as a State church, the civil and ecclesial response to the plague cannot be untangled from one another. Funds and provisions from the State were distributed to the sick and the poor by parish, and this work was administered by the church. Public health orders required examiners to be appointed who then, on pain of imprisonment, were responsible for recording which homes had been visited by the plague, painting the red cross and “Lord have mercy” upon their doors, and enforcing quarantine upon those households. Constables were required to appoint two watchmen, one for the day and the other for the evening, who were responsible for guarding that home and preventing entrance and exit until the quarantine concluded. Chirurgeons (or surgeons), along with designated searchers, were responsible to inspect the bodies of the dead to discern the cause of death. This information was passed to church secretaries who recorded the death and cause of death in the parish register and then reported those figures to the city government. In this way, the parishes served as health districts. The death tolls were compiled and published regularly as *Bills of Mortality* and posted throughout the city during the plague. This baseline of parish

¹⁰ The Company of Parish Clerks of London, *A generall Bill for this present year, ending the 19 of December 1665 according to the Report made to the KINGES most Excellent Majesty* (London, 1665).

¹¹ Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 325.

operations continued to be led by city government and church officers whether or not clergy were present to continue worship services.

For the conventicles of Nonconformists, these illegal gatherings by nature were detached from public health measures. They did not bear the responsibility of enforcing public health orders in each parish, and neither did they receive public aid to administer to the community. Instead, along with the rest of London's population, the deaths of Nonconformists were recorded in parish records according to their geography, but they usually were separated in burial. Being barred from burial in London's churchyards, Nonconformists were buried in other burial grounds such as Bunhill fields where John Bunyan was later buried.

The Anglican Response to the Plague

The majority of London's clergy fled from London while few remained to care for their congregations. Though bishops called for clergy to return to their churches, they were largely unheeded.

The Plague Flight of London's Clergy

As the wealthier citizenry evacuated the city, a great number of London's clergy joined the exodus. John Meriton, the rector of St. Michael Cornhill, compared himself with those who left, describing himself as one of the few who had stayed at his post throughout the plague.¹² Richard Baxter recounted that "when the plague grew hot . . . the ministers in the city churches fled, and left their flocks in the time of their extremity."¹³ Thomas Vincent likewise reported that the ministers of London moved out of the city, "leaving the greatest part of their flock without food or physic [medicine], in

¹² Ian L. O'Neill, "Meriton, John (1630/31?-1704), Church of England clergyman," in *ODNB*.

¹³ Richard Baxter, *An abridgment of Mr. Baxter's History of his life and times* (London: Printed for John Lawrence, 1702), 583.

the time of their greatest need.”¹⁴ The great majority of London’s pulpits had been vacated and left empty. In writing about the void left by the fugitive clergy, Walter Bell noted that “locked doors and desolate altars were deplorable witnesses of forsaken duty; but others were open, and the people remaining at liberty crowded into them for worship.”¹⁵ While the majority of the city’s population remained, this was not true for the pulpits of London.

In addition to plague flight, the plague itself robbed congregations of their ministers, and the congregation at St. Michael Bassishaw experienced both. After the pulpit was vacated in 1662 with the Great Ejection, Francis Hall was appointed to serve as rector. He ministered there from 1662-65 but fled when the plague arrived in London. A substitute was appointed to serve in his stead, dying with his wife and three children that September. Hall finally returned to St. Michael Bassishaw in 1670 and demanded back payment of tithes. Because “he had not visited the parish or performed any duty therein during those years,” the congregation and vestry rejected his request.¹⁶

John Pritchett, the vicar at St. Giles Cripplegate, was one of the first to leave the city. He handed care over to his curate Thomas Luckeyne, who helped care for the church in Pritchett’s absence with the help of Nonconformist clergy.¹⁷ Bell observed that “it was impossible that one man, however willing, could in the fearful conditions of Cripplegate minister to the whole of that large parish, bring consolation to the sick and shrive¹⁸ the dying.”¹⁹ As Luckeyne was unable to meet all the needs, a chaplain came to

¹⁴ Thomas Vincent, *God’s Terrible Voice in the City* (London: George Calvert, 1667), 28.

¹⁵ Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 221.

¹⁶ W. B. Passmore, “A History of the Church and Rectory of St. Michael Bassishaw,” in *The Home Counties Magazine*, vol. 2, ed. William J. Hardy (London: F. E. Robinson, 1900), 140.

¹⁷ Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 148-49, 178.

¹⁸ To shrive is to hear confessions and pronounce forgiveness.

¹⁹ Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 149.

assist with worship services, preaching, and visiting the sick. Even then, the need was overwhelming. Three of the church wardens died from the plague. In addition, Nicholas Pyne, the parish clerk who recorded the deaths in the register at Cripplegate, succumbed to the plague with his wife.²⁰ Richard Smyth recorded Pyne's wife's death in his obituary.²¹

Samuel Pepys noted that his pastor, Mr. Mills, was quick to flee from London, leaving his church at St. Olaves Hart Street. When Pepys heard that Mills had returned after the plague abated, Pepys decided to return to church with his wife for the first time together since the plague, on February 4, 1667. Pepys wrote that he expected "a great excuse for his leaving the parish before any body went, and now staying till all are come home; but he made but a very poor and short excuse, and a bad sermon."²²

Symon Patrick is a unique example of a pastor who left London for Northamptonshire, but after two months, he reversed course and returned to care for his flock at St. Paul's Cathedral in Covent Garden. Returning to London in July 1665, Patrick wrote, "I resolved to commit myself to the care of God in the discharge of my duty."²³ Patrick did not sequester himself but is described as performing "all of the offices of his religion, visiting the sick, and burying at night those who had died of diseases other than the plague."²⁴

William Sancroft, the Dean of St. Paul Cathedral, fled London and moved to

²⁰ Moote and Moote, *The Great Plague*, 188.

²¹ Richard Smyth, *The Obituary of Richard Smyth, Secondary of the Poultry Compter, London: Being a Catalogue of All Such Persons as He Knew in their Life: Extending from A.D. 1627 to A.D. 1674*, ed. Sir Henry Ellis (London: J. B. Nichols and Son, 1848), 65.

²² Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys: The Great Plague of London and The Great Fire of London, 1665-1666* (Oxford: Benediction Classics, 2020), 148.

²³ Symon Patrick, *The Works of Symon Patrick DD, including his Autobiography*, ed. Alexander Taylor (London, 1858), 9:442-43.

²⁴ Wm. Durrant Cooper, "Notices of the Last Great Plague, 1665-6," in *Archaeologia, Or, Miscellaneous Tracts Relating to Antiquity*, vol. 37, by Society of Antiquaries of London (London: J. B. Nichols and Sons, 1857), 10.

Kent, where he attempted to keep informed of ministry in the city through correspondence.²⁵ Reports of ministry at St. Paul’s were forwarded to Sancroft by Stephen Bing. In addition, London’s remaining clergy updated him on vacancies in London’s pulpits.²⁶ In a September 20, 1665, letter to Bishop Henchman, Sancroft reported that he had traveled to his brother Thomas Sancroft’s home in Fresenfield, Suffolk, “from whence I intend not to stir, till either it shall please God in mercy to open us a safe return to the Citie, or your lordship make special command [to] remove me.”²⁷ John Evelyn’s diary recorded that Sancroft preached a sermon *Coram Rege* (before the face of the king) on March 2, 1666, but he did not specify whether this happened in London or at a church outside the city.²⁸

Table 1 is a partial listing of the clergy who fled the city.

Table 1. Plague flight of London’s clergy

<i>Name</i>	<i>Office</i>	<i>Parish</i>
Cross		
Hall, Francis	Rector	St. Michael Bassishaw
Mills		St. Olaves Hart Street
Patrick, Symon	Rector	St. Paul’s Cathedral, Covent Garden
Pritchett, John	Rector	St. Giles Cripplegate
Sancroft, William	Dean	St. Paul’s Cathedral, Covent Garden

In addition to these names, records show that the pulpits at St. Anne and St. Agnes Aldersgate, St. Booth Aldgate, St. Helen Bishopsgate, Allhallows-the Great, St. Katherine Creechurch, and St. Katherine Coleman were filled by Nonconformist

²⁵ Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 224.

²⁶ Moote and Moote, *The Great Plague*, 320.

²⁷ William Sancroft, “Letter from Sancroft to Henchman,” September 20, 1665, MS. Tanner 45, fol. 28, British Library, London.

²⁸ John Evelyn, *The Diary of John Evelyn*, vol. 3, *Kalendarium: 1650-1672*, ed. E. S. de Beer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 431-32.

preachers during the plague year. The brevity of this list does not correspond to the actual numbers of absent clergy as many sources testified to the absence of the majority of the city's clergy. Instead, this list illustrates the void in church record keeping, which is partially due to the destruction of the majority of London's churches in the Great Fire of 1667.

Shepherds Who Remained

Symon Patrick's correspondence reported the deaths of several of London's ministers who had remained. Among these were Peachhill, Mandrill, Austen, Stone, Bastwick,²⁹ Throgmorton,³⁰ and Stillingfleet.³¹ Walter Bell's plague history drew from Patrick's writings and other sources, and he reported the names of nineteen clergy who remained in the city.

In addition to the parish clergy who remained, there were chaplains who stayed in London to minister in contexts outside of the church. One of these was a chaplain by the name of Bastick who ministered in the prisons and prison ships of the city, and he succumbed to the plague.³² Among the Nonconformists imprisoned at this time were Richard Flavel, the father of John Flavel, who had been imprisoned at Newgate where he succumbed to the plague. John Bunyan was also imprisoned outside of London in Bedford, where he and his family were spared from the plague.

Table 2 shows London's clergy who remained in the city and died from the plague. They were numbered with the martyrs, having sacrificed their lives for the sake of gospel ministry and love for their congregations.³³

²⁹ Also spelled Bastick.

³⁰ Also spelled Throckmorton.

³¹ Symon Patrick to Mrs. Gauden, September 30, 1665, quoted in Cooper, "Notices of the Last Great Plague, 1665-6," 11.

³² Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 190.

³³ Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 225-27.

Table 2. The Church of England's plague martyrs

<i>Name</i>	<i>Office</i>	<i>Place of Ministry</i>	<i>Death</i>	<i>Source</i>
Austen, Samuel	Rector	St. Mary Staining	Sept-Oct 1665	Patrick ³⁴
Bastwick	Chaplain	Poultry Compter		Patrick ²⁶⁰
Blemell	Minister	All Hollows	January 1, 1666	Smyth ³⁵
Harrison, Thomas	Rector	St. Christopher-le-Stocks	October 13, 1665	Smyth ³⁶
Knightley	Curate	St. Saviour's Southwark		Bell ³⁷
Long, Timothy	Rector	St. Alphage London Wall	September 14, 1665	Hennessy ³⁸
Mandrill	Lecturer	St. Benet Fink		Patrick ²⁶⁰
Peachhill	Lecturer	St. Clement		Patrick ²⁶⁰
Pechell, John	Curate	St. Mary Aldermanbury	July 21, 1665	Smyth ³⁹
Raworth, Francis	Minister	St. Leonard Shoreditch	September 15, 1665	Smyth ⁴⁰
Stillingfleet		St. Andrew's Holborn		Patrick ⁴¹
Stone	Minister	Alphage		Patrick ⁴²
Throckmorton	Curate	St. George's Southwark		Patrick ⁴³
Wakeman, Edward	Rector	St. Matthew Friday Street	Nov 1665	Smyth ⁴⁴
Philipps	Priest	St. Michael Bassishaw	Sept 1665	Patrick ⁴⁵

³⁴ Symon Patrick to Mrs. Gauden, September 30, 1665, quoted in Cooper, "Notices of the Last Great Plague, 1665-6," 11.

³⁵ Smyth, *The Obituary of Richard Smyth*, 71.

³⁶ Smyth, *The Obituary of Richard Smyth*, 69.

³⁷ Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 226.

³⁸ George Leyden Hennessy, *Novum Repertorium Ecclesiasticum Parochiale Londinense*, vol. 1 (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1898), 16.

³⁹ Smyth, *The Obituary of Richard Smyth*, 64.

⁴⁰ Smyth, *The Obituary of Richard Smyth*, 67.

⁴¹ Symon Patrick to Mrs. Gauden, September 30, 1665, quoted in Cooper, "Notices of the Last Great Plague, 1665-6," 11.

⁴² Symon Patrick to Mrs. Gauden, September 30, 1665, quoted in Cooper, "Notices of the Last Great Plague, 1665-6," 11.

⁴³ Symon Patrick to Mrs. Gauden, September 30, 1665, quoted in Cooper, "Notices of the Last Great Plague, 1665-6," 11.

⁴⁴ Smyth, *The Obituary of Richard Smyth*, 70.

⁴⁵ Symon Patrick to Mrs. Gauden, September 30, 1665, quoted in Cooper, "Notices of the Last Great Plague, 1665-6," 11.

Walter Bell reported that among the nineteen recorded clergy who remained in the city, eleven fell victim to the plague, and only eight survived.⁴⁶ Bell’s record is expanded upon in table 3 below.

Table 3. London’s clergy who survived the plague

<i>Name</i>	<i>Office</i>	<i>Church</i>	<i>Source</i>
Boreman, Robert	Rector	St. Giles-in-the-Fields	Smith ⁴⁷
Clark, William	Vicar	Stepney	Bell ⁴⁸
Edwards, Richard	Rector	St. Anne and St. Agnes	Bell ⁴⁹
Horton, Thomas	Vicar	St. Helen Bishopsgate	Bell ⁵⁰
Kingston, Richard	Preacher	St. James Clerken-well and St. Paul’s	Kingston ⁵¹
Lane, Peter	Rector	St. Benet Paul’s Wharf	Bell ⁵²
Lewys, Francis	Preacher	St. Botolph Bishopsgate	Moote ⁵³
Reynolds, Edward	Bishop	Westminster	Reynolds ⁵⁴
Meriton, John	Rector	St. Michael Cornhill	Dunn ⁵⁵
Outram, William	Rector	St. Mary Woolnoth	Bell ⁵⁶

⁴⁶ David J. Appleby, “From Ejection to Toleration in England, 1662-89,” in *The Great Ejection of 1662: Its Antecedents, Aftermath, and Ecumenical Significance*, ed. Alan P. F. Sell (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012), 92.

⁴⁷ Julia J. Smith, “Boreman, Robert (d. 1675), Church of England clergyman,” in *ODNB*.

⁴⁸ Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 226.

⁴⁹ Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 226-27.

⁵⁰ Stephen Wright, “Horton, Thomas (d. 1673), college head,” in *ODNB*.

⁵¹ Richard Kingston, *Pillulæ pestilenciales, or A Spiritual receipt for cure of the plague delivered in a sermeon preach’d in St. Paul’s Church London, in the mid’st of our late sore visitation* (London: W. G. for Edw. Brewster, 1665).

⁵² *Vestry minutes of 1665* from St. Benet Paul’s Wharf in Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 226.

⁵³ Letter from Francis Lewys to Dean Sancroft, Oct. 25, 1665, Harleian MS 3785, fol. 37r, quoted in Moote and Moote, *The Great Plague*, 320.

⁵⁴ Edward Reynolds, *Being a Day of Solemn Humiliation for the Continuing Pestilence* (London: Tho. Ratcliffe, 1666).

⁵⁵ Samuel Dunn, *Memoirs of the Seventy-Five Eminent Divines Whose Discourses Form the Morning Exercises at Cripplegate, St. Giles in the Fields, and in Southwark: with an Outline of a Sermon from each Author* (London: Tyler & Reed, 1844), 210.

⁵⁶ Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 226.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Office</i>	<i>Church</i>	<i>Source</i>
Pearson, Richard	Curate	St. Bride's	Moote ⁵⁷
Tatnall, Robert		St. John Evangelist	Tatnall ⁵⁸

Among those in this list, there are several points of interest. Horton is unique in that though he had been ejected in 1662, he afterward conformed and was given a place of ministry in London.⁵⁹ Edwards served in two parishes, and he willingly received help from the Nonconformist William Dyer. Though Edwards was sickened by the plague, he recovered and continued in ministry.⁶⁰ Boreman served as the rector of St. Giles-in-the-Fields. Though he had a reputation for being unpopular, it is recorded that he stayed at his post and served with courage.⁶¹ Reynolds was not from London but served as the bishop of Norwich. He visited London during the plague and preached at Westminster Church.⁶²

The Efforts of Anglican Leadership

Gilbert Sheldon, the Archbishop of Canterbury, remained at Lambeth Palace throughout the plague and attempted to coordinate care for the city. The biographer Vernon Staley reported that “Sheldon, true to his consecration vow, with heroic courage, remained faithfully at his post. Not only did he never leave Lambeth, though victims were dying in numbers at the very gates of the palace, but he ministered to their needs of his own wealth.”⁶³ Sheldon was known for writing letters and raising significant funds to

⁵⁷ Moote and Moote, *The Great Plague*, 306.

⁵⁸ Robert Tatnall, *An Antidote Against the Sinfull Palpitation of the Heart* (London: J. Hayes, 1665).

⁵⁹ Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 226.

⁶⁰ Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 226-27.

⁶¹ Julia J. Smith, “Boreman, Robert (d. 1675), Church of England clergyman,” in *ODNB*.

⁶² Reynolds, *Being a Day of Solemn Humiliation for the Continuing Pestilence*.

⁶³ Vernon Staley, *The Life and Times of Gilbert Sheldon* (London: Wells Gardner, Darton, 1913), 158.

provide relief and charitable help throughout the crisis. Though he remained in the city, his ministry was more administrative and financial. While his efforts to meet physical needs are not to be discounted, he was unable to fill the pulpits of London, and there is no indication that he himself preached in the city. In a previous plague outbreak in 1638, Sheldon had moved away from the city where he was serving, having been granted permission to retain his position though absent by the dean of Gloucester.⁶⁴ Sheldon's departure in 1638 stands in stark contradiction to his call for London's clergy to remain or return. This raises the question as to whether his call was duplicitous or whether his convictions had changed over time.

In addition to Sheldon, Humphrey Henchman, the Bishop of London, remained in the city at the episcopal palace of London House on Aldersgate Street.⁶⁵ He reported to Lord Arlington that while "most of his own officers had deserted him . . . the sober clergy remained," and "attendance at public worship had greatly increased."⁶⁶ The plague created a ministerial crisis as those available to serve congregations were few, while the needs of ministry had multiplied. Henchman warned the clergy of London who had fled that if they did not return, they would be replaced, but no one heeded his warning or returned. Paul Slack recorded that "the bishop of London was unable to persuade sufficient pastors to stay in London in 1665."⁶⁷ In addition, some of the clergy who remained in the city refused to carry out their duties and minister to the sick and dying. Being unable to bring about pastoral care by calling on clergy's sense of pastoral responsibility or commanding their obedience, ministry became increasingly mercenary

⁶⁴ Anonymous, *Dispensation for non-residence granted by the dean and chapter of Gloucester to Dr. Sheldon by reason of the plague, 27 Jun 1638*, MS. Tanner 26, fol. 48, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

⁶⁵ Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 224.

⁶⁶ Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 225.

⁶⁷ Paul Slack, *The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 286.

as parishes had to make special payments for clergy to visit and pray with the sick.⁶⁸

In addition to HENCHMAN and Sheldon's voices, peers called London's fugitive clergy to return, but to no avail. One London priest identified by the initials J. W. published an anonymous pamphlet entitled *A Friendly Letter to the Flying Clergy*, in which he appealed to the clergy who left to return or resign. He cited plague instructions from a prior bishop of Exeter, which forbade clergy from plague flight:

We, saith he, are 'not our own but our peoples, and are charged with all 'their souls, which to hazard by absence, is to lose our own: We must love our lives but not when they are Rivals with our souls, or with others; Its better to be dead than to be negligent or faithless: All soules must not willfully be neglected because some are contagiously sick: this is the time when good counsel is most seasonable and needful; now then, to run away from a necessary and publick good to avoid a doubtful and private evil, is to run into a worse evil then we would avoid.⁶⁹

He argued that they were not to flee from the danger of the plague, but instead to "love to live to the good of the church." He considered that giving a poor example to the congregation by fearful flight was far more harmful than whatever benefit could be received by the church by their staying alive.⁷⁰

In review of the behavior of London's clergy, Walter Bell described this season as a failure for London's churches and an indictment against those who had replaced the ejected clergy in 1662:

The City incumbents as a body failed in their mission, their moral fervour was at its lowest ebb; and little wonder. At the Great Ejectment of 1662, fifty-five of the clergy of City parishes alone surrendered their offices rather than submit in matters of conscience. Many of these were among the most earnest and devout of Christ's servants in the Church's ministry. Pluralists and placemen crowded to accept the vacant livings, and they absented themselves from London with the first when the Plague invaded its streets.⁷¹

Bell charged that the responsibility for the abandonment of positions of

⁶⁸ Slack, *The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England*, 286.

⁶⁹ J. W., *A Friendly Letter to the Flying Clergy Wherein is Humbly Requested and Modestly Challenged the Cause of their Flight* (London, 1665), 2.

⁷⁰ J. W., *A Friendly Letter to the Flying Clergy*, 2.

⁷¹ Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 223.

ministry was not to be laid with the archbishop or bishops of the Anglican Church, but rather that the blame was to be rightly laid upon the parochial clergy.⁷² While Sheldon and Henchman remained at their posts as bishops and called for shepherds to care for the city, they were largely unable to bring about the pastoral care that was needed. In contrast to this, for the clergy who did remain, there was great gratitude. Even Thomas Vincent commended the Anglican clergy who remained with their congregations, stating that “those who did stay out of choice and duty deserve true honour.”⁷³

Critique of Fugitive Clergy

Public criticism and anger burned hot toward the shepherds who fled the city. Multiple books and pamphlets were published and distributed condemning those who fled. These writings shared Sheldon and Henchman’s convictions on pastoral responsibility and condemned the fugitive shepherds for abandoning their flocks in a time of danger.

Medela Pestilentia

This work by Richard Kephale addressed multiple questions of practical theology. First, Kephale cited Bishop Hall of Exeter’s discourse which prohibited plague flight, previously cited in *A Friendly Letter to the Flying Clergy*. Clergy must not place the souls of the church at risk by leaving them in time of plague. The illness of some does not mean that the souls of the entire church must be neglected. Instead, the time of plague is a great opportunity for ministry, and therefore the minister must remain with the flock in order to counsel, encourage, and warn them against danger.⁷⁴

⁷² Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 224

⁷³ Vincent, *God’s Terrible Voice in the City*, 28.

⁷⁴ Richard Kephale, *Medela Pestilentia: wherein is contained several theological queries concerning the plague, with approved antidotes, signes and symptoms: also an exact method for curing that epidemical distemper, humbly presented to the Right Honourable and Right Worshipful the lord mayor and sheriffs of the city of London* (London: J. C., 1665), 29.

Kephale also rationalized preventing those in eminent positions from placing themselves in harm's way, likening them to King David's soldiers preventing him from joining them in battle in 2 Samuel 21:17. If a suitable substitute may be found to care for the church, then one may leave the church while entrusting its care to another.⁷⁵ Though some may find a substitute and depart, it is God's providence that sets one in his calling, and ministers "must in their places expose themselves to danger, for performing the work which by vertue of their place belongeth unto them" and "abide in cities, and other places diseased or Infected with contagious Diseases . . . to instruct, direct, comfort, and encourage the people under their charge."⁷⁶ The shepherd must not leave the church without care, and shepherds must remain with their people in times of sickness.

A Friendly Letter to the Flying Clergy

The anonymous author identified by the initials J. W. called for London's clergy to return. He argued that according to Romans 12:7, the minister should serve and the teacher should teach, and no one should forsake his calling even in times of plague. As shepherds of the flock, they must continue to stand watch over the sheep, being "ready to die for the Cause of Christ, with Saint Paul" and to "comfort the feeble-minded, and to support the weak," according to 1 Thessalonians 5:14.⁷⁷ As they have been given the duty of *Curam Animarum* (the cure of souls), and they must not "betray the truth out of fear" and leave souls untended. In contrast to those who fled, he concluded by describing himself, stating that "I glory in this, that God hath given me courage to execute my Office, notwithstanding the great mortalitie that is in this parish where I am an unworthie Minister."⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Anonymous, *Medela Pestilentiae*, 32.

⁷⁶ Anonymous, *Medela Pestilentiae*, 33.

⁷⁷ J. W. *A Friendly Letter to the Flying Clergy*, 1.

⁷⁸ J. W. *A Friendly Letter to the Flying Clergy*, 4-5.

The Shepherds Lasher Lash'd

In one page of anonymous verse attacking the fugitive clergy, entitled *The Shepherds Lasher Lash'd, Or a Confutation of the FUGITIVES Vindication*, the author presented a brief summary of what appears to be a defense for leaving the city and then thoroughly prosecuted his case against them. There is little recorded by way of justification for the clergy who had left their congregations, but this work gives a slight sense of the argumentation provided by those who fled the city. From the voice of those who left London is the question, "If we go away, what's that to you?" This hearkened from John 21:23, with the intended response of conveying that it was inappropriate for the people to question their flight, as it was inappropriate for the apostle Peter to question Christ's plan for the apostle John's life. This was then followed with three points of argumentation. First, "charity begins at home," and one's household must have priority. The second reason provided is that because of the hardness of their congregation's hearts, they were free to depart. The final reason given was the emptiness of their churches.⁷⁹ By way of refutation, an author identified by the initials J. B. gave a searing rebuttal and condemned the clergy for abandoning souls to hell without hope. Instead of detaching the pastoral office from one's home, J. B. asserted that "the pastor's people is his home," likening him to a father, a watchman, or a nurse who must stand by his duty for better or for worse. He compared the fugitive clergy to soldiers who would be hanged for fleeing the enemy. Alluding to Ezekiel 33, he wrote of the responsibility of the watchman to warn the people or otherwise incur bloodguilt and likened the forsaking of one's flock to murder. Instead of fleeing, they are to "stay in the midst of Death, To do their duty."⁸⁰

A Pulpit to Let

This anonymous page of verse is perhaps the most scathing of all the critiques.

⁷⁹ J. B., *The Shepherds Lasher Lash'd, Or a Confutation of the Fugitives Vindication* (London, 1665), 1.

⁸⁰ J. B., *The Shepherds Lasher Lash'd*, 1.

Beginning with Zechariah 11:17, the author pronounced woe upon the clergy who left London. The author accused them of leaving wolves or lions to feed the flock. He quoted Luke 10:2 to describe the city, in that “the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.” The clergy who remained in the city are then praised for following Christ’s example in John 10. Those who fled are the hirelings of John 10:11 who abandon the flock to danger, but those who remained are faithful shepherds who imitate Christ’s example as the Good Shepherd. Going beyond this, the author made remaining with the flock a test of orthodoxy while accusing those who fled of apostasy. In closing, the author commended those who remained as being steady like the stars in the sky: “The church reserves her better angels still which she embraces; for, in vain she cares for wandering Planets, that has fixed Starres.”⁸¹ This work was recounted by both Thomas Vincent and Daniel Defoe. Vincent wrote about “finding pamphlets flung about the streets, of pulpits to be let,” and this served to provoke him and several others to take action in response to this need.⁸²

On the Nonconformist side, Thomas Vincent presented possible reasons for why London’s clergy might have left the city. Perhaps it was because they were seeking out church members who had left the city before them, or “possibly they might think God was now preaching to the city, and what need their preaching?”⁸³ He then dismissed these as true possibilities and condemned their flight, characterizing it as fleeing from God himself: “Did not the thunder of God’s voice affrighten their guilty consciences and make them fly away, lest a bolt from heaven should fall upon them, and spoil their preaching for the future . . . and therefore they would reserve themselves till the people had less need of them.”⁸⁴ Vincent was convinced that there was a severe disconnect between those

⁸¹ Anonymous, *A Pulpit to Let. With a just applause for those worthy divines that stay with us* (London, 1665), 1.

⁸² Vincent, *God’s Terrible Voice in the City*, 42.

⁸³ Vincent, *God’s Terrible Voice in the City*, 28.

⁸⁴ Vincent, *God’s Terrible Voice in the City*, 28.

who rationalized escaping the plague so that they might minister in the future when the urgency for pastoral care was in the immediate present.

Impact of Critique

As pamphlets called for pastoral duty in the midst of the plague, they availed little but to increase public anger toward the fugitive clergy. Bishop Henchman and Archbishop Sheldon asserted the responsibility of clergy to remain with their congregations, but this was futile as those under their authority did not heed their orders. On the other side of things, these voices of critique served to heighten public awareness of the need in London and helped to provoke Nonconformist ministers to become more public in their ministry. As this happened, the failure of the Church of England became more apparent as the ejected Nonconformists bore the double risk of persecution and plague to minister to those forsaken by London's clergy.

The Nonconformist Response to the Plague

As printed criticism and news of the fugitive clergy spread throughout England, London's dire circumstances provoked several Nonconformists to enter the city to publicly minister the gospel at great risk to themselves. In addition to this, those who were ministering quietly in London to avoid persecution were emboldened to become more public with their illegal gatherings. Nonconformist ministers, upon seeing the rising death toll and the absence of gospel ministry, could no longer minister privately to escape persecution and trust that the gospel was still being preached in London's churches. Vincent wrote that the burden of gospel ministry caused them to preach "in public places, though the law of man . . . did forbid them to do it."⁸⁵

Though great attention was given to medical care and public health, Vincent argued that the need for pastoral care was far more urgent than the public's need for

⁸⁵ Vincent, *God's Terrible Voice in the City*, 42.

medicine:

The need of souls was greater than the need of bodies, the sickness of the one being more universal and dangerous than the sickness of the other; and the saving or losing of the soul, being so many degrees beyond the preservation or death of the body; so the obligation upon ministers was stronger, and the motive to preach, greater; and for them to have incurred the guilt of soul-murder, by their neglect to administer soul-physic, would have been more heinous and unanswerable.⁸⁶

This conviction brought many Nonconformists out of the shadows of London and into public view. Baxter likewise reported on how, as they observed the catastrophe that was unfolding in the increasing death toll in the Bills of Mortality, they were moved to pity for the “dying and distressed” and determined to enter the city and preach the gospel as they “had none to call the impenitent to repentance, nor to comfort them in their terrors; when about ten thousand died in a week.”⁸⁷

Baxter reported that they could no longer justify inaction on the basis of the laws of men and that they could no longer neglect “men’s souls and bodies in such extremities, any more than they can justify parents for famishing their children to death.”⁸⁸ They determined to stay with those in the city and “enter the forsaken pulpits, though prohibited, and give them what sustenance they could under such an awakening Providence, and also visit the sick, and get what relief they could for the poor, especially such as were shut up.”⁸⁹ God’s providence was seen as awakening souls to the gospel, and they must not neglect this opportunity.

Thomas Doolittle and Thomas Vincent

Thomas Doolittle had grown up under Richard Baxter’s preaching in Kidderminster and come to faith under his ministry. Baxter had helped him find a

⁸⁶ Vincent, *God’s Terrible Voice in the City*, 42-43.

⁸⁷ Baxter, *An abridgment of Mr. Baxter’s History*, 583.

⁸⁸ Baxter, *An abridgment of Mr. Baxter’s History*, 583.

⁸⁹ Baxter, *An abridgment of Mr. Baxter’s History*, 583.

chaplaincy in London, and when Doolittle was ejected in 1662, he moved to Moorfields and opened a boarding school. As the school grew, he hired Thomas Vincent, who had also been ejected, to serve as his assistant. They also served together in pastoral ministry and led a conventicle in London. When the plague arrived, Doolittle moved his family and the school to Essex, while Vincent remained in his house in London.⁹⁰ Vincent observed the great lack of pastoral care for the thousands who were dying, and described the situation: “When most of the ministers in place were fled and gone from the people Seeing the people crowd so fast into the grave and eternity, who seemed to cry as they went, for spiritual physicians; and perceiving the churches to be open, and pulpits to be open, and finding pamphlets flung about the streets, of pulpits to be let.”⁹¹ In response, Vincent determined to leave his employment with Doolittle so that he might minister in London. He considered that God’s law and nature commanded his preaching in public places, even though the Act of Uniformity had barred him from preaching. Speaking of himself and the other Nonconformist preachers, Vincent stated that the plague had served as a call from the Lord to bring them out into public view, and they could no longer continue in ministry privately as they had been doing previously.⁹²

Doolittle and Vincent’s Dispute

When Vincent resolved to preach in the city, Doolittle opposed his resolution on the grounds that he would be exposing himself to danger and that he should continue in employment at their school. As they were unable to reach an agreement, they decided to bring their case before other trusted brothers. Being Nonconformists, they were without an ecclesial structure to make a ruling between them. Instead of allowing

⁹⁰ J. William Black, “Doolittle, Thomas (1630/1633?–1707), clergyman and ejected minister,” in *ODNB*.

⁹¹ Vincent, *God’s Terrible Voice in the City*, 42.

⁹² Vincent, *God’s Terrible Voice in the City*, 42-43.

disagreement to continue, they raised the question to fellow ministers in and around London to settle their dispute.

Doolittle presented his objections before this group, and Vincent replied with his conviction that “he thought it was absolutely necessary that such vast Numbers of dying People should have some Spiritual Assistance.”⁹³ Vincent stated that “he had carefully examined the state of his own soul, and could look death in the face with comfort. . . . He could have no prospect of usefulness in the exercise of his ministry, through his whole life, like that which now offered itself.”⁹⁴ Vincent concluded by asking that no one seek to weaken his hands or discourage him in this effort. Those who heard the matter agreed and “unanimously declar’d their Satisfaction and Joy, that they apprehended the Matter was of God, and concurr’d in their Prayers for his Protection and Success.”⁹⁵

Vincent ministered in London through the plague and continued in ministry until his death in 1678. Samuel Slater preached the sermon for Vincent’s funeral in 1678 and recounted his life and ministry, reporting the following:

He stayed with you here in the time of that noisom and greedy Pestilence, which raged so furiously, and devoured so hastily, and numbred out many thousands, and ten thousands to the Grave, when others fled for their lives, he kept his station all the while, knowing he could not go out of Gods reach; the arm of omnipotency could so bend his bow, and draw his arrow to the head, that it should flie as far as he could run. He knew his duty and his safety lay together. He was however freely willing to venture his life for the salvation of souls.⁹⁶

Having determined that the need for gospel ministry was more important than his own

⁹³ Edmund Calamy, *A Continuation of the Account of the Ministers, Lecturers, Masters, and Fellows of Colleges, and Schoolmasters, who were Ejected and Silenced after the Restoration in 1660, by or before the Act for Uniformity* (London: R. Ford, 1727), 32.

⁹⁴ Orton, “Sketch of Rev. Thomas Vincent, M. A.” *The Panopolist, Or, the Christian’s Armory* 2, no. 10 (March 1807): 445.

⁹⁵ Calamy, *A Continuation of the Account*, 32.

⁹⁶ Samuel Slater, *Vicentius Redivivus. A Funeral Sermon, Preached Octob. 27, 1678. Upon Occasion of the much bewailed Death of that Reverend and Eminent Servant of CHRIST, Mr. THOMAS VINCENT, Formerly Preacher at Mandlins Milk-street, London* (London, 1679), 41.

life, Vincent entrusted himself to divine providence throughout this ministry in the city.

Preachers in the Plagued City

In reviewing the Nonconformists who ministered in the city, Edmund Calamy's *Nonconformist's Memorial* is the definitive history of ejected ministers, and he also identified many who preached in London during the plague. Second to Calamy is Baxter's list of ministers in the *History of His Life and Times*.⁹⁷ Additional names can be found in Walter Bell's plague history, the *Oxford National Dictionary of Biography*, and other works. These have been compiled in table 4.

Table 4. Nonconformists plague ministers

<i>Name</i>	<i>Place of Ministry or Burial</i>	<i>Source</i>
Allin, John	London	Calamy ⁹⁸
Askew, John	St. Giles Cripplegate	Bell ⁹⁹
Austin, Samuel	Buried at St. Giles Cripplegate	Bell ¹⁰⁰
Brooks, Thomas	Conventicle at Moorfields near St. Margarets	Beeke ¹⁰¹
Carslake, William	Multiple churches throughout London	Calamy ¹⁰²
Chambers, Robert (Grimes, John)	Buried at St. Giles Cripplegate	Baxter and Calamy ¹⁰³
Chester, John	Conventicle	Baxter and Calamy ¹⁰⁴

⁹⁷ Richard Baxter and Edmund Calamy, *An abridgement of Mr. Baxter's History of his life and times* (London: Printed for John Lawrence

, 1702), 583.

⁹⁸ A. G. Matthews, *Calamy Revised: Being a Revision of Edmund Calamy's Account of the Ministers and Others Ejected and Silenced, 1660-2* (1934; repr., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 6.

⁹⁹ Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 150-51.

¹⁰⁰ Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 152.

¹⁰¹ Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans: With a Guide to Modern Imprints* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 97.

¹⁰² Matthews, *Calamy Revised*, 101.

¹⁰³ Baxter and Calamy, *An abridgement of Mr. Baxter's History*, 583.

¹⁰⁴ Baxter and Calamy, *An abridgement of Mr. Baxter's History*, 583.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Place of Ministry or Burial</i>	<i>Source</i>
Dyer, William	St. Anne & St. Agnes Aldersgate	Dyer ¹⁰⁵
Ford, Stephen		Wilson ¹⁰⁶
Franklin, Robert	Chaplain to Mr. Easterland	Calamy ¹⁰⁷
Goodwin, Thomas	Conventicle	Beeke ¹⁰⁸
Janeway, Abraham	Buried at St. Giles Cripplegate	Calamy ¹⁰⁹
Janeway, James	Conventicles	Calamy ¹¹⁰
Knowles, John	Private ministry	Wilson ¹¹¹
Marley, Henry	Buried at St. Giles Cripplegate	Bell ¹¹²
Mortimer, John	unidentified churches	Calamy ¹¹³
Needham, Benjamin	Buried at St. Giles Cripplegate	Bell ¹¹⁴
Needler, Benjamin	Near St. Giles Cripplegate	Vernon ¹¹⁵
Skelton, Samuel	St. Giles Cripplegate	Bell ¹¹⁶
Swift, Richard	conventicle	Calamy ¹¹⁷
Turner, Edward	conventicle	Bell ¹¹⁸
Turner, John	conventicle	Calamy ¹¹⁹
Vincent, Thomas	Aldermanburg Church, St. Botolph Aldgate, St. Helen Bishopsgate, Allhallows-the Great, St. Katherine Creechurch, and All Hallows Thames St.	Moote ¹²⁰

¹⁰⁵ William Dyer, *Christ's Voice to London, and the Great Day of God's Wrath: Being the Substance of Sermons Preached in the City in the Time of the Sad Visitation, Together with the Necessity of Watching and Praying, with a Small Treatise of Death* (London: Black Spread Eagle and Matthias Walker, 1668).

¹⁰⁶ Wilson, *The History and Antiquities of Dissenting Churches*, 1:472.

¹⁰⁷ Matthews, *Calamy Revised*, 212.

¹⁰⁸ Beeke and Pederson, *Meet the Puritans*, 273.

¹⁰⁹ Matthews, *Calamy Revised*, 295.

¹¹⁰ Edmund Calamy and Samuel Palmer, *The Nonconformist's Memorial* (London: Button & Hirst, 1802), 3:298.

¹¹¹ Wilson, *The History and Antiquities of Dissenting Churches*, 1:156.

¹¹² Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 152.

¹¹³ Matthews, *Calamy Revised*, 356.

¹¹⁴ Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 152.

¹¹⁵ E. C. Vernon, "Needler, Benjamin (1620–1682)," in *ODNB*.

¹¹⁶ Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 152.

¹¹⁷ Matthews, *Calamy Revised*, 472.

¹¹⁸ Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 227.

¹¹⁹ Matthews, *Calamy Revised*, 497.

¹²⁰ Moote, *The Great Plague*, 310.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Place of Ministry or Burial</i>	<i>Source</i>
Vernon, John	conventicle	Vernon ¹²¹
Wadsworth, Thomas	conventicles	Gordon ¹²²
Walker	St. Katherine Coleman	Bell ¹²³
Wall, John	near St. Giles Cripplegate	Bell ¹²⁴

In addition to the ministry of these men in the churches and conventicles of London, the influence of Nonconformists was present in London through the printed works of Thomas Blake, William Bridge, and Richard Kephale.

Ministry in London's Churches

During the plague, Nonconformist ministers ministered in the churches of London and in their conventicles. Some boldly entered London's churches, which required a significant degree of courage as they openly risked arrest, while others continued more privately in their conventicles. Those who preached in London's pulpits are listed below.

William Carslake

Carslake's ministry extended throughout the city, with Calamy reporting that he "preached about in the churches of London, all the time of the great plague."¹²⁵

William Dyer

Dyer is recorded to have ministered in London during the time of the plague.¹²⁶

¹²¹ John Vernon, "Memoirs of Caleb Vernon," in *A Brief History of the Dissenters; Memoirs of Miss Ann Price, also of Daniel Cuxon, Caleb Vernon, and Charles Whitfield; and an Introductory Address on the Constitution of the Baptist Churches*, ed. Joseph Ivimey (London: Wightman and Cramp, 1827).

¹²² Alexander Gordon and J. William Black, "Wadsworth, Thomas (1630–1676)," in *ODNB*.

¹²³ Vestry minutes from St. Katherine Coleman in Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 227.

¹²⁴ Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 152.

¹²⁵ Matthews, *Calamy Revised*, 101.

¹²⁶ Calamy and Palmer, *The Nonconformist's Memorial*, 298.

Though he was ejected in 1662, he preached in the pulpits of St. Anne and St. Agnes in Aldersgate in an unusual cooperation with the rector Richard Edwards, who welcomed Dyer's ministry despite his ejection.¹²⁷ Dyer's sermons were published and distributed throughout the city after the plague.¹²⁸

John Mortimer

Mortimer served as rector of Sowton, Devonshire, until his ejection. He then traveled to London where he found employment with his uncle. Calamy recorded that after the plague broke out, Mortimer preached often in London's churches.¹²⁹ Traveling outside of London after the fire, he and his wife were detained and placed in a pesthouse for fear that they were bringing the plague with them. They survived and were released.

Thomas Vincent

Vincent preached in several of London's churches throughout the plague, including Aldermanburg Church, St. Botolph Aldgate, St. Helen Bishopsgate, Allhallows-the Great, and St. Katherine Creechurch.¹³⁰ It is reported by Orton that Vincent "constantly preached every Lord's day through the whole visitation in some parish church."¹³¹

Ministry in London's Conventicles

Throughout the plague, some persevered in ministry in their conventicles while others planted new ones. The plague brought their relatively hidden civil disobedience increasingly into the public view as they risked persecution for the sake of a city that had

¹²⁷ Caroline L. Leachman, "Dyer, William (1632/3–1696), clergyman and ejected minister," in *ODNB*.

¹²⁸ Dyer, *Christ's Voice to London, and the Great Day of God's Wrath*.

¹²⁹ Matthews, *Calamy Revised*, 356.

¹³⁰ Moote and Moote, *The Great Plague*, 310.

¹³¹ Orton, "Sketch of Rev. Thomas Vincent, M. A.," 445.

become largely bereft of gospel ministry.

John Chester

Chester ministered in a conventicle during the plague, and he ministered together with Thomas Wadsworth in the years afterward in meeting houses in Globe Alley.¹³²

James Janeway

James Janeway, Abraham Janeway's brother, first felt the call to preach while observing "the horrors and suffering of the Plague" in London.¹³³ He participated in opening multiple conventicles in London during the plague year.¹³⁴

John Knowles

Knowles was ejected from his pulpit in Bristol in 1662, and he then ministered privately in London. He also remained in the city and held conventicles in more than one location.¹³⁵ In contrast to those who visited the sick for financial gain, it is recorded that Knowles visited "rich and poor, without distinction, and regardless of danger."¹³⁶

Benjamin Needler

Needler had served as rector at St. Margaret Moyses in London, from which he was then ejected in 1662. He ministered near St. Giles Cripplegate and remained in London throughout the plague from which his wife and two of his daughters died.¹³⁷

¹³² Matthews, *Calamy Revised*, 114.

¹³³ Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 227.

¹³⁴ Alexander Gordon, "Janeway, James (1636?–1674)," in *ODNB*.

¹³⁵ Roger Thompson, "Knowles, John (c. 1606–1685), nonconformist minister," in *ODNB*.

¹³⁶ Wilson, *The History and Antiquities of Dissenting Churches*, 1:156.

¹³⁷ Vernon, "Needler, Benjamin (1620–1682), clergyman and ejected minister," in *ODNB*.

Richard Swift

Swift had served as curate of Edgware in Middlesex until his ejection. After being ejected, he opened his home as a boarding house to earn income. Swift continued to minister despite his ejection and regularly suffered persecution, being imprisoned in Newgate prison on multiple occasions for hosting and leading a conventicle in his home. Calamy noted that Swift's last imprisonment was during the plague, and in the Lord's providence he survived.¹³⁸

John Turner

Turner served as vicar of Sunbury in Middlesex until his ejection. After this, he moved to London where he continued to minister illegally. Baxter and Calamy both recorded that his preaching ministry continued during the plague.¹³⁹

John Vernon

Vernon also suffered persecution, having been imprisoned in Newgate prison after the restoration. After his release he pastored a Baptist congregation in London during the plague, and his ministry is recounted in the narrative of his son Caleb's baptism, illness, and subsequent death.¹⁴⁰

Thomas Wadsworth

Wadsworth served as a minister in St. Mary's in Surrey, from where he had extensive correspondence with Richard Baxter. Moving to London, he served as curate at St. Margaret's until his ejection in 1662. Not being swayed by ejection, he continued in pastoral ministry as a Nonconformist and continued to minister throughout the plague. A

¹³⁸ Matthews, *Calamy Revised*, 472.

¹³⁹ Matthews, *Calamy Revised*, 497.

¹⁴⁰ Vernon, "Memoirs of Caleb Vernon."

meeting house was built for his conventicle after the Great Fire in 1666.¹⁴¹

Nonconformist Plague Martyrs

Calamy recorded that Abraham Janeway died on September 16, 1665, and was buried at Aldermanbury the next day, being numbered with the plague martyrs. Thomas Vincent preached his funeral sermon in Aldermanburg Church, proclaiming the gospel to unbelievers, encouraging believers with the hope of heaven, and exhorting fellow ministers to consider Janeway's example and put their shoulders to the work of the gospel in the city: "Ministers, lay to heart the example of our dear Brother in the Ministry; many ministers are fled into the Country, a few remain at a time when Souls have the greatest need; the work is great and weighty which lieth upon us, we have need of many shoulders."¹⁴²

Walter Bell recorded that ministry at Cripplegate could not sufficiently be performed to meet the needs of the congregation and that this void was filled by the Nonconformists:

It was impossible that one man, however willing, could in the fearful conditions of Cripplegate minister to the whole of that large parish . . . The work was done, and it was done by Nonconforming ministers. They are the real heroes of the Plague, the men whose golden example ennoble their great profession, and condemns the political Churchmen who made them outcasts.¹⁴³

Multiple Nonconformist ministers perished during the plague year and were buried at St. Giles Cripplegate. Among these are Samuel Austin, John Askew, Samuel Skelton, Abraham Janeway, Henry Marley, John Wall, John Grimes, and Benjamin Needham.¹⁴⁴ Bell described them as "martyrs to the duty they accepted without flinching,

¹⁴¹ Gordon and Black, "Wadsworth, Thomas (1630–1676)," in *ODNB*.

¹⁴² Thomas Vincent, *God's Terrible Voice in the City and A Sermon Preached at the Funeral of Abraham Janeway, Minister of the Gospel; in Aldermanbury Church, the Eighteenth day of September 1666* (London, 1667), 241.

¹⁴³ Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 149.

¹⁴⁴ Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 150-51.

when the courage of others failed.”¹⁴⁵

Many Nonconformist ministers also lost family members to the plague; among these were the Askew, Chambers, and Needler families. John Askew and his daughter died from the plague and were buried at St. Giles Cripplegate on September 6, 1665.¹⁴⁶ The son of Robert Chambers (later known as Grimes) was buried at St. Giles Cripplegate on October 2, 1665.¹⁴⁷ Benjamin Needler’s wife and his two daughters also died from the plague.¹⁴⁸

Renewed Opposition to Nonconformity

Though enforcement of the Clarendon Code diminished during the plague, persecution of Nonconformity had not ended. Conventicles continued to suffer persecution. Samuel Pepys recorded the Lord Albemarle had some Presbyterians arrested at a meeting on Convent Garden on August 20, 1665.¹⁴⁹ They refused to pay the fine for their gathering so that they might be released, so they were imprisoned.

One of the Anglican priests (the anonymous J. W.) bemoaned the fact that the church had lost control over its pulpits. He blamed the fugitive clergy for this, writing that those who fled ought to be “troubled at that poison which may be suckt in by your people, from the mouths of sectaries [dissenters], who have not only crept into your parishes, but also (as I am credibly informed) into some of your pulpits.”¹⁵⁰

As Nonconformist ministers became more public in their ministry and conventicles became more established in London, persecution was heightened under

¹⁴⁵ Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 152.

¹⁴⁶ Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 150-51.

¹⁴⁷ Matthews, *Calamy Revised*, 108.

¹⁴⁸ Vernon, “Needler, Benjamin (1620-1682), clergyman and ejected minister,” in *ODNB*.

¹⁴⁹ Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, 50.

¹⁵⁰ J. W. *A Friendly Letter to the Flying Clergy*, 4.

Charles II through Parliament's passage of the Five Mile Act. Parliament had removed to Oxford because of the plague, and from there they decided to take action against the Nonconformist ministers. Despite the public favor the ministers received for serving the city during the plague, Parliament determined to remove Nonconformists from their communities with the passage of the Five Mile Act in August of 1665. The act passed with a margin of six votes.¹⁵¹ Ejected ministers who refused to abide by 1662's Act of Uniformity were now faced with the additional requirement that they take an oath swearing that they would not seek to bring about any changes in the church or civil government of England. Those who refused this oath were then banned from entering within five miles of where they had previously ministered. Penalties could consist of a fine of £40 and six months imprisonment.¹⁵²

Civil Disobedience

As state opposition to Nonconformity increased, Nonconformity would not be dissuaded. Richard Baxter's voice well represented the Nonconformists who ministered in the city throughout the plague. Baxter wrote against the conventicle laws, arguing that while a magistrate has authority to momentarily stop church assemblies and public gatherings in times of plague, invasion, or fire, it was another thing altogether to do so regularly, or "profanely" as a "renunciation of Christ and our religion." Under such circumstances, Baxter called for civil disobedience, for "it is not lawful formally to obey," meaning that obedience to the magistrate in those cases was disobedience to God.

Baxter then addressed the Conventicle Act and its restrictions on worship. Writing about the state's limitations on gatherings, he condemned any magistrate's orders which would "plainly destroy the worship," giving the example of a requirement that they could only "meet only in a room that will hold but the twentieth part of the church,"

¹⁵¹ Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 229.

¹⁵² Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 228-29.

which is to “destroy or frustrate the work which God commandeth us.” Similarly, magistrates who limited worship gatherings to “never above five or six,” would “destroy the work and end” of worship, as the church was unable to gather. Baxter reasoned that this limit would “keep church-assemblies without ministers, when there is not so many as for every such little number to have one.” Under these circumstances, Baxter wrote that the church “must suffer, and not obey.” Citing Christ’s instruction in the Olivet Discourse for his disciples to flee from one city to another in time of persecution (Matt 10:23), Baxter observed the difference in their context, as persecution was not localized, but spread throughout the nation. Instead of stopping preaching, Baxter emphasized the commission Christ has given to his disciples to preach the Gospel to all nations and to people in all places, for he “would have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” Instead of a cessation of pastoral ministry, Baxter argued that Christ’s teaching required them to preach in the cities, for the scope of the Great Commission “doth not allow us to forsake the souls of all that dwell in cities and populous places, and preach only to some few cottagers elsewhere.”¹⁵³

Except for unusual collaboration between Anglicans and Nonconformists with rare cases such as is seen with William Dyer, the Church of England’s reception of Nonconformist clergy’s reappearance was quite hostile. The nature of the public emergency, the vacuum left by the fugitive clergy, and the need that was being met by Nonconformists made it difficult for the state to successfully intervene. Large crowds gathered to hear the Nonconformist preachers. Looking at Thomas Vincent in particular, Orton reported that “it was a general inquiry through the preceding week, where Mr. Vincent was to preach on the Sabbath. Multitudes followed him wherever he went.”¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory, or, A summ of practical theologie and cases of conscience directing Christians how to use their knowledge and faith, how to improve all helps and means, and to perform all duties, how to overcome temptations, and to escape or mortifie every sin: in four parts* (London: Robert White for Nevill Simmons, 1673), 467.

¹⁵⁴ Orton, “Sketch of Rev. Thomas Vincent, M. A.,” 445.

One can get a sense of the press of the crowds in Vincent's description in *God's Terrible Voice in the City*. Ministers had difficulty reaching the pulpit because the crowds packed into both the pews and filling the aisles: "Now there is such a vast concourse of people in the churches where these [Nonconformist] ministers are to be found, that they cannot many times come near to the pulpit doors for the press, but are forced to climb over the pews to them."¹⁵⁵

Enforcement against Nonconformists appeared to be a low priority throughout the plague. Nonconformists continued to preach while under the threat of persecution. Moote recorded that the size of the crowds at services was difficult for authorities to manage. Instead of provoking public unrest by intervening, authorities tended to leave the services alone:

John Allin's private gatherings in Southwark invited arrest by Albemarle's forces. Even public services in city churches by ejected ministers like Thomas Vincent were fraught with anxiety, though the large size of the congregation probably saved the worshipers from interference by the captain general (better to leave them alone than to incite a mass riot).¹⁵⁶

Baxter described the growing civil disobedience among the preachers of the city, stating "that this "Freedom of Preaching, which this [the plague] occasioned, cannot, by the daily Guards of Soldiers, nor by the Imprisonments of Multitudes, be restrained."¹⁵⁷

Though the state had the advantage of political power and could wield the sword against dissenters, the court of public opinion had tilted in favor of Nonconformity. The failure of the Anglican church to care for London during the Great Plague served to diminish their credibility, while the public's favor and gratitude had increased toward

¹⁵⁵ Vincent, *God's Terrible Voice in the City*, 43.

¹⁵⁶ Moote and Moote, *The Great Plague*, 316.

¹⁵⁷ Richard Baxter, *The Practical Works of the Rev. Richard Baxter: With a Life of the Author, and a Critical Examination of his Writings, by the Rev. William Orme*, 23 vols. (London: James Duncan, 1830), 1:255.

Nonconformity. This change, however, did not dissuade the state from continuing to persecute Nonconformists.

Following the Great Plague and the Great Fire, multiple conventicles constructed meeting houses for their illegal gatherings, among which was Thomas Doolittle and Thomas Vincent's "large and commodious" meeting house for their conventicle on Morkwell Street. Horton recorded that the Lord Mayor of London requested an audience with Vincent and Doolittle to warn them of their danger, after which they told him that "they were satisfied of their call to preach the gospel, and therefore could not promise to desist."¹⁵⁸ That next Sunday, soldiers came to break up the church service, with an officer crying out to the preacher, "I command you in the king's name, to come down." The preacher replied with "I command you in the name of the King of kings, not to disturb his worship," upon which the officer commanded his men to shoot him. The uproar of the crowd allowed the preacher to escape, but the pulpit was pulled down and the doors were barred until the Charles II's Declaration of Indulgence in 1672.¹⁵⁹ Despite this, the church stayed together. According to the Reverend Joseph Boyse, at Vincent's death in 1678, the congregation still consisted "much of persons that had found the benefit of his labours during the plague time."¹⁶⁰

In the years following the plague, Baxter observed that one good to come out of the Great Plague was the increasingly public ministry of Nonconformists. "The ministers that were Silenced for Nonconformity, had ever since 1662 done their Work very privately . . . It was the Plague that brought them out of their secret narrow Meetings

¹⁵⁸ Orton, "Sketch of Thomas Doolittle," in *The Panopolist, Or, the Christian's Armory* 2, no. 11 (April 1807): 502.

¹⁵⁹ Orton, "Sketch of Thomas Doolittle," 502.

¹⁶⁰ Joseph Boyse, *Epitaph on Thomas Vincent*, 1678, MS 4275, fol. 84, British Library, London.

[conventicles] into publick.”¹⁶¹ As Nonconformity became more open in the city, dissent became increasingly hard to suppress. Joseph Boyse, in his epitaph for Thomas Vincent, noted that the Lord’s blessing as seen in the fruitfulness of ministry during the plague gave him “greater Resolution,” and that his example encouraged “many of his Brethren that were inclined to desist” to continue in ministry.¹⁶² Bell argued that the influence of Nonconformist preachers had an enduring impact: “We must not overlook it, for it has vastly influenced English life and thought in all subsequent generations. The Great Plague established English Nonconformity.”¹⁶³ While J. F. Shrewsbury questioned Bell’s claim as possibly being overstated, he observed merit in Bell’s arguments and deemed it worth further study.¹⁶⁴ In seeking to evaluate these claims, Nonconformists had indeed won in the court of public opinion, and an increasing number of them ministered publicly. The establishment of Nonconformity can also be observed in the construction of meeting houses for conventicles and the authorities’ reluctance to prosecute. Persecution waxed and waned in the decades that followed, ramping up with the Conventicle Act of 1670, and diminishing with Charles II’s Declaration of Indulgence in 1672. In the following year, at least seventy-six conventicles were known throughout the city of London.¹⁶⁵ James II ruled briefly from 1685-1689 until deposed by William and Mary in the Glorious Revolution, which then led to freedom of worship being granted to Nonconformists with the Act of Toleration in 1689.

¹⁶¹ Richard Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae: Or, Mr. Richard Baxter’s Narrative of the Most Memorable Passages of his Life and Times*, 5 vols., ed. N. H. Keeble (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 3:306.

¹⁶² Joseph Boyse, “Epitaph on Thomas Vincent.”

¹⁶³ Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 227.

¹⁶⁴ Shrewsbury, *A History of the Bubonic Plague in the British Isles*, 451.

¹⁶⁵ Anonymous, *A List of the Conventicles or Unlawful Meetings Within the City of London and Bills of Mortality; with the Places where they are to be found; As also; the Names of divers of the Preachers, and the several Factions they profess* (London: Nat. Thompson, 1683).

Findings

In reviewing the effect of the plague on church leadership, the plague brought about several consequences. Some findings were anticipated, such as the increased presence and public ministry of the Nonconformist ministers. On a more unexpected note, the majority of critique toward the clergy that fled came from within the Anglican church, and there was a general unity between Anglican leadership and Nonconformist ministers when it came to the responsibilities of the pastor to his flock, though there were significant differences in application. Finally, the priorities of safety versus duty were significant in determining who remained in the city to minister.

Though Thomas Vincent offered a critique in *God's Terrible Voice in the City*, the preponderance of criticism toward the clergy who fled was internal to the Church of England. This self-critique was severe, and yet the high view of the pastoral office that is conveyed in these writings ought to be appreciated by those considering the responsibilities that accompany the call into pastoral ministry. In a time when pastoral scandal is all too common, shepherds should be encouraged and provoked to “love to live to the good of the Church,” and to keep in mind that resignation from one’s office serves Christ and his Bride better than the harm that comes from pastoral scandal.¹⁶⁶ Present and future pastors do well to form convictions on the pastor’s obligation to his church in times of public calamity and to become acquainted with examples of faithful and sacrificial service from church history.

Though Anglican leadership upheld the importance of the pastoral office and call for clergy to remain and minister in proximity to the dying, it can be imagined that the lower clergy who left the city viewed this call as lacking moral authority as these commands came from voices that remained cloistered from the plague. Despite theological differences, Anglican leadership and the Nonconformist ministers found

¹⁶⁶ J. W., *A Friendly Letter to the Flying Clergy*, 2-4.

themselves in general agreement when it came to the responsibility of shepherds to remain with their congregations. Even though they might make the same argument, a practical distinction remained as Anglican leadership sought to administrate the crisis from inside episcopal palaces while the Nonconformists ministered among the crowds and visited the sick. As historical accounts tend to amplify the role of Nonconformists during the plague, Anglican clergy who remained in the city should be remembered for their faithfulness and sacrifice. Plague martyrs can be found on all sides, and Anglican and Nonconformist alike should be honored for their sacrifice in service to the Lord and his church. The crisis also allowed for some unexpected partnerships between Anglican and Nonconformist ministers as caring for the city took priority over their conflicts.

When contrasting those who remained to minister in the city with those who fled, several important distinctions are to be made. Those who fled the city prioritized health and physical security, while those who remained were bound by conscience to care for the church even though it imperiled their health. While conformity to the state brought many of London's clergy into positions of ministry in 1662, preservation of health motivated them to vacate the same in 1665. On the other hand, the ejected ministers had sacrificed their ministries, livelihoods, and homes for the sake of conscience. Having already counted the cost in 1662 and embraced a life of ongoing civil disobedience and illegal ministry, many stood ready to count the cost again in 1665 in exposing themselves to the double dangers of plague and persecution in order to minister the gospel to the city. Having rejected the state's authority over worship, they had been galvanized by persecution and were more substantially ready to persevere in danger than their recently appointed Anglican counterparts.

In summary, the plague brought about great pressure upon the shepherds of London as it caused them to choose between personal safety or continued ministry. As the ministers of London were winnowed down by the plague or flight, the need for pastoral ministry increased greatly as the city was struck with the terror of the plague. Though the

increasing demand for care with the reduced numbers of clergy to provide it brought enormous pressure upon the ministers who remained, they also found themselves receiving remarkable opportunities for gospel ministry. In addition, the crisis coupled with the need for pastoral care created a brief opportunity for Nonconformist ministers to return to public ministry. For all who remained in the city, the plague brought great pressure upon them as they navigated how to minister in the face of disease and death. The challenges this brought to pastoral ministry and congregational life will be examined in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4
THE WORK OF MINISTRY DURING
THE PLAGUE YEAR

This chapter will explore and present a composite picture of pastoral ministry and church life during the Great Plague of London. For those who remained in London, pastors faced numerous difficulties and in the care of their churches as they persevered in preaching and administering the ordinances. Some clergy continued without regard for safety while others modified their ministry to account for the plague. Opportunities for the gospel abounded with life and death urgency as pastors shepherded their congregations through the terror of the plague. Finally, as the plague abated, pastors led their churches in doxology and thanksgiving.

Church Life in the Plague Year

Church life in 1665 London varied greatly depending on what kind of congregation was gathering. For the Church of England, the congregation consisted of those from the parish who attended worship, and services were offered multiple times a day. During the plague, additional services for prayer were added. If there was no one to preach due to plague flight or death, some churches were closed. Other times, Nonconformists led services in the pulpits they had previously been ejected from. With church membership generally being determined through geographic boundaries of each parish, pastoral care largely amounted to care for the populace as they came to the church, requested aid from the sextant, or asked for visitation from the clergy.

For Nonconformist churches or conventicles, church life was strikingly different. As gatherings were generally private to avoid persecution, there was a clearer understanding of the congregation's members. This was particularly true in Baptist

congregations such as John Vernon's. In his conventicle, Vernon's writings show that seventy-eight of his members had been sickened by the plague. Of these, twenty-eight died. They experienced church growth as well, adding twenty new members during the plague year, including some who had recently been orphaned by the plague.¹

Differing ecclesiology regarding membership (from infant baptism, or from believer's baptism) made a significant difference in terms of the burden placed upon churches during the plague. Baptist conventicles or Nonconformist churches operating outside the law were able to focus care more on their known membership and evangelism in the community, whereas parishes had to bear the weight of providing services for the community and providing an account of the vast numbers of plague victims. The inability of churches to provide for these needs led to an increased government response and a shift to plague pits for mass burials of the dead.

Worship Services in the Plagued City

Church policy and practices varied greatly when it came to responding to the plague. Some churches increased services, while others limited services and even set up guards to prevent entry.

Adding Services

Some churches increased worship services for the duration of the plague. In past plague outbreaks, the state had called for additional prayer services on Wednesdays. Increased services were not a reality for all churches as some had been shuttered due to the absence of clergy. At St. Paul's Cathedral, services continued to be held three times a day. In a letter dated August 3, 1665, Stephen Bing reported to William Sancroft that

¹ John Vernon, "Memoirs of Caleb Vernon," in *A Brief History of the Dissenters; Memoirs of Miss Ann Price, also of Daniel Cuxon, Caleb Vernon, and Charles Whitfield; and an Introductory Address on the Constitution of the Baptist Churches*, ed. Joseph Ivimey (London: Wightman and Cramp, 1827), 144.

attendance at St. Paul's services was good despite the plague.²

Reduced Services

Some churches remained open but reduced their number of services. Defoe recounted that some parish churches were temporarily closed by the authorities in London where the plague was most active with the greatest mortality.³ The July 27, 1665, vestry minutes at St. Christopher-le-Stocks revealed that worship services were reduced due to the suspected or actual presence of people from areas of the city infected with the plague, and this left many without services: "Not infrequently the services were few, as at St. Christopher-le-Stocks (by the Mansion House) where a weekly service was held on Sunday afternoons alone."⁴ Prior to this change, a great number of people attended services on weekday afternoons, but those were canceled as, of those who attended, "many of whom were known or believed to resort there from places infected."⁵ Paul Slack noted that this did not only impact those who were sick, but it also left healthy church members isolated at home.⁶

Barring Entry to Services

Not only did some churches reduce services, but some churches took more severe measures. Even though London required those confirmed ill to be forcibly quarantined and kept under guard in their homes, some churches actively prevented anyone suspected of illness from attending worship. Bell noted, "At St. Dunstan-in-the-East two men were paid to watch at the church doors and keep out all persons suspected

² Walter G. Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665* (London: The Bodley Head, 1951), 223.

³ Daniel Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year* (New York: Dover, 2001), 156-57.

⁴ Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 221.

⁵ Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 221.

⁶ Paul Slack, *The Impact of the Plague in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 295.

to be infected.”⁷ In addition, some tightened attendance all the more, being prejudicial as to who was allowed to enter. “The Benchers of Lincoln’s Inn locked all gates giving access to their private Chapel save one, itself jealously guarded to ensure that ‘none but persons of quality’ be admitted.”⁸ While public health measures effectively served to excommunicate those who were sick, the fear of the plague also turned the possibility of illness into an excommunicable offense. Bell rightly commented that “the problem confronting the churches was of perplexing difficulty. Every congregation was a peril, threatening to scatter yet wider and to increase the Plague, yet to debar worship at such a time was impossible.”⁹

Church Attendance

While many fled London, increased numbers flocked to churches for hope and comfort. Humphrey Henchman, the Bishop of London, recorded that “attendance at public worship had greatly increased.”¹⁰ Daniel Defoe’s commentary in *A Journal of the Plague Year* reported on the courage of those who attended worship and the increased attendance largely brought about by the plague:

Indeed nothing was more strange than to see with what courage the people went to the public service of God, even at that time when they were afraid to stir out of their own houses upon any other occasion . . . when we came to see the crowds and throngs of people which appeared on the Sabbath-days at the churches, and especially in those parts of the town where the plague was abated, or where it was not yet come to its height, it was amazing.¹¹

While other activities could be suspended, the worship of God remained essential for many. The severity of the plague also brought about the impression that few would

⁷ Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 221.

⁸ Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 221.

⁹ Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 221.

¹⁰ Bell, *The Great Plague in London 1665*, 225.

¹¹ Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*, 157.

survive and that one should gather for worship while one lived.

As it brought the people into public company, so it was surprising how it brought them to crowd into the churches. They inquired no more into whom they sat near to or far from, what offensive smells they met with, or what condition the people seemed to be in; but, looking upon themselves all as so many dead corpses, they came to the churches without the least caution, and crowded together as if their lives were of no consequence compared to the work which they came about there. Indeed, the zeal which they showed in coming, and the earnestness and affection they showed in their attention to what they heard, made it manifest what a value people would all put upon the worship of God if they thought every day they attended at the church that it would be their last.¹²

In this way, the closure of many churches and the circumstances of the plague caused the churches that did gather to overflow.

While the plague brought many to church, fear of the plague also caused many to forsake church attendance. In *Food and physick for every householder*, the anonymous T. D. engaged the ethics of church attendance in a series of theological meditations. In contemplating the fearful and foolhardy responses to the plague, he argued that the forsaking of church attendance out of fear was a double sin against God and one's own soul:

[H]ere you may see one so timerous of Sickness, that he dares not goe to Church, for fear of Infection; being so full of base Cowardise, that he is fearful to gather a Rose, lest he should prick his Fingers; neglecting his Souls welfare, for fear of his Bodies sickness . . . We must part, viz. from our frail Life. I will therefore resolve, not so much to fear the Evil of Sickness, as to commit the Evil of Sin . . . The one is a sin against my Soul, to deprive it of the Food which is offered; and *Tantalus* like, to starve it under the means.¹³

In contrast, he also condemned the hypocrisy of those who had forsaken worship but who truly feared the plague “in their purses” and would “trudge to *Westminster*” and continue all their business dealings while neglecting their souls.¹⁴ In this way, T. D. highlighted the tension between physical and spiritual needs and how many were quick to prioritize the

¹² Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*, 132.

¹³ T. D., *Food and Physick for Every Householder* (London: T. Leach, 1665).

¹⁴ T. D., *Food and Physick for Every Householder*, 17-19.

physical and temporal while disregarding the spiritual and eternal.

The terror of the plague with its high level of mortality is difficult to imagine. John James Baddeley compiled vestry meeting minutes and churchwarden's accounts from St. Giles Cripplegate and reported on the severity of the challenges faced by that parish during the plague. In August 1665, 101 pages of the church register were filled with the names of 3,556 plague victims. By way of contrast, only 74 deaths were recorded in August of 1667. It is uncertain how many were buried on site at St. Giles, but it was impossible for the church burial grounds to accommodate the dead, and shallow graves created additional problems:

To add to the horror of the time, and notwithstanding an increase in the size of the Churchyard in 1662, when ground was added near Crowders Well, and the new burying ground at the Pest House opened, the Churchyards were absolutely overcrowded; the provision for even the ordinary number of interments was not more than sufficient, so that the bodies of those dying of the Plague were placed only just below the surface of the ground.¹⁵

The churchwardens' reports reveal their attempts to deal with the crisis: "Paid George Day for fetching heath to lay at the Churchyard doors, and for carrying rubbish to lay under the pews."¹⁶ Baddeley interpreted this as efforts to mitigate the stench of decomposing corpses in the shallow graves surrounding the building. In addition to this, there were records of multiple purchases of incense and herbs likely used for this purpose. In September of 1665, the churchwardens ordered 1,196 cart loads of earth to be brought and spread over the churchyard to deepen the soil level, resulting in "the great height of the Churchyard above the floor of the Church and the neighbouring streets."¹⁷ Some compared the soil levels rising around churches to waters rising during a flood.

As many churchyards no longer had capacity and there was concern about

¹⁵ John James Baddeley, *An Account of the Church and Parish of St. Giles, Without Cripplegate, City of London: Compiled from various old authorities, including the Churchwardens' Accounts, and the Vestry Minute Books of the Parish* (London: East and Blades, 1888), 23.

¹⁶ Baddeley, *An Account of the Church and Parish of St. Giles*, 23

¹⁷ Baddeley, *An Account of the Church and Parish of St. Giles*, 21.

places of burial being places of contagion, city officials moved burials to mass graves that later became known as the plague pits. When it came to burials, Paul Slack noted that those who were sick with the plague had essentially been treated as if they had been excommunicated, as the London government responded to the crisis by banning plague victims from being buried in churchyards, which was usually the case for Nonconformists and others outside the Church of England. Instead of being buried in a churchyard, their bodies were sent to the plague pits.¹⁸

Samuel Pepys had stopped attending church during the plague, and when he returned, he noted the growth of the graveyard and his fear in passing through it. Though Pepys made many notes regarding church, he is hardly a moral exemplar as he is well known for his promiscuity. After about a year's absence from church, he went to a church service in the hopes of seeing another man's wife on January 30, 1666, and he described his visit:

This is the first time I have been in this church since I left London for the plague, and it frightened me indeed to go through the church more than I thought it could have done, to see so [many] graves lie so high upon the churchyards where people have been buried of the plague. I was much troubled at it, and do not think to go through it again a good while.¹⁹

The following day, Pepys recounted a conversation with his neighbor, Mr. Knightly, and his desire to see “the churchyards covered with lime, and I think it is needfull, and ours I hope will be done.”²⁰ A few days later on February 4, 1666, Pepys and his wife returned to church for the first time since the plague began.²¹

In contrast to Pepys, John Evelyn is an example of a churchman who persevered in gathering for worship throughout almost the entirety of the plague. On each

¹⁸ Slack, *The Impact of the Plague in Tudor and Stuart England*, 296.

¹⁹ Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys: The Great Plague of London and The Great Fire of London, 1665-1666* (Oxford: Benediction Classics, 2020), 146.

²⁰ Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, 147.

²¹ Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, 148.

Sunday, he recorded where he worshipped, the preacher's name, the text that was preached, and a few notes about the sermon. His diary reveals a commitment to attending worship despite the plague, yet also a carefulness about avoiding attendance in parishes where the plague was at its height. From his diary it can be observed that churches continued to serve the Lord's Table throughout the plague. There were very few occasions when he absented himself from services: once because of a storm, and a few other times because the plague was at its height. One entry on July 29, 1666, reads: "The Pestilence now a fresh increasing in our Parish, I forebore going to Church."²² When absent from services, he then recorded his practice of family worship with his household, such as his entry on August 26, 1666: "Contagion still continuing, we had the Church Office at home etc."²³ Evelyn also commended one preacher at Deptford by the name of Breton on December 3, 1665, stating his gladness to see "that good man [had not] stirred from his charge" as other clergy had done.²⁴

As the plague continued, church members noticed the deaths of others in the congregation. Richard Smyth of St. Giles Cripplegate recorded the death of another who shared the pew with him: "Mis Durant, of Cripplegate parish, our pew fellow, buried in this parish; *ex peste*."²⁵

George Bobbington is another example of one who attended services throughout the plague. Moote reported that Boddington attended service faithfully on every Lord's Day and sought to attend wherever Thomas Vincent was preaching. Boddington observed great crowds that overflowed from the church's doors when

²² John Evelyn, *The Diary of John Evelyn*, vol. 3, *Kalendarium: 1650-1672*, ed. E. S. de Beer, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 446.

²³ Evelyn, *The Diary of John Evelyn*, 3:448.

²⁴ Evelyn, *The Diary of John Evelyn*, 3:424.

²⁵ Richard Smyth, *The Obituary of Richard Smyth, Secondary of the Poultry Compter, London: Being a Catalogue of All Such Persons as He Knew in their Life: Extending from A.D. 1627 to A.D. 1674*, ed. Sir Henry Ellis (London: J. B. Nichols and Son, 1848), 66.

Vincent preached. He came to faith under his preaching and later become a church member at Vincent's conventicle.²⁶ In the Family Commonplace Book, as discovered by A. Lloyd Moote in London's Guildhall Library, Boddington recorded his own struggle with fear as he sat in worship services:

Just as the clarke was going to set the Psalme, I being in the Pue w[hi]ch was Mr Gardners he came into it in deep mourning. I sayd to him [I] hoped he and his were all well. He answerd yes but his wiffe was dead of the plague and buryed last nite. On w[hi]ch I was somewhat affrited and was about to goe out, but remembered my selfe and attended all Day dureing the service thereoff (to my great comfort).²⁷

In this way, fortitude and faith was required for perseverance in church attendance and also for the ministers who remained at their posts. Not only did those attending church have to pass by the gauntlet of the burial mounds in the churchyard and the odors emanating from shallow graves, but they had to overcome their own fears in the pews as they observed missing church members and learned of the death surrounding them.

Thomas Vincent observed the intensity of worship services in this context and how the plague had awakened audiences to hear the preaching of the gospel. He described the crowded church buildings and the attentiveness of the congregations that gathered together:

[S]uch a face is now seen in the assemblies, as seldom was seen before in London; such eager looks, such open ears, such greedy attention, as if every word would be eaten which dropped from the mouths of the ministers. If you ever saw a drowning man catch at a rope, you may guess how eagerly many people did catch at the Word, when they were ready to be overwhelmed by this overflowing scourge, which was passing through the city; when death was knocking at so many doors; and God was crying aloud by his judgments; and ministers were now sent to knock, cry aloud, and lift up their voice like a trumpet: then, then the people began to open the ear and the heart, which were fast shut and barred before. How did they then hearken as for their lives, as if every sermon were their last, as if death stood at the door of the church, and would seize upon them so soon as they came forth.²⁸

²⁶ Gary S. De Krey, "George Boddington," in *ODNB*.

²⁷ George Boddington, *Boddington Family Commonplace Book*, MS 10,823, fol. 40, Guildhall Library, London.

²⁸ Thomas Vincent, *God's terrible voice in the city: wherein are set forth the sound of the voice, in a narration of the two terrible judgements of plague and fire, inflicted upon the city of London, in the years 1665, and 1666* (London, 1667), 44.

Vincent wrote of his hopes that many were “born again, and brought forth: a strange moving there was upon the hearts of the city; and I am persuaded that many were brought over effectually unto a closure with Jesus Christ.”²⁹ Baxter and others also wrote of the spiritual hunger in London during the plague and record that many came to faith in Christ through the preaching of Nonconformists.³⁰

The Work of Pastoral Ministry

For the ministers who remained at their posts, all the ordinary functions of pastoral ministry continued in the time of plague. Symon Patrick is described as performing “all of the offices of his religion, visiting the sick, and burying at night those who had died of diseases other than the plague” as he continued to serve at St. Patrick’s Cathedral.³¹ Though pastoral ministry continued, the depopulation of London by flight and plague diminished the number of weddings and baptisms and multiplied funerals. Pastoral ministry was disproportionately tilted toward care for the dying and bereaved and navigating the life-altering circumstances of the outbreak.

Participation in the public health response significantly impacted parish life as churches found themselves severely challenged by the extraordinary number of deaths and burials. Plague deaths were simply too numerous for services and church yards too small for the number of burials. It was impossible to keep up with the number of funerals, and public health orders prevented family from being present for burial. Burials of plague victims was restricted to the evening. Corpses were collected by the dead carts during the night and brought to mass graves or plague pits for burial. Kephale reported in *Medela*

²⁹ Vincent, *God’s Terrible Voice in the City*, 45.

³⁰ Richard Baxter, *An abridgment of Mr. Baxter’s History of his life and times* (London: Printed for John Lawrence, 1702), 583.

³¹ Wm. Durrant Cooper, “Notices of the Last Great Plague, 1665-6,” in *Archaeologia, Or, Miscellaneous Tracts Relating to Antiquity*, vol. 37, by Society of Antiquaries of London (London: J. B. Nichols and Sons, 1857), 10.

Pestilentia that “the dead of the Plague were buried at convenient houres, alwaies either before Sun-rising, or after Sun-setting, with the privy of the Churchwardens, or Constables, and not otherwise, and no Neighbours or Friends were suffered to accompany the Course to Church.”³² The majority of the dead were buried without ceremony in unmarked graves.

In *Golgotha; OR, A Looking-Glass for London, and the Suburbs thereof*, the author identified by the initials J. V. argued against the mandatory quarantine as it separated people from fellowship, arguing that “most that are shut-up being surprised, unprovided; unsettled in heart and house, needing then most the use of a sure friend, made for the day of adversity. Pro 17.17.”³³ Those in infected homes who suffered the loss of loved ones were unable to leave quarantine for a funeral, and they were forced to grieve in isolation apart from the comfort of family, friends, and church as they waited to learn if they too would succumb to the plague. The minister had special privilege to be permitted to “attend at a competent distance,” when all others were forbidden to “enter the visited house upon pain of having their houses shut up, and being close imprisoned.”³⁴

For the Nonconformist preachers, many of them served more as evangelists in the city and providers of pastoral care at-large rather than pastors of specific congregations. In writing about the ministry of Nonconformists in London, Baxter wrote they “resolved to stay with the People, and to go in to the forsaken Pulpits, though prohibited, and to preach to the poor People before they dyed; and also to visit the Sick,

³² Richard Kephale, *Medela Pestilentia: wherein is contained several theological queries concerning the plague, with approved antidotes, signes and symptoms: also an exact method for curing that epidemical distemper, humbly presented to the Right Honourable and Right Worshipful the lord mayor and sheriffs of the city of London* (London: J. C., 1665), 10.

³³ J. V., *Golgotha, or a Looking-glass for London* (London, 1665), 11.

³⁴ Kephale, *Medela Pestilentia*, 11.

and get what relief they could for the Poor, especially those that were shut up.”³⁵ This work was primarily that of preaching, but also included visitation of the sick and distribution of benevolence to those who lacked necessities while they were locked up in quarantine.

Nonconformist Preachers

Preachers gave their sermons uncertain if they would ever preach again and with the knowledge that many in their audiences would not live to the following Sunday. Vincent described how the plague awakened preachers, and personified time, death, and the grave in his description of the scene surrounding the pulpit:

Now they are preaching, and every sermon was unto them, as if they were preaching their last. Old Time seems now to stand at the head of the pulpit, with its great scythe; saying with a hoarse voice, work while it is called to day, at night I will mow thee down. Grim Death seems to stand at the side of the pulpit, with its sharp arrow, saying, do thou shoot God’s arrows, and I will shoot mine. The grave seems to lie open at the foot of the pulpit, with dust in her bosom, saying, “Louden thy cry, to God, to men, and now fulfil thy trust: Here thou must lie, mouth stopp’d, breath gone, and silent in the dust.” Ministers now had awakening calls to seriousness and fervour in their ministerial work; to preach on the side and brink of the pit, into which thousands were tumbling; to pray under such near views of eternity, into which many passengers were daily entering, might be a means to stir up the spirit more than ordinary.³⁶

Vincent’s preaching was known for his intensity. Joseph Boyse described his preaching as “serious discourses” that made “deeper impressions” upon those who were listening. In describing the audience, he wrote that the great mortality of the plague hung over them with urgency, so that “each thinks hee his own Fune’rall Sermon hears!” and “dread Words pierce their attentive Ears.”³⁷

Describing Vincent’s zeal in verse, Boyse’s epitaph for Vincent described the

³⁵ Richard Baxter, *Reliquiæ Baxterianæ, or, Mr. Richard Baxters narrative of the most memorable passages of his life and times faithfully publish’d from his own original manuscript by Matthew Sylvester*, 3 vols. (London: Printed for T. Parkhurst, J. Robinson, F. Lawrence and F. Dunton, 1696), 2.

³⁶ Vincent, *God’s Terrible Voice in the City*, 43.

³⁷ Joseph Boyse, *Epitaph on Thomas Vincent*, 1678, MS 4275, fol. 84, British Library, London.

urgency of his preaching in “widdow’ed” churches whose “publick ministers” had left:

The Man whose generous Pitty once did vye
with the fierce Plague’s consuming Cruelty;
With equall eagerness they seem’d to strive
That to Destroy, hee to preserve alive:
That through Men’s veins it’s poys’onous streams diffusd
To cure a worse Disease his Art Heeus’d:
And as on helpless Bodys That did rave
Hurrying vast Crowds to the insatiate Grave:
So his diviner Zeal strove to translate
As many Spiritts to an happier State:³⁸

In a very real sense, the ministry of the gospel became a contest between life and death as the hope of eternal life was proclaimed to those who were being consumed by the plague.

William Dyer’s *Christ’s Voice to London* is a compilation of his plague sermons from St. Ann Aldersgate. While this provides the full text of his sermons, this work is atypical in its origin, in that it comes from a Nonconformist who was permitted to preach in an Anglican pulpit in contravention of the Act of Uniformity. Dyer’s book is an evangelistic invitation for “children of wrath” and “lost sinners” to come to Jesus and know his grace and salvation.³⁹ He preached on the destruction of cities throughout Scripture as examples of God’s judgment. Though Londoners may shut the doors of their homes against the plague or be shut up in their homes under quarantine, they must not shut the doors of their hearts against Christ.⁴⁰ The next sermon is an exposition on God’s wrath, followed by an exposition on prayer and a concluding exhortation to not fear but trust in the Lord. Dyer’s work provides a rare window into pastoral preaching during the plague. The lost are called to repent and believe in the gospel, and believers are called to trust in the Lord instead of giving way to fear.

³⁸ Boyse, *Epitaph on Thomas Vincent*.

³⁹ William Dyer, *Christ’s Voice to London, and the Great Day of God’s Wrath: Being the Substance of Sermons Preached in the City in the Time of the Sad Visitation, Together with the Necessity of Watching and Praying, with a Small Treatise of Death* (London: Black Spread Eagle and Matthias Walker, 1668), 2-3.

⁴⁰ Dyer, *Christ’s Voice to London, and the Great Day of God’s Wrath*, 33.

Anglican Worship Services

To help guide worship liturgy during the plague, the Church of England published *A Form of Common Prayer Together With an Order of Fasting, for the Averting of Gods heavy Visitation Upon many places of this Realm*.⁴¹ This work instructed churches to observe a fast on Wednesday, July 12, 1665 and to continue to do so on the first Wednesday of each month. It also included prayers that were to be read on each fast day and text for communion and evening prayer services.

John Evelyn's diary provided a window into the preaching given to congregations throughout the duration of the plague. The Anglican diet of homilies was not systematic expositional preaching through books of the Bible, but it actively engaged with the difficulties of the day.⁴² Those who preached to Evelyn called to congregations to redeem the time, "because the daies are evil."⁴³ They were encouraged from Romans 8:18 to look forward to the joys that would surpass their afflictions.⁴⁴ On one of the days of fasting, the churches were called to recognize God's displeasure and humbly submit to God's punishment from Leviticus 26:41-42.⁴⁵ Evelyn's diary recorded multiple sermons that were preached on God's wrath against sin and the need for repentance, as well as the serving of the Lord's Table.⁴⁶ In this time of great mortality, eternal life was preached from John 8:51.⁴⁷ As many were suffering, how to support those who were suffering was preached from Galatians 6:2.⁴⁸ On September 16, 1666, shortly after the Great Fire of

⁴¹ Anonymous, *A Form of Common Prayer Together With an Order of Fasting, for the Averting of Gods heavy Visitation Upon many places of this Realm* (London: John Bill and Christopher Barker, 1665).

⁴² These entries are presented in a table in appendix 2.

⁴³ Evelyn, *The Diary of John Evelyn*, 3:414.

⁴⁴ Evelyn, *The Diary of John Evelyn*, 3:415.

⁴⁵ Evelyn, "August 2, 1665," in *The Diary of John Evelyn*, 3:415-16.

⁴⁶ Evelyn, "August 20, 1665," in *The Diary of John Evelyn*, 3:418.

⁴⁷ Evelyn, "September 24, 1665," in *The Diary of John Evelyn*, 3:419-20.

⁴⁸ Evelyn, "October 29, 1665," in *The Diary of John Evelyn*, 3:423.

London, Evelyn recorded that the sermon was preached from 2 Peter 3 on the end of the world and how all things must be dissolved.⁴⁹

The Work of Pastoral Care

Throughout the plague, there is some question as to what degree pastoral visitation of the sick was permitted and to what degree pastoral visitation continued despite public health orders. Many persevered in ordinary pastoral ministry in this extraordinary time, moving toward the bereaved and the sick while others shrank back from them. Though households were locked in quarantine, there are multiple reports of ministers who visited the sick. One of these is from the Nonconformist James Janeway, who recorded the death of a child, John Ludlow, who died from the plague in November of 1665. Being a child with strong faith, he spoke of his anticipation of heaven in the days before he died. A minister visited John more than once in the hours before his death, asking him if he was afraid to die and on what basis he was expecting comfort and salvation, upon which he answered with his faith in Christ.⁵⁰

When Vincent entered London to minister during the plague, he lived in a house with eight people: “Three men, three youths, an old woman, and a maid, all which came to me, hearing of my stay in town, some to accompany me, others to help me.”⁵¹ Among these who ministered in London together, Vincent recounted that three of them succumbed to the plague. He regularly went out to visit and provide pastoral care to those sickened by the plague and described the suffering that surrounded him as he walked through London: “Now we could hardly go forth, but we should meet many coffins, and

⁴⁹ Evelyn, “September 16, 1666,” in *The Diary of John Evelyn*, 3:463.

⁵⁰ James Janeway, *A token for children: Being an exact account of the conversion, holy and exemplary lives, and joyful deaths of several young children. In two parts* (London, 1757), 6-7.

⁵¹ Vincent, *God’s Terrible Voice in the City*, 38.

see diseased persons with sores and limping in the streets.”⁵² In one example, he recorded discovering a sick man who had fallen and gashed his head and his futile attempts to speak with him as he lay dying.⁵³ In describing pastoral visitation, Vincent wrote, “I had been abroad to see a friend in the city, whose husband was newly dead of the plague, and she herself visited with it; I came back to see another whose wife was dead of the plague, and he himself under apprehensions that he should die within a few hours.”⁵⁴ Vincent regularly counseled sufferers through their sorrows and fears, pointing them to hope in Christ.

In the absence of pastoral care and the isolation of quarantine, some families found help in the pastoral writing of Baxter and others. In one example, James Janeway reported on John Harvey, who died from the plague at age eleven. Before the plague came to their house, Janeway recounted that second to the Bible, John was “most taken with the reading of the reverend Mr. *Baxter’s* works, especially his *Saints Everlasting Rest*,” which Baxter had written to prepare souls for death.⁵⁵ His sister was the first to die from the plague. Two weeks passed, during which he read *The Saint’s Everlasting Rest* “with great attention,” after which John also sickened with the plague. In speaking to his mother, he asked “I pray let me have Mr. Baxter’s book, that I may read a little more of eternity, before I go into it.” In the absence of pastoral visitation, his mother spoke with him about whether he was ready to go to heaven, and he spoke with her of his assurance that his sins were forgiven in the moments before his death.⁵⁶

It is important to note that the Nonconformists did not have a uniform approach to pastoral ministry during the plague. Though Baxter commended the courage

⁵² Vincent, *God’s Terrible Voice in the City*, 32.

⁵³ Vincent, *God’s Terrible Voice in the City*, 32-33.

⁵⁴ Vincent, *God’s Terrible Voice in the City*, 39.

⁵⁵ Janeway, *A token for children*, 42.

⁵⁶ Janeway, *A token for children*, 42-43.

of those who preached in London, it is also noted by the anonymous author T. M. that Baxter had dissuaded him from visiting the sick and recommended that he provide printed materials to the sick to bring comfort instead.⁵⁷ As recounted above, Baxter's written works truly served many who had been shut up in their homes. It should also be noted that though Baxter was outside of London, he was unexplainably absent from his family in Acton as he sheltered with his friend Richard Hampden in Buckinghamshire. He was restored to his family after the plague ended.⁵⁸ This could have been due to his own chronic health conditions, but no explanation is provided.

The Care of Souls

For as long as the plague continued, pastoral care largely focused on shepherding the fearful and comforting the grieving. In responding to the fear that pervaded London, Robert Tatnall's *An Antidote Against the Sinfull Palpitation of the Heart, or Fear of Death* confronted the fearful and called the church to respond to the plague with faith. The Christian must not fear the plague or death, but trust in the resurrection of Christ and the hope of eternal life. Instead of succumbing to sinful fear, the saints must rest in the promises of the gospel and find assurance and refuge in Christ.⁵⁹ In addition to Tatnall, the unidentified T. D.'s *Food and physick for every householder* rebuked the fearful for forsaking worship and neglecting the care of their souls while continuing to engage in public business dealing.

In his commentary on the plague, Daniel Defoe called for charity and grace to be extended due to the unparalleled challenges of the time, while also accusing those who

⁵⁷ T. M., *The Plague Chekt: Piety will either prevent or alter the property of the plague together with sundry other things in a letter written by a friend to sundry of his godly friends with respect to the present times* (London, 1665).

⁵⁸ Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, 2:448.

⁵⁹ Robert Tatnall, *An Antidote Against the Sinfull Palpitation of the Heart* (London: J. Hayes, 1665), 25.

condemned the fugitive clergy of arrogance:

[U]pon the whole, an allowance of charity might have been made on both sides, and we should have considered that such a time as this of 1665 is not to be paralleled in history, and that it is not the stoutest courage that will always support men in such cases. I had not said this, but had rather chosen to record the courage and religious zeal of those of both sides, who did hazard themselves for the service of the poor people in their distress, without remembering that any failed in their duty on either side. But the want of temper among us has made the contrary to this necessary: some that stayed not only boasting too much of themselves, but reviling those that fled, branding them with cowardice, deserting their flocks, and acting the part of the hireling, and the like.⁶⁰

Instead of rebuking the fearful or rebuking fugitive clergy, Defoe described courage as a gift which God gave to some and withheld from others.

I recommend . . . the charity of all good people to look back and reflect duly upon the terrors of the time, and whoever does so will see that it is not an ordinary strength that could support it. It was not like appearing in the head of an army or charging a body of horse in the field, but it was charging Death itself on his pale horse; to stay was indeed to die, and it could be esteemed nothing less, especially as things appeared at the latter end of August and the beginning of September, and as there was reason to expect them at that time . . . Besides, if God gave strength to some more than to others, was it to boast of their ability to abide the stroke, and upbraid those that had not the same gift and support, or ought not they rather to have been humble and thankful if they were rendered more useful than their brethren?⁶¹

In doing this, however, Defoe diminished personal responsibility and assigned responsibility for one's cowardice or courage to whether or not the Lord gave or withheld strength. This magnanimous spirit may very well be easier for Defoe as one who did not personally experience the Great Plague of London but reported on it afterward. In making allowances, Defoe permitted circumstances to eclipse how Scripture speaks about fear (Gen 46:3; Josh 1:9; Ps 46:2; 91:5; Jer 1:8; Matt 14:27; Rev 21:8) and courage (Deut 31:6; Josh 1:6; 1 Chr 28:20; Acts 23:11; 2 Cor 5:6-8). Shepherds must lead their congregations according to God's Word, and unusual circumstances do not allow for congregations to be exempted from the commands of Scripture.

⁶⁰ Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*, 177.

⁶¹ Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*, 177-78.

At Plague's End

Churches held special worship services of thanksgiving as the plague concluded. John Vernon's congregation designated November 17 as a day of thanksgiving and gathered to praise God as fifty of their church members had recovered from the plague.⁶² In addition, Samuel Pepys recorded that on Tuesday, November 20, 1666, he and a friend went to church for it was "thanksgiving-day for the cessation of the plague."⁶³ Pepys had suspicions as to why the day of thanksgiving was announced, but nevertheless the churches of London gathered for a special service of thanksgiving to God.

Thomas Doolittle and Thomas Blake wrote works to shepherd the plague survivors, encouraging them to live in light of God's mercy. Doolittle presented thirteen directions for living in thankfulness for God's merciful preservation from death.⁶⁴ The influence of the plague was felt in literature in the decades that followed. Works like Ralph Venning's *The Sinfulness of Sin* looked backward to the Great Plague of London, describing sin as "the plague of plagues."⁶⁵ How greatly might efforts for sanctification be increased if people truly believed that sin was to be avoided with the same zeal in which they sought to avoid a mortal disease. Additional works that followed included Isaac Watts's hymn *When We Are Raised from Deep Distress*⁶⁶ and Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year*, which is thought to have been prompted by the 1722 plague outbreak in Marseille.

⁶² Vernon, "Memoirs of Caleb Vernon," 144.

⁶³ Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, vol. 11 (New York: Croscup and Sterling, 1895), 66.

⁶⁴ See appendix 1.

⁶⁵ Ralph Venning, *Sin: The Plague of Plagues; or Sinful Sin the worst of Evils* (London, 1669).

⁶⁶ See appendix 2.

Findings

In considering the nature of pastoral ministry during the Great Plague, shepherding those who remained in London required a focus on comforting the grieving and encouraging the fearful. The preponderance of death and grief in the city, accompanied by the terror of the plague, served to keep these needs at the forefront of congregational care. In addition, the plague brought an intensity to worship services for those in attendance and also for those preaching. Pastors preached knowing that congregants would die before they regathered the following Sunday. Members said farewell at the end of service knowing that they would not see their whole congregation the following week. In this context, there was little middle ground. Church members largely treasured fellowship together or did not regather until the plague abated.

In this context, there was the temptation to suspend key pastoral or congregational responsibilities until the plague was over. Pastors should take care that they do not forsake the visiting of the sick (Jas 5:14) due to plague. Likewise, believers should not continue in fear or suspend the duties of Christian fellowship due to extraordinary times. The church needs shepherds who will persevere in the work of ordinary pastoral ministry, especially when in the face of unprecedented times of disease and death. For times such as this, as well as for the mortality that all face, pastors do well to equip themselves to become skilled comforters for the sake of their flocks.

It is worth noticing the extremity of the efforts given to avoiding the plague. Many fled from the city, households were quarantined, and vocations were abandoned. Public health officials searched for plague victims and efforts to combat disease were made, such as fumigations and many other approaches. Venning capitalized on this point in that sin is a far more deadly disease than the plague itself, as all of humanity is under the curse and will die. How much more then ought we to seek to avoid the spiritual evil of sin and fly to the Lord in repentance and faith?

Finally, for those who ministered throughout the plague, their hope was not to be found in the plague's abatement. If any clergy had set their hope in a return to normalcy, their hopes were severely dashed as London continued to face disaster with much of the city being consumed by flames in 1666. In addition, persecution continued to oppress many of the Nonconformists and their conventicles, and this only heightened as the plague ended. The hope of the pastor must not be in changing circumstances, but in the immutable Chief Shepherd who crowns his faithful under-shepherds with glory (1 Pet 5:4).

CHAPTER 5

PASTORAL APPLICATIONS FOR THE PRESENT

Practical applications for shepherding during public health crises can be drawn from the ministries of those who pastored during the Great Plague of London. As observed during the plague, those who would shepherd the saints through public health crises should possess the conviction to persevere in ministry despite the danger of disease and the disruption of public health orders. Until Christ returns for his flock, his sheep need to be fed the Word of God and receive the fellowship and encouragement that is only found in the gathering of the saints and the administration of the ordinances. Instead of suspending pastoral care, pastors ought to increase their labors to respond to the heightened needs of their flock, and fearful circumstances should be met with increased exhortations to trust the Lord.

Duty and Disruption

Public health crises introduce significant disruption to church and community life as increased mortality and accompanying public health orders bring about public hysteria and social fragmentation. This makes congregational life increasingly difficult as worship and fellowship is burdened with the complexity of navigating these issues. If the crisis is localized, pastors may be tempted to abandon their congregations to escape what is unfolding. In an unavoidable pandemic, shepherds may be tempted to prioritize personal safety and isolate themselves to avoid contagion while forsaking the care of their flock. Instead of this, those to whom the care of the church has been entrusted must look to the Lord and take heart as they embrace their calling to care for the body of Christ. Despite the ministry challenges of public health crises, pastors do well to heed

Richard Kephale's counsel to embrace their duties to Christ and to one another while entrusting themselves to Divine Providence.¹ Though fear will tempt many to forsake duty, pastors must commit themselves to leading the regular gathering of the saints for worship (Heb 10:25), the keeping of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Table (Matt 28:19-20; 1 Cor 11:23-26), and the visitation of the sick (Matt 25:36; Jas 5:13).

In places where the state seeks to exercise authority over the church's worship, only those with galvanized convictions on the freedom of the church to obey Christ and uphold the nature of the church as an embodied and emplaced assembly will be willing to engage in civil disobedience and persevere. To this end, Richard Baxter's writing on civil disobedience and the Nonconformists' ministry in London provide helpful examples of upholding Christ's authority over the worship of the church.²

Those in pastoral ministry ought to anticipate increased ministerial difficulty and sorrow as daily ministry becomes disproportionately weighted toward the care of sufferers. Faithfulness in such extraordinary times is a gift to the church as the fainthearted are encouraged, the sick are visited, and the bereaved are shepherded to the comfort that is only found in Christ. Those who persevere in shepherding and protecting the flock exhibit the Good Shepherd's love for his sheep while refusing to be hirelings who flee in the presence of danger (John 10:11-15). Finally, those who shepherd well in times of disease and death provide a profound gift to future generations who may learn from the ministerial examples of those who have gone before them.

¹ Richard Kephale, *Medela pestilentiae wherein is contained several theological queries concerning the plague, with approved antidotes, signes and symptoms: also an exact method for curing that epidemical distemper, humbly presented to the Right Honourable and Right Worshipful the lord mayor and sheriffs of the city of London* (London, 1665), 39.

² Richard Baxter, *A Christian directory, or, A summ of practical theologie and cases of conscience directing Christians how to use their knowledge and faith, how to improve all helps and means, and to perform all duties, how to overcome temptations, and to escape or mortifie every sin: in four parts* (London: Robert White for Nevill Simmons, 1673), 467.

Shepherding Issues in Public Health Crises

Shepherding a congregation through the trial of a public health crisis is multifaceted as different needs are brought to the forefront. As observed in the Great Plague of London, public health crises are accompanied with particular temptations. Instead of setting their hope in the Lord, some will give way to fear, be tempted to neglect the love of neighbor, and forsake their duties of worship and fellowship. Those with a faulty understanding of God's providence may be prone to misinterpret their suffering and the sufferings of others. As the population looks to medicine for treatment, some may reduce their experience to a medical event and set their hope in medicine instead of looking to the Lord who is sovereign over disease and health. Shepherds must keep careful watch over their flocks lest they stray in these ways. In all these things, believers ought to be shepherded to place their faith in the Lord who sovereignly accomplishes his purposes for his glory and the good of his church.

Shepherding the Fearful

As T. D. exhorted London toward courage in *Food and physick for every householder*, so too must pastors lead their churches to exercise faith and entrust themselves to the Lord instead of giving way to sinful fear.³ Fearfulness is never commended in Scripture, and fear is antithetical to faith. The command to not be afraid is regularly coupled with the command to believe and be reminded of God's presence.⁴ Believers are not to fear that which kills the body (Matt 10:28), but instead must turn to the Lord in faith (Deut 31:6; Josh 1:9; Neh 4:14; Isa 8:12-14; Matt 14:27). Instead of being guided by fear, one's decisions must arise from faith (Rom 14:23). While a

³ T. D., *Food and physick for every householder & his family during the time of the plague very useful, both for the free and the infected, and necessary for all persons in what condition or quality soever: together with several prayers and meditations before, in, and after infection, very needful in all infectious and contagious times, and fit as well for the country as the city* (London: T. Leach for F. Coles, 1665).

⁴ Edward T. Welch's book *Running Scared: Fear, Worry, and the God of Rest* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2007) is a helpful resource for counseling believers to turn from their fears and trust in the Lord.

response of fear might be instinctive, one must turn to Christ in faith. Cowardice is not permissible, for it is among the sins judged by God in the lake of fire (Rev 21:8).

Regardless of the trial, believers must be shepherded away from fear and encouraged to set their hope in the goodness of God's providence.

Those who have forsaken love of neighbor and the duties of worship and fellowship out of fearfulness must be called to repent, return to their God given duties, and entrust themselves to the Lord's care. While liberty of conscience is not to be abused as justification to forsake obligations, neither ought one to cultivate a censorious spirit toward those whose consciences differ as they go about these duties in a modified manner. Though prudence is to be exercised when it comes to contagion, one is not to suspend the duties of the love of neighbor and love of family, or the duties of fellowship and worship. The light of the gospel must not be hidden by the church in times of calamity, and neither should neighbors and relatives be forsaken in their hour of greatest need (Prov 17:17).

Interpreting Suffering

Pastors serve a vital role in preparing the church for suffering and in shepherding the saints in how to interpret their sufferings. While this work is done primarily by the regular proclamation of the whole counsel of God's Word, interpreting suffering becomes an important part of personal ministry to sufferers in times of crisis. Church members must be instructed in the gracious purposes of God as they seek to understand the meaning of their afflictions. Interpretations of suffering must be framed and bounded by the purposes, goodness, and love of God (Rom 8:24-39). Without these interpretive boundaries, those who have not learned the goodness of God's providence may more easily find sickness to be a point of stumbling.

Church members should be warned away from presuming that suffering is judgment for particular sins. Without biblical warrant, such interpretations must be

discarded. Those who accuse sufferers of sin in this way have, as Samuel Shaw argued, “a misapprehension of the nature of God, and of the nature of Good and Evil.”⁵ Unless there is specific biblical warrant, all illness and suffering should be seen as part of the consequences of sin for which the whole world continues to groan and wait for redemption (Rom 8:18-23). Instead of presuming that illness is a consequence for particular sins, one should be reminded that Jesus himself rejected such assignment of guilt to specific groups because of the disasters that befell them and instead called for all to repent (Luke 13:1-5).

Those who are in Christ must not interpret their sufferings to be an expression of God’s wrath against them for their sins. The propitiating work of Christ is finished and they have been saved from wrath and condemnation (Rom 5:9; 8:1). Instead of wrath, God disciplines his children in love for the sake of their holiness (Heb 12:3-11). If disease comes to the church by the hand of God’s providence, it is for his good purposes, as Theodore Beza wrote, to “destroy the wicked, and also to correct and exercise the good, doth bring unto us great profit, that we may learn both to fear and love God.”⁶ Disease must not be reduced to a medical event independent of God’s sanctifying work. Every illness is a providential interruption of ordinary life as the afflicted are brought face to face with their own weakness and mortality. This requires one to rest and exercise wisdom in seeking medical care for the body, and such times provide unsought opportunities for seeking the Lord and growing in faith. Shepherds must encourage their flocks to trust that their illness is under God’s providence and to seek to be good stewards of such trials.

⁵ Samuel Shaw, *The Voice of one crying in a wilderness, or, The business of a Christian, both antecedaneous to, concomitant of, and consequent upon, a sore and heavy visitation represented in several sermons / first preacht to his own family, lying under such visitation, and now made publike as a thank-offering to the Lord his healer* (London, 1667), A3.

⁶ Theodore Beza, *A Learned Treatise of the Plague: Wherein, the Two Questions: Whether the Plague be Infectious, or no: And Whether, and how farr it may be shunned of Christians, by going aside? are resolved* (London: Thomas Ratcliffe, 1665), 8.

Upholding God’s Sovereignty over Disease and Medicine

Church members need to be disciplined to trust in the Lord’s sovereignty over disease and medicine. Unless the Lord gives health, the doctors labor in vain. Shepherds do well to apply Psalm 127 in highlighting the necessity of human action and our utter dependence upon God’s providence. Uncontrolled public health events such as epidemics and pandemics expose the shortcomings of medicine. The failure of medicine in 1665 is painfully apparent today as plague transmission and treatment was not understood, and public health orders and medical treatments often harmed patients’ health through bleeding, potions, and fumigation. Daniel Defoe argued that the plague served to humble those who placed their confidence in human achievement, for “the contagion despised all medicine,” and “vain was the help of man” as the plague continued.⁷ Such events serve as reminders that man is not sovereign over public health and display the futility of man’s efforts apart from God’s blessing.

The scientific and medical advances since 1665 should be seen as a gift of God’s common grace. When the nature of transmission is understood and treatments have proven to be successful, this is a cause for thanksgiving. However, when secondary causes are understood and medical treatments have predictable outcomes, it can become easier to neglect God as the first cause of all things. In his sermon “A Welcome to the Plague,” Samuel Shaw warned against “immoderate seeking after created help” through medicine.⁸ Receiving medicine is not contrary to trusting in God, but no one should trust in medicine apart from faith in the Lord and “depend upon the virtue of any created means as distinct from God.”⁹ Instead, those who use medicine ought to do so “in subordination and subserviency to the supream cause, who can at pleasure let lose or

⁷ Daniel Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year* (New York: Dover, 2001), 184.

⁸ Shaw, *Voice of one Crying*, 111.

⁹ Shaw, *Voice of one Crying*, 112.

suspend the influences and virtues of every such means.”¹⁰ God as the first and supreme cause gives healing through secondary causes or means such as medicine, and so medicine must be received with faith and hope in the Lord. Those who set their hope in medicine apart from God should be called to repent:

Oh what a raging and unquenchable thirst have many men after creature-cures! . . . Give me a Physician, or I dye, says one . . . What man, is thy life lapt up in a pill, or incorporated into a potion? . . . wilt thou . . . tye up the supream and free Agent to a form and method of working? Let not such a prophane disposition be found amongst us. Again, if you have found out hopefull creature cures, take heed of using them in an inordinate manner, laying stress upon them, *looking earnestly on them*, as though they by their *own power and proper vertue* could make the lame to walk, or the sick to recover.¹¹

Instead of losing sight of God’s providential care when receiving medical treatment, the saints should give thanks to the Lord for medicine, exercise wisdom, and obey conscience as bounded by Scripture (Rom 14:23). Instead of setting hope in medical care, public health orders, or a return to normalcy, the saints must entrust themselves to God’s providence and hope in Christ who is immutably sovereign over all.

Pastoral Care for the Sick, the Dying, and the Bereaved

Until the Lord returns, the saints will continue to suffer illness which often leads to death. As the members of a church entrust themselves to one another’s care, it is vital that shepherds become skilled in caring for souls as they experience illness and physical sufferings on their way to glory.

Shepherding the Sick

Care for the sick is assumed of Jesus’s disciples (Matt 25:31-46). Physical care is a diaconal and congregational responsibility (Acts 6:2-4; 1 Tim 5:10), while the spiritual care provided by ministry of the Word and prayer is a pastoral duty assigned to the elders of the church (Acts 20:28). Instead of being suspended in times of illness, the

¹⁰ Shaw, *Voice of one Crying*, 112.

¹¹ Shaw, *Voice of one Crying*, 111-12.

responsibility of visitation and prayer for the sick is explicitly assigned to the elders of the church (Jas 5:13-15). In James 5, there is an implicit understanding that because the sick have absented themselves from the gathering of the church, the elders of the church will go to visit and pray for them. As Richard Kephale argued in *Medela Pestilentiae*, a pastor must not abandon his congregation in times of illness, but continue to “instruct, direct, comfort, and encourage” his flock.¹² In sickness or in health, the spiritual care of the church is to be continued.

It is important for shepherds to skillfully apply the Scriptures to those who are sick instead of imitating the example of Job’s friends. This includes anticipating and addressing the temptations faced by those who are ill and exhorting them to walk in faithfulness and trust the Lord throughout their illness. Temptations among the suffering frequently include frustration, fear, blame upon secondary causes, and anger toward God. In *An Antidote Against the Sinfull Palpitation of the Heart, or Fear of Death*, Robert Tatnall encouraged faith in the time of plague and exhorted the saints to repent of their fearfulness and trust in the Lord.¹³ Tatnall exhorted the reader to apprehend the promises of the gospel and the assurance of knowing that the Lord is good, to trust the Scriptures, and take refuge in Christ. Those who are sick must be instructed that their sickness is not by chance but comes to them from the hands of God.¹⁴

Thomas Brooks likewise wrote that it is “the Lord alone that sends the pestilence amongst a people,” and that while “the cup of trembling which is this day offered to the children of God, is often very bitter at the second hand, or as it appears in second causes; and yet it is sweet at the first hand, yea, it is very sweet, as it is reached to

¹² Kephale, *Medela Pestilentiae*, 32-33.

¹³ Robert Tatnall, *An Antidote Against the Sinfull Palpitation of the Heart* (London: J. Hayes, 1665), 25.

¹⁴ One helpful work for ministry training that draws upon the Puritans is Christopher Bogosh’s *The Puritans on How to Care for the Sick and Dying: A Contemporary Guide for Pastors and Counselors* (Yulee, FL: Good Samaritan Books, 2011).

them by a hand from heaven.”¹⁵ Instead of becoming embittered by placing blame upon secondary causes, the sufferer must be reminded to look to God as the first cause of all things, recognize the hand of God, and trust the goodness of his providence.¹⁶ Sufferers need to be shepherded away from emphasizing any secondary cause to the neglect of God’s providence. While secondary causes are not to be discounted, those suffering need to look above secondary causes to the very hand of God.¹⁷ Trust in the sovereignty of God coupled with faith in his goodness serves to guard against the bitterness that springs up from a misfocus upon secondary causes. Such a misfocus serves to increase strife and controversy instead of redirecting the soul to find rest in the Lord.

In situations where spiritual care can only be done at a distance, pastors must consider how to best care for members that they are unable to visit. Sometimes those who are sick may refuse visitation out of a desire to protect others from contagion, while others may experience constraints depending on the regulations of their medical facility. While it is usually possible for clergy to overcome these barriers in medical settings, it is important to consider what spiritual care might look like for those who are quarantined. During the Great Plague of London, the printing press served as a mediator between the healthy and the sick. Today there are many digital tools available to mediate when one is unable to receive in-person ministry. As Symon Patrick, Richard Baxter, and Thomas Willes were exemplary in writing and publishing pamphlets to shepherd the quarantined, pastors do well to consider what resources they might provide to shepherd the souls of those who are sick and unable to share in fellowship with the rest of the congregation. This could be printed materials as well as sermons, podcasts episodes, audiobooks, and other curated materials to encourage and comfort those suffering illness. Depending on

¹⁵ Thomas Brooks, *A Heavenly Cordial* (London, 1666), 7-8.

¹⁶ Brooks, *A Heavenly Cordial*, 7-8.

¹⁷ Brooks, *A Heavenly Cordial*, 7-8.

the setting, modern technology allows for greater frequency of communication and interaction with both pastors and the congregation than permitted by the visiting restrictions of medical facilities.

Though such resources may be necessary, the exception must not become the rule, and ministry mediated through writing and technology should not become the primary way of ministering to those who are sick. While technology is a gift, it is no substitute for embodied fellowship. Shepherds must determine whether or not they are willing to expose themselves to contagion for the sake of caring for their flock and at a minimum be able to “attend at a competent distance.”¹⁸ One should seek to be faithful without being foolhardy and discern whether measures are prudent in seeking to avoid exposure during visitation and whether they should be quarantined afterward before continuing to minister to the healthy. One must not presume divine protection from disease but should remember the plague martyrs such as Thomas Vincent’s ministry partners.¹⁹

One must beware of the sin of presumption as David prayed in Psalm 19:13, “Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me!” Pastors must beware of presuming that they are protected from disease because of their own righteousness or faith. Such pride easily turns to casting aspersions on others, such as when Samuel Shaw was accused of sin because his daughters died from the plague. Without specific biblical warrant, such presumption is cruel. Instead of pretending to know the mind of God, all should seek to walk in faithfulness and wisdom while entrusting the outcome to God’s good providence.

Those who do not have pastoral willingness for in-person ministry to the sick and dying do well to appreciate the danger and sacrifice of those who persevere in

¹⁸ Kephale, *Medela Pestilentiae*, 11.

¹⁹ Anonymous, “Life of the Author,” in *The True Christian’s Love to the Unseen Christ* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1996), ix.

ministry to the risk of their own selves. Those who venture their own health in order to care for souls should receive encouragement and prayer. As Vincent requested from the fellow pastors who mediated his disagreement with Doolittle, they should not seek to “weaken his hands” in this work.²⁰ The prayerful support that was provided to Vincent is a helpful template for believers today. Those who have decided not to expose themselves to disease must not seek to discourage those who are providing care to the sick and the dying, but should uphold them in prayer, knowing full well the cost they may incur because of their service.

Shepherding the Dying

As all the saints will die until the Lord returns, pastors must be skilled in preparing their church members for death. As David wrote of the Lord’s shepherding of his soul through the valley of the shadow of death in Psalm 23, so also the saints need the Great Shepherd’s under-shepherds to care for their souls as they pass through the shadow of the plague. Over the course of pastoral ministry, pastors will care for many saints as they experience greater degrees of physical decline and illness before they enter glory. When illness is serious or terminal, spiritual care should not only be responsive to their sufferings, but it should prioritize preparation for heaven. Shepherds should equip the saints to finish their races, following the example set by the apostle Paul. Christians who walk in the valley of the shadow of death should be able to confess with confidence that Christ alone is their comfort in life and in death.

At a basic level, it is vital for believers to have a clear understanding of how Scripture speaks about life, death, and resurrection, for knowing of “the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment” (Heb 6:2) is an elementary doctrine. Every physical

²⁰ Edmund Calamy, *A Continuation of the Account of the Ministers, Lecturers, Masters, and Fellows of Colleges, and Schoolmasters, who were Ejected and Silenced after the Restoration in 1660, by or before the Act for Uniformity* (London: R. Ford, 1727), 32.

death is a consequence of sin (Rom 3:23), and will be overcome by union with Christ and his resurrection (Rom 8:11). The saints have been brought from death to life by the gracious work of Christ (Eph 2:1-9), and all who are alive in Christ, though they die physically, will go immediately to be present with the Lord (2 Cor 5:6-8) and look forward to a future resurrection after which they will dwell with the Lord forever in the New Creation (Rev 20-22). Confidence in these truths is essential to assurance as one approaches the end of life.

Ars moriendi, or “the art of dying,” was a genre for Christian readers originating in the thirteenth century focused on preparation for death. Multiple examples of this genre can be found from the literature of the Great Plague, and these works provide helpful templates for ministry to the dying. In *A Cordial for Believers in Dying Times*, Thomas Doolittle wrote to provide comfort and equip the saints for death.²¹ He outlined spiritual duties to aid in preparation for death and advised the reader to be certain of one’s spiritual standing before the Lord, to entrust one’s family members to the Lord, and to look forward to Christ’s coming.²² In *A Help for the Poor Who Are Visited with the Plague*, Thomas Willes also presented duties for those who were sick with the plague. He began with his reader’s need for salvation and then prescribed duties to them as they waited for death or recovery. They were to begin by recognizing God’s sovereign hand in their illness, followed by the recognition and repentance of their sins. As they prepare for death, they are to recognize that their death is deserved because of sin. Finally, as they wait upon the outcome of their illness, they are to suffer patiently and seek to grow in holiness, waiting on the Lord with submission to whatever outcome he

²¹ Thomas Doolittle, *A Cordial for Believers in Dying Times with a Corrosive for Wicked Men in Dying Times. At first written as a letter to private friends in daily expectation of death by the plague, and afterwards printed for more public good* (London, 1665).

²² See appendix 1 for a summary of these spiritual duties.

gives.²³ These duties as listed by Doolittle and Willes are wise aims for shepherds to keep in mind as they have conversations with the dying to prepare them for glory.

Whether a saint's illness be short or long-term before going to be with the Lord, shepherds do well to equip themselves and their people to think biblically about death and look forward to heaven with hope. In *The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness*, Samuel Shaw expounded on 2 Corinthians 5:6 and the apostle Paul's desire to be with the Lord instead of being "absent of Christ Jesus and his glory."²⁴ Shaw encouraged the dying with "the consummation of a Christian's happiness" that is before them.²⁵ Instead of seeking to maintain lesser joys in the flesh, one should be "willing and desirous to lay aside this weight of flesh, and this body and so easily resists us with sins and snares, and run with eagerness to the object that is set before us."²⁶ Eternal life with the Lord is greater than whatever blessedness one has known, for it is free of all pain and sorrow, and greatest joy is found in beholding Christ in his glory.

First published in 1650, Richard Baxter's *The Saints Everlasting Rest* is an exposition of Hebrews 4:9 that brought comfort to those dying of the plague as it pointed them to the hope of eternal rest and joy with the Lord.²⁷ Finally, in *God's Terrible Voice in the City*, Thomas Vincent described the saint's entrance into glory and the glorious welcome waiting for God's people as they enter his presence with the angels and all the saints and rejoice together:

²³ Thomas Willes, *A Help for the Poor Who Are Visited with the Plague: To be Communicated to them by the Rich Or, by any Pious Christian, Whose Bowels of Compassion are Moved Towards Them, in the Apprehension of their Comfortless Condition, and the Great Danger of their Dying in their Sins* (London, 1665), 3-4.

²⁴ Shaw, *A Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness*, 123.

²⁵ Shaw, *A Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness*, 123.

²⁶ Shaw, *A Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness*, 189.

²⁷ Richard Baxter's *Dying Thoughts* is also worth a mention as a meditation on the goodness of going home to be with the Lord. It is an exposition of Philippians 1:23 and was first published in 1683.

Now the vail is rent, and they enter the Holy of Holies, where God dwells, not in the darkness of a thick cloud, as in the temple of old, but in the brightness of such marvelous light and glory, as their eyes never did behold, neither could enter into their heart to conceive; there they have the vision of God's face without any eclipse upon the light of his countenance: there they have the treasures of God's love opened, and his arms to receive them with dearest and sweetest embracements; which kindles in their hearts such a flame of love, so ravishing and delightful, as words cannot utter: there they are entertained by the Lord Jesus Christ, whom in the world they have served; and he that showed them his grace, which they had wondered at when they were in the body, doth now show them his glory, which they wonder at much more.²⁸

Shepherds do well to encourage dying saints with the promises of heaven and to look forward to the joy, wonder, and awe of God's presence.²⁹

Shepherding the Bereaved

When it comes to the care of the bereaved, prior points of application are foundational. Those who set their hope in the Lord with confidence in Divine Providence and anticipation of the glory of the New Creation will be more equipped to navigate their grief. In addition to these truths, ongoing encouragement and fellowship with the saints is essential for those who are grieving. Isolation from society in times of illness strips away the irreplaceable fellowship of joy and sorrow that is meant to be shared by the saints as they weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice (Rom 12:15). Pastors must guard against allowing a public health crisis to result in the neglect of the grieving sheep in their flock.³⁰

Those who are bereaved need ongoing counsel and encouragement from the

²⁸ Thomas Vincent, *God's terrible voice in the city: wherein are set forth the sound of the voice, in a narration of the two terrible judgements of plague and fire, inflicted upon the city of London, in the years 1665, and 1666* (London, 1667), 35-36.

²⁹ Additional recommendations for preparation for death include Douglas Taylor's *I Shall Not Die, But Live: Facing Death with Gospel Hope* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2020), Nancy Guthrie's *O Love That Will Not Let Me Go: Facing Death with Courageous Confidence in God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), Joel Beeke and Christopher Bogosh's *Dying and Death: Getting Rightly Prepared for the Inevitable* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), Ligon Duncan's *Fear Not! Death and the Afterlife from a Christian Perspective* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2010), and Matthew McCullough's *Remember Death: The Surprising Path to Living Hope* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018).

³⁰ For more on this, Brian Croft's *The Pastor's Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015) is a helpful resource for ministering to those who are grieving and widowed.

Scriptures as sorrows are accompanied with temptations for false thoughts of God. Instead, times of sorrow are an opportunity for deeper communion with the Lord. In *A Voice Crying Out in the Wilderness*, Samuel Shaw testified of his own grief over the loss of his children while magnifying the work of God in his own soul: “The valley of tears brought me more sight of my God, more insight into myself, than ever the valley of visions, all duties and ordinances had done.”³¹

As far as pastoral counsel for the grieving, the writings of John Rawlet and Symon Patrick provide helpful guidance. In John Rawlet’s letter to his mother, he did not deny her the grief of loss, but sought to temper her grief with comfort in looking to the wisdom and grace of God. Those who suffer loss do not lose the love of God. Though one has died, so also will all of God’s children follow Christ in death, and God in his goodness determines the order in which all will die. In sorrow, one should love God more, and “depending on him, more immediately for your comfort, you shall enjoy much more of him, and feel more the plenty of the communication of his goodness to your soul.”³² When God withdraws his gifts, those who have enjoyed them should seek to receive rest and joy in God himself. Instead of focusing on one’s loss, one should rejoice in the gain of their loved ones who are now with the Lord and look forward to when we “shall all meet in the general assembly of the saints, and be forever with the Lord and with one another.”³³

Symon Patrick’s *A Consolatory Discourse to prevent Immoderate Grief for the Death of our Friends* is a caution against inordinate sorrow that mourns “as if we loved

³¹ Shaw, *A Voice Crying Out in the Wilderness*, ix.

³² John Rawlet, “A Consolatory Letter of that Reverend and Pious Man, Mr. Rowlett, the Author of *The Christian Monitor*, to his Mother, upon his Apprehension of Dying by the Plague,” in *A Brief Account of the Life of the Reverend Mr. John Rawlet, Author of The Christian Monitor. Together, With a Valuable Remain of His, never before Printed, viz. His Consolatory Letter to his Mother, Written on Occasion of his Apprehension of Dying by the Great Plague, 1665*, by Thomas Bray (London: W. Roberts, 1728), 11.

³³ Rawlet, “A Consolatory Letter,” 24.

nothing else.”³⁴ Those who grieve must look to the hope of resurrection so that they might receive comfort in Christ. Instead of seeking to protect oneself from grief by not loving others, or by seeking to be like a Stoic and “stupify all your passions,” one “may mourn moderately.”³⁵ Patrick surveyed church fathers’ writings on grief and then wrote to give comfort toward different bereavements such as the loss of a child or spouse. Instead of being surprised by loss, one should live in expectation that death comes to all. As the Lord gives, so he also takes away, but he does not forget his children who grieve and calls them to come to himself and receive rest (Matt 11:28). Patrick urged such consideration and faith in the goodness of God:

Doth not God do all things for our Good? Do we wish better to our selves than God doth? Hath not He the greatest care of all his Creatures, to see that it be well with them? Did he make them for any other end than that they might be happy? Is there the least Sparrow . . . that falls to the ground without our Fathers Providence? Then Mankind must needs be under a greater love, and none of them can dye by chance, but by his direction.³⁶

More than this, our greatest comfort is to be found in the life of Jesus. Friends are buried so “that by the power of God they may have a better birth” in the resurrection.³⁷ Those who are bereaved must not consider themselves to be alone after suffering loss but look to the risen Christ who will come and give comfort to the bereaved in their sorrow.³⁸ The mourner should be comforted by the life of our resurrected Lord and patiently wait for the day when “we shall not be capable of mourning any more; All Tears shall be wiped off from our Eyes, Sighing and Sorrow shall fly away.”³⁹ Until the resurrection, one will continue to experience loss, and the greatest comfort is to be found in God. Instead of

³⁴ Patrick, “A Consolatory Letter,” 88.

³⁵ Patrick, “A Consolatory Letter,” 89.

³⁶ Patrick, “A Consolatory Letter,” 193.

³⁷ Patrick, “A Consolatory Letter,” 235.

³⁸ Patrick, “A Consolatory Letter,” 236.

³⁹ Patrick, “A Consolatory Letter,” 237.

inordinate grief such as David's response to the death of Absalom (2 Sam 18-19), sorrow is to be tempered with resurrection hope (1 Thess 4:13-18).

Shepherding after the Crisis

It is important to consider how to shepherd the souls of those who have recovered and what exhortations are appropriate and helpful for the congregation when the health crisis ends. In the busyness of ministry and caring for the church this might be an afterthought, but it is an opportunity for instruction that should not be neglected. The trials and the testing of faith are intended to bring about the fruit of steadfastness in the saints (Jas 1:3-4), and those who are emerging from such a season of difficulty should contemplate how the Lord has worked in their souls.

One helpful example of shepherding souls after the Great Plague of London is Thomas Doolittle's *A Serious Enquiry for a Suitable Return, for Continued Life, in and after a Time of Great Mortality, by a Wasting Plague*. Doolittle presented thirteen directions to the church for how they might live in response to God's mercy.⁴⁰ As God had preserved them, they were to respond by living in thankfulness to God.⁴¹ In addition to this, Thomas Blake's *Eben-Ezer: OR, Profitable Truths after Pestilential Times* called for an increase of devotion and love from those who survived.⁴² Christ "expects higher thoughts of himself, and to be more esteemed by them."⁴³ They are to fear the Lord, keep the Sabbath, and love and delight in Christ. This is "the fruit that this escaping remnant should bring forth, and is that which God expects from preserved ones."⁴⁴ Christ must be seen and known in his glory: "Let not a poor heart think it is at present in a capacity of

⁴⁰ See appendix 2.

⁴¹ Thomas Doolittle, *A Serious Enquiry for a Suitable Return, for Continued Life, in and after a Time of Great Mortality, by a Wasting Plague* (London: R. I., 1666).

⁴² Thomas Blake, *Eben-ezer: OR, Profitable Truths after Pestilential Times* (London, 1666).

⁴³ Blake, *Eben-Ezer*, 7.

⁴⁴ Blake, *Eben-Ezer*, 9.

valuing Christ according to all his worth and excellency, for that the soul cannot fully know.”⁴⁵ Surviving the plague should “encourage thee to press after prizing Christ more; as Paul speaking of the Corinthians, ‘You love the Lord Jesus, see you abound yet more and more.’”⁴⁶ When churches emerge from seasons of trial, it is wise for shepherds to seek to solidify the lessons learned in seasons of testing and sanctification and to lead their congregations in thanksgiving to God.

An Example for Future Generations

As Richard Kephale and William Boghust looked back to church history, those who would persevere in pastoral ministry during public health crises do well to look to the stream of church history that has preceded them. As examples from early church history and past teachings on plague ministry from Cyprian, Dionysius of Alexandria, Theodore Beza, and Joseph Hall informed London’s clergy, so also the examples of those who pastored in London during the plague provide examples for future generations of pastors.

Charles Spurgeon is an example of one who was influenced by those who ministered during the Great Plague of London. In one of his early sermons at a small Baptist church in Waterbeach, Spurgeon remembered the courageous ministry of those who pastored during the Great Plague of London and noted God’s deliverance.⁴⁷ In his personal library he owned two volumes authored during the Great Plague of London, one being Samuel Shaw’s *A Welcome to the Plague*, and the other being Thomas Doolittle’s *A Suitable Return*.⁴⁸ Spurgeon’s ministry imitated the plague ministers during London’s

⁴⁵ Blake, *Eben-Ezer*, 59.

⁴⁶ Blake, *Eben-Ezer*, 66.

⁴⁷ Charles Spurgeon, *The Lost Sermons of C. H. Spurgeon*, vol. 6, *His Earliest Outlines and Sermons between 1851 and 1854* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2020), 95.

⁴⁸ These specific volumes are preserved at the Spurgeon Library at Midwestern Theological Seminary. Thank you to Geoff Chang and his assistant who reviewed these volumes.

cholera outbreak in 1854 as he observed new opportunities for the gospel and courageously preached and ministered to the sick.⁴⁹ In recounting this ministry in a sermon at the Metropolitan Tabernacle on July 29, 1866, Spurgeon testified of the urgency of gospel ministry among the sick and the dying:

I recollect, when first I came to London, how anxiously people listened to the gospel, for the cholera was raging terribly. There was little scoffing then. All day, and sometimes all night long, I went about from house to house, and saw men and women dying, and, oh, how glad they were to see my face! When many were afraid to enter their houses lest they should catch the deadly disease, we who had no fear about such things found ourselves most gladly listened to when we spoke of Christ and of things Divine. And now, again, is the minister's time You have the Balm of Gilead; when their wounds smart, pour it in. You know of Him who died to save; tell them of Him. Lift high the cross before their eyes.⁵⁰

Such ministry was grueling, and Spurgeon recorded his exhaustion and depression as “family after family summoned me to the bedside of the smitten, and almost every day I was called to visit the grave.”⁵¹ His friends were “falling one by one,” and “a little more work and weeping would have laid me low among the rest.”⁵² In a moment of despondency, Spurgeon found encouragement in Psalm 91, entrusted his health to the Lord, and persevered in ministry to the sick.⁵³ Examples of pastoral courage such as these provide ministerial guidance and precedent to future generations of the church.

An Opportunity for Gospel Ministry

Finally, as the labors of pastoral care are multiplied in times of disease and death, so also are the opportunities for gospel proclamation. As the plague created

⁴⁹ Brian Croft, *The Pastor's Ministry: Biblical Priorities for Faithful Shepherds* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 96.

⁵⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, Susannah Spurgeon, and W. J. Harrald, *The Autobiography of Charles H. Spurgeon*, vol. 1, 1834-1854 (Chicago: Curts & Jennings, 1899), 371.

⁵¹ Spurgeon, *The Autobiography of Charles H. Spurgeon*, 1:371.

⁵² Spurgeon, *The Autobiography of Charles H. Spurgeon*, 1:371.

⁵³ Spurgeon, *The Autobiography of Charles H. Spurgeon*, 1:372.

opportunities for the gospel, times of public calamity heighten awareness of one's own mortality. In the midst of uncertainty and fear, the hope of Christ must be proclaimed widely instead of having a diminished presence in society. While others shrink back, public health crises provide a unique opportunity for the church to move forward with love for those in need and to courageously proclaim the hope of the gospel. The hope of eternal life shines brightly when surrounded by the darkness of death. In such times, it is vital for churches to remain open not only to continue to minister to their church members, but to proclaim the hope of salvation to their communities.

Conclusion

Times of disease and death bring many opportunities for caring for the souls of God's people. While many stumble as they experience suffering, a heart that rightly responds to illness is rich soil for Spirit-borne fruit. It is vital that shepherds recognize this opportunity and the dangers it presents to their congregation and that they are faithful to shepherd souls toward faith, hope, and love. May the ministry of faithful shepherds turn the eyes of their flocks to look to God's good and gracious providence, to find rest in the finished work of Christ, and to know the comfort of the Holy Spirit. Though seasons of trial will continue to buffet the church, the Lord who is the first cause of all things gives such providences to refine his people and magnify his name. May pastors be ever faithful to care for the saints in the face of disease and death, knowing that their path with the sheep does not conclude until they are finally with their glorious Chief Shepherd.

APPENDIX 1

DUTIES FOR THOSE PRESERVED FROM DEATH

This list of duties is excerpted from Doolittle's *A Serious Enquiry for a Suitable Return*.

1. Be not worse, but better.
2. Pay your vows, and live up to your holy purposes and resolutions, which you made in time of danger, and fears of death.
3. Look after the cure of soul-sickness; take heed that you lie not under spiritual judgments, when temporal judgment is removed.
4. Be eminently exemplary in the capacity God hath set you.
5. Watch against secret sins, perform secret duties, mind secret things in publick duties.
6. Be dead to the world.
7. Be dead to sin, and be buried with Christ.
8. Walk in newness of life.
9. Keep upon your heart a constant sense of God's distinguishing providence in preserving of you.
10. Since you live, and many of your relations dead, love God so much the more.
11. Remember what conscience did condemn you for, in time of fear and death, and avoid it; what it did commend you for, and do it.
12. Since you live, after such danger of death, trust God for the future.
13. Give thanks to God for your preservation.¹

¹ Thomas Doolittle, *A Serious Enquiry for a Suitable Return, for Continued Life, in and after a Time of Great Mortality, by a Wasting Plague* (London: R. I., 1666).

APPENDIX 2

JOHN EVELYN'S DIARY ENTRIES ON CHURCH ATTENDANCE DURING THE PLAGUE

These excerpted entries from John Evelyn's diary provide a glimpse into church attendance and worship services during the Great Plague of London.¹

<i>Date</i>	<i>Attendance</i>	<i>Church and Preacher</i>	<i>Text</i>	<i>Topic</i>
?	Yes	Chatham; Unnamed minister		"redeeming the time, because the daies are evil"
07/16/1665	Yes	Hampton Court; Dr. Turner		
07/23/1665	Yes	"Our curate"	Rom 8:18	"Concerning afflictions, and how they are to be received."
07/30/1665	Yes	"Our Doctor"	1 Pet 2:5	"how prayer was to be made acceptable"
08/02/1665	Yes	"Our doctor"	Lev 26:41-42	"Was the solemn fast through England to deprecate Gods displeasure against the land by pestilence and war. . . That the meanes to obtaine remission of punishment, was not to repine at it, but humbly submitting."
08/06/1665	Yes	Mr. Higham	James 4:4	"the danger of spiritual adultery as well as carnal."
08/13/1665	No. "Was so temptesteous that we could not go to church."			
08/20/1665	Yes	"Our Doctor"	1 Cor 11:28	"preparatorie to the L. Supper"
08/27/1665	Yes	"Our Doctor"	1 Pet 2:5	"the duty of Prayer for others as well as for ourselves"
09/10/1665	Yes	Greenwich; Dr. Plume	Col 3:5-6	"shewing how our sins had drawne downe God's judgments."

¹ John Evelyn, *The Diary of John Evelyn*, vol. 3, *Kalendarium: 1650-1672*, ed. E. S. de Beer, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

<i>Date</i>	<i>Attendance</i>	<i>Church and Preacher</i>	<i>Text</i>	<i>Topic</i>
09/24/1665	Yes	Greenwich; ² Mr. Plume	John 8:51	“Shewing what was meant by the faithful, that they should not see death: meaning death eternal, the natural death not to be esteemed a death but a change.”
10/01/1665	Yes	Greenwich, Mr. Plume	Luke 13:23	“are there few shall be saved? Showing the paucity of true believers, explaining our blessed savior’s expression, little flock.”
10/04/1665	Yes	Greenwich; Mr. Plume	Num 16:46	“Was the monthly fast . . . of the sinn of rebellion against magistrates and ministers.”
10/08/1665		Mr. Higham, parson of Wotton	Luke 15:18-20	“The Parable of the Prodigal.”
10/29/1665	Yes	Mr. Plume	Gal 6:2	“shewing how we ought support our suffering brethren, those especially who sinn of Infirmitie.”
11/08/1665	Yes	Dr. Offley at Abinger	1 Sam 12:23	“the effects of true repentance”
11/19/1665	Yes	Mr. Higham at Wotton	Luke 15:21	“of the prodigals returne”
11/26/1665	Yes	Mr. Plume	Luke 12:32	“on fear not, little flock, tis your fathers will to give you a Kingdome, pursuing his former point, of the paucitie of true Christians”
12/03/1665	Yes	“Our Doctor preached at Deptford”	Hab 2:1ff	“of Faith, and waiting on God, etc. I received the blessed communion.”
12/06/1665	Yes	“Our Doctor”	1 Kings 8:37	“Was the monthly fast . . . That prayer and generall reformation were the best averters of God Almighty’s wroth, against a people.”
12/10/1665	Yes	“A stranger”	Luke 13:2-5	“Not to judge uncharitably of others, for our owne Escape: applied to those who survived the contagion.”
12/24/1665	Yes	Curate of Abinger Mr. Andrews	Luke 2:9-10	“Of the veracity of Christs humanity”

² Evelyn shifted attendance to Greenwich, “For our Parish was exceedingly infected.”

<i>Date</i>	<i>Attendance</i>	<i>Church and Preacher</i>	<i>Text</i>	<i>Topic</i>
12/25/1665	Yes	Curate of Abinger Mr. Andrews	Luke 2:9-10	“On the same, I received the blessed eucharist.”
01/14/1666	Yes	“Our Doctor”	Isa 9:6	“To us a son is borne: of the benefit of Christs incarnation.”
01/21/1666	Yes	morning: Mr Plume Greenewich		“and put on the new man, etc.”
01/21/1666	Yes	Afternoon: Plume’s curate	Eccles 8:2ff	“Preparation to death, the plague not yet ceased.”
01/28/1666	Yes	“Our Doctor”		“on the same Text, shewing Gods free-grace in Christ.”
02/04/1666	Yes	Our curate”	Ps 117	“shewing how much the service of God consists in prayes, by an historical deduction of the continual practice of the church and saints in all ages.”
03/02/1666	Yes	Dr. Sancroft	Ps 102:27	“About the immutability of God . . . But thou art the same.”
05/15/1666	Yes	“Our Doctor”	1 Cor 15:20	“Easter day a Resurrection sermon: Our parish now was more infected with the plague, than ever, and so was all the countrie about, though almost quite ceased at London.”
07/22/1666	Yes	“I went to Greenewich to Prayers: our Parish still exceedingly infected with the Contagion.”		
07/29/1666	“The Pestilence now a fresh increasing in our Parish, I forbore going to Church.”			
08/01/1666	Yes	Dr. Gunning	Psalms	“showing how the Angels had the custody of Good men: etc.”
08/05/1666	Yes	“Our Viccar”		“that the perfection and uprightnesse of God require not our following or imitation of the most perfect of good men, without bringing their actions and practis to the rule of Gods Word. . . I received the Holy Sacrament.”
08/12/1666	“The pestilence still raging in our Parish, I durst not go to Church.”			
08/19/1666	“Went not to church by reason of the Contagion.”			
08/26/1666	“Contagion still continuing, we had the Church Office at home etc.”			
09/09/1666	“Still the Plage, continuing in our parish, I could not without danger adventure to our Church.”			
09/16/1666	Yes	Greenewich Dr. Plume	2 Pet 3	“Dr. Plume preached very well on Pet: Seeing therefore all these things must be disolvd etc.”

APPENDIX 3

WHEN WE ARE RAISED FROM DEEP DISTRESS

When we are raised from deep distress
Our God deserves a song;
We take a pattern of our praise
From Hezekiah's tongue.

The gate of the devouring grave
Are opened wide in vain;
If he that holds the keys of death,
Commands them fast again.

Pains of the flesh are won't t'abuse
Our minds with slavish fears:—
“Our days our past, and we shall lose
The remnant of our years.”

We chatter, with a swallow's voice,
Or like a dove we mourn;
With bitterness, instead of joys,
Afflicted and forlorn.

Jehovah speaks the healing word,
And no disease withstands;
Fevers and plagues obey the Lord,
And fly at his commands.

If half the strings of life should break,
He can our frame restore;
He casts our sins behind his back,
And they are found no more.¹

¹ Isaac Watts, *Hymns and Sacred Songs* (London, 1707).

APPENDIX 4

SPIRITUAL DUTIES IN PREPARING FOR DEATH

Excerpted from Thomas Doolittle's *A Cordial for Believers in Dying Times*.

1. Self-examination about sin, grace, and duty.
2. Assurance, particularly about the pardon of sin.
3. Victory over the fears of death.
4. Fervent secret prayer.
5. Zeal for God and men's souls to press us after the endeavors of the salvation of other men's souls.
6. Study the Word of God and the select promises for so many sad cases.
7. Sense of God's judgments.
8. Weigh God's distinguishing mercies to body and soul.
9. Study much the evil of sin, our own, and others.
10. Improve afflictions by sanctifying them.
11. Submission to the will of God in afflictions.
12. Sympathize with others.
13. Sit loose to the world. Do not love the world, spiritual things are best.
14. Leave and entrust your relations with God.
15. Redeem time.
16. Look for the coming of Christ.
17. Meditate on the life to come, that which we shall be freed from in heaven, and how we shall enjoy God.
18. Fast and pray with others.
19. Speedily reform from sin and turn to God in holiness.

20. Be content with a small allowance of outward enjoyments.

21. Persevere and be unwearied in all these, and in communion with God.¹

¹ Thomas Doolittle, *A Cordial for Believers in Dying Times with a Corrosive for Wicked Men in Dying Times. At first written as a letter to private friends in daily expectation of death by the plague, and afterwards printed for more public good* (London, 1665).

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ABSTRACT

SHEPHERDING THE SAINTS IN THE FACE OF DISEASE AND DEATH: PASTORAL MINISTRY DURING THE GREAT PLAGUE OF LONDON (1665-66)

Benjamin Bruce Purves, DMin
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023
Faculty Supervisor: John D. Wilsey

This thesis is an examination of pastoral ministry in seventeenth century London during the Great Plague of 1665-66. Chapter 1 introduces the difficulty of pastoral ministry during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the need for guidance from church history. Chapter 2 surveys pastoral instruction in the theology of providence, disease, and medicine in English plague literature from 1665-66. Chapter 3 overviews the plague's impact on church leadership, the loss of Anglican credibility, the courage of Nonconformist clergy, and the pastoral convictions of those who remained in London. Chapter 4 is a composite picture of pastoral ministry in London and its challenges during the plague year. Chapter 5 concludes with pastoral considerations for shepherding congregations during present and future public health crises.

VITA

Benjamin Bruce Purves

EDUCATION

BA, Multnomah Bible College, 2005

MA, Capital Bible Seminary, 2009

ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

Bible Instructor, Word of Life Christian Academy, Springfield, Virginia, 2005-2007

MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Pastoral Intern, Occoquan Bible Church, Woodbridge, Virginia, 2008

Director of Youth Ministry, Occoquan Bible Church, Woodbridge, Virginia, 2009-2010

Pastor of Youth Ministry, Occoquan Bible Church, Woodbridge, Virginia, 2010-2018

Pastor of Community and Member Care, Occoquan Bible Church, Woodbridge, Virginia, 2018-