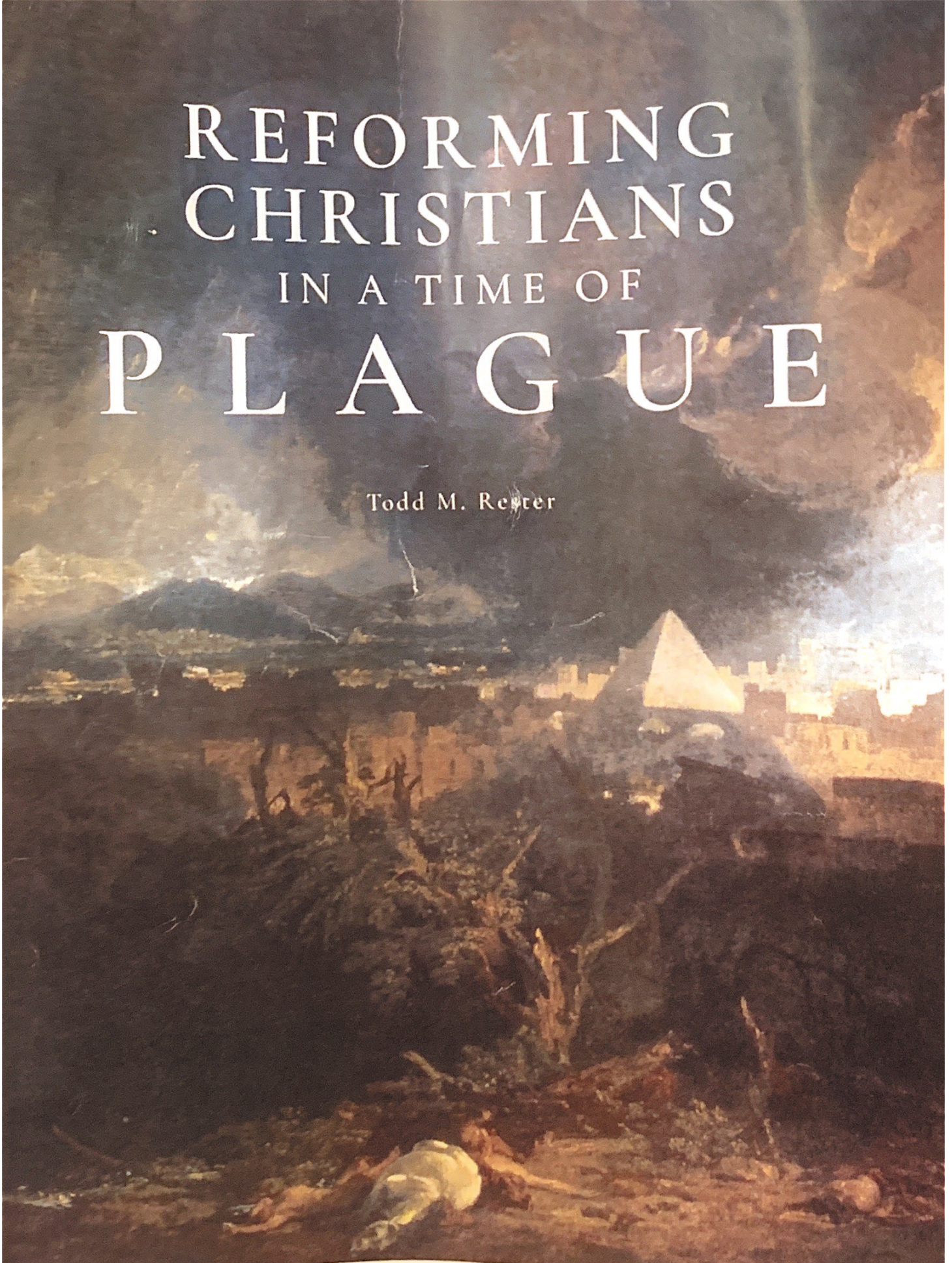


# REFORMING CHRISTIANS IN A TIME OF PLAGUE

Todd M. Rester



“**B**lessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort, which comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any affliction by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation aboundeth in Christ.” - 2 Corinthians 1:3-5 (1599 Geneva Bible)

**A** year ago, outside of the conclaves and conference rooms of historians, epidemiologists, and public health officials, not many of us were terribly interested in discussing plagues. What better way to kill a dinner party (remember when we had those?) than to broach early modern mortality rates, disease transmission, plague diffusion, disease vectors, and medieval and early modern public health policy? After all, plague pandemics lay in the dark, distant corners of our corporate memory, somewhere in the gloomy umbral shade of the 14th Century, far from the bright urgency of modern demands. Plague, and what life felt like in the midst of one, had to be imagined. Now it is our sense of normal life that has to be imagined. Perhaps now that masks, social distancing, self-quarantining, and “flattening the curve” are part of our immediately foreseeable future, we no longer need to use our imagination alone, and perhaps we can learn more easily. In times like these—times of change, uncertainty, and loss of control in a season of disease, death, and dying—it is right to reflect on pastoral and biblical wisdom for Christian living and Christian ministry through the plague writings of pastors and theologians from a former age.

Yes, plague literature is a real genre. Plague writings are a society’s multifaceted literary response to plague. They broadly include everything from public policy and medical treatises, to poetry, plays, or theological literature. Given the literary responses to the plague from various disciplines and layers of society, it is no surprise that theologians and pastors participated in the genre. Their contributions included prayers, hymns, theological treatises, and Protestant “art of dying well” tracts (*ars moriendi*), which were common pastoral responses to the plague, and important aids of early Protestant piety. Frequently composed in the global academic language of the period, Latin, to publicize their work

internationally, they offered biblical exposition, doctrinal applications, and practical exhortations in particular crises.

A quick side-note for us modern Reformed folk: Although Latin is a "dead language," these plague writings are just one example of why pastors and scholars interested in modern resources to enrich their perspectives and congregational life from their own Reformed heritage should support the study and translation of Latin in our seminaries and colleges. After all, Latin was used by Christians, including the Reformers, for at least 1,800 years. Many of these works have yet to be translated, and yes, Westminster is a place that trains the willing for the work.

So, how should a Christian respond to a pandemic? The plague writings of the Reformers give us a rich repository from which to draw answers to that question. I've highlighted just a few that show us how ministers, theologians, and church leaders in a prior age addressed the question of the plague, what theological resources they reflected on, and which doctrines, practices, and insights they drew on in ministering to their congregants.

### Plague in the Early Modern Period

Allow me to paint a landscape for you of plague in Reformation and post-Reformation Europe. In addition to the more than 330 wars, armed conflicts, and rebellions between 1500 and 1700, plague also was a common event. Always a frightening occurrence in early modern Europe, due to its virulence and contagiousness, the plague, or the range of diseases included under the term, had a mortality rate on average of about 25% in this period. Viewed grimly, this mortality rate represents some improvement over the 14th Century outbreaks, which had a mortality rate of 70-90%. During the 17th Century, the percentage of population lost to plague was still staggering, whether in Italy (30-43%), the Low Countries, Rhineland, Alsace, and Switzerland (15-25% on average), England and Wales (8-10%), Spain (18-19%) or France (11-14%). If you lived between 1560 and 1670 in Southwest Germany, eastern France, or Switzerland, for example, you may have experienced any number of at least ten instances

of plague that affected over 30 communities in each outbreak. In one particularly virulent outbreak over 150 communities were affected.

Plague did not only affect large cities or densely populated localities, but spread throughout rural regions along trade routes, in the wake of marching armies, and along the escape routes of refugees. The frequency of the plague was about every decade or so, sometimes lasting months, even years in both urban and rural communities. In the town of St. Gallen, Switzerland, a town of about 5,000 people (sizable for this period) there were outbreaks in 1610-11, 1629, and 1635 that claimed at least a fifth of the population each time.

Plague varied in severity; in some years there was a relatively low mortality rate, in others it was devastating. In just Spain, for example, the outbreak of 1599 accounted for approximately half a million deaths. In London, during the outbreaks of 1592-93, 1603, 1625, 1636, and 1665-66 the death rate due to plague ranged from 4% of the population in mild instances up to 21% in severe ones.

For a simple comparison, the mortality rate of COVID-19, as of this writing in the summer of 2020 according to international, regional, and national reporting agencies such as the UN World Health Organization, the USA Center for Disease Control, and the EU European Center for Disease Prevention and Control, ranges globally from less than 1% in a few countries to 12% in others, with most countries hovering somewhere between 4-8%. Out of approximately 25 million cases reported globally, approximately 850,000 have died so far; a global average mortality rate slightly higher than 4%.

Our modern society chafes under the inconvenience of almost six months of intermittent shutdowns of public marketplaces and social life. Yet, if you lived for any stretch of 75 years between 1500 and 1720—a big if by the way—you would probably spend 1/5-1/3 of your life under plague-related civil ordinances and restrictions, implemented in half-year and years-long stretches. These restrictions were met with varying degrees of success and were accompanied by discord, civil unrest, and economic disaster as farms and markets faltered.

Either due to a simple lack of medical professionals, or their reluctance to expose themselves, the scholarship is clear that the burden

of care for plague victims largely fell to religious orders and pastors in this time period. In 1641 in London, for example, Parliament entertained a novel European proposal to appoint a corps of doctors specifically to handle the plague in London. But as a matter of frugality, only 2 doctors and 2 apothecaries were to attend plague victims in a city with an estimated 400,000 people. The proposal stalled and died in continual parliamentary debate. By comparison London was comprised of at least 113 parishes within the city walls at the time, which coordinated pastoral and congregational outreach efforts with modest success. Further examples of pastoral care from the Reformers on this count are not difficult to come by. In 1519, the Swiss reformer of Zurich, Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531), was away from Zurich when the plague broke out, but he rushed back, like a fireman to a fire, to serve his flock, even as mortality rates in that city reached 25%. It was not long afterwards that he contracted and almost died of the plague. Zwingli's "Plague Hymn" (*Pestlied*) is a vivid written personal response to that experience.

We learn from a lament of John Calvin (1509-1564) in a 1551 letter to his colleague Guillaume Farel (1489-1565) that Theodore Beza (1519-1605) had contracted the plague while ministering in Lausanne. Later, in 1588, Beza's first wife of forty-four years would die of the plague. Franciscus Junius (1545-1602), a Bible translator, pastor, theology professor, and editor of the *Belgic Confession*, would die from plague during an outbreak in Leiden in 1602.

Plague and disease deeply shaped the ministries of pastors and the congregational life of the early modern churches. A faithful pastor in this context needed a solid theology of God's providence, the dignity of every human being, especially of the sick

and the infirm, a deep love of neighbor, a strong commitment to the duties of pastoral vocation, and a robust Christian prudence to navigate the physical and spiritual needs of his family, congregation, and community.

As we can all attest to, plague tends to reveal the seams and tensions within a society. It was no different in the 16th Century. In one city, we have municipal and ecclesiastical records complaining that the undertakers and the cleaners were price gouging. Medical practitioners were overwhelmed, and

hospitals were short staffed. People fled their homes and jobs for a season to the countryside and protested their civic obligations. Ministers, weighing their pastoral obligations to preach and care for their congregations, frequently declined municipal requests to supply chaplains to minister to the afflicted in the city's plague-house and hospital. Even doctors were not agreed on how infectious the plague was or how it was transmitted, increasing uncertainty about how risky the plague actually was. Why did it strike some and not others? How exactly does one remedy miasma (that is, "bad air" or better translated, "polluted air")? Additionally, it was exceedingly difficult to track cases of plague. Medical

doctors and practitioners did not agree on which deaths were plague-related or due to some other cause. Strangers and travelers were suspect. Even the water supply was unreliable and just as likely to spread the plague as assist in its remedy. Those tasked with cleaning and disinfecting houses and public buildings did not always handle medical waste well, and infected bedding and straw was frequently dumped, out of convenience not regulation, on the banks of the local river, a source of the city's water supply.

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What pleading by the magistrates could not accomplish, sometimes force did. Plague spreaders, who spread the disease either in gross disregard of the magistrate's plague ordinances or who intentionally contaminated others, were prosecuted (115 cases), fined, imprisoned, sometimes tortured (flogging and amputations of the hand), and even executed (44 executions). Some Christians disregarded all concern for secondary causes invoking God's sovereignty. Others, paralyzed by fear of secondary causes, refused to fulfill duties to their home, church, and society. Many wavered between the extremes of indifference and anxiety. Basic life was constantly strained if not totally disrupted, and if the normal bonds of human and Christian fellowship were not yet snapped, they demanded constant maintenance.

54 This was the case in Geneva, Switzerland. That renowned city of Calvin's and Beza's pastoral ministry was struck by the plague at least five times between 1542 and 1572. Beza's own brother succumbed after fleeing the plague elsewhere only to meet his death by it in Geneva in 1570. In September of 1571, the academy that trained ministers was almost shuttered by civil authorities, but Beza's persuasion managed to keep it open, if only because he was its sole professor, with only 4 students enrolled. While endeavoring to hold regular church services in 1572, the people often absented themselves. The magistrates and ministers of Geneva encouraged and pleaded with the people to seek the Lord in corporate repentance and prayer with mixed success. Plagues, like the one that struck Geneva, tested and shaped the character and identity of Christians in hundreds of similar outbreaks. But it was trials of this sort that concretized and personalized Reformed doctrines and approaches to pastoral ministry among congregants.

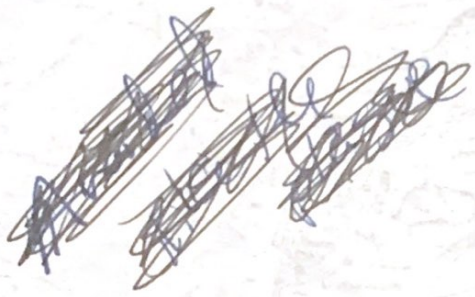
## Plague and Theology

Theological questions among the Reformed in this period tended toward three primary categories. First, what is God's relationship to the infliction of a temporal evil? (Is God the cause of evil?) At the root of this question is a moral challenge to the character and goodness of God: Can God be good and still inflict evils as they are considered in themselves? In one sense, this is not too far afield from questions regarding predestination and reprobation. But in another

sense, it is a much more poignant and practical application of God's goodness to real and present suffering. Second, if temporal evils can result in spiritual goods that have value in this life and the next, should the plague be avoided? And, related to this, if the plague is God's judgment of the wicked or chastisement of the good, is it permissible to seek to avoid it? Third, can a Christian physically leave their city and community in time of a plague outbreak? What of the duties of magistrates, ministers, and citizens? After all, how can someone love their neighbor and shun them at the same time?

In *A Treatise on the plague, or A spiritual antidote for the plague* (*Tractatus de peste seu pestis antidoto spirituali*), Gijbert Voet' (1589–1676), the Dutch Reformed theologian and pastor at Utrecht, explored the issue of the plague theologically, first with respect to God as sovereign over the plague, and then with respect to man and his duties in the plague (both to God and neighbor). Voetius differentiated between efficient causes: A primary cause, that is God; secondary causes, like fevers, flies, and bad air; and meritorious causes, such as human sinfulness. So, while one might speak of the efficient causes of disease as natural, physical, and proximate; the meritorious causes are those that elicit God's wrath.

The spiritual antidote that Voetius recommended for the plague can be divided into private and public aspects. First, the private remedy is that signal measure of the grace of God in the heart of the believer that must be prepared in daily doses "with a renewed faith by believing it, by watching carefully with a firm hope, by desiring it with a kindled love, by demanding it with devoted prayers." Second, that spiritual remedy requires "fighting against the fear of death through Christian faith and fortitude." Indeed, "so that you may find a faith and heart fortified in Christ against death, exercise yourself in preparation for death and meditation upon the brevity and vanity of this life." Third, "there is the consideration of the fatherly divine providence on which, like a couch of heavenly security, we may recline our hearts." We can do so because there is no chance or fortune that befalls our health or life, since nothing happens that is not for our good. Fourth, there is the renewal and stirring up of our repentance through a careful scrutiny of our inmost parts, for the practice of repentance and the exercise of new obedience. "Only



## PLAGUE HYMN

Huldrych Zwingli

Help me, O Lord,  
My strength and rock;  
Lo, at the door  
I hear death's knock.

Uplift thine arm,  
Once pierced for me,  
That conquered death.  
And set me free.

Yet, if thy voice,  
In life's midday.  
Recalls my soul,  
Then I obey.

In faith and hope  
Earth I resign.  
Secure of heaven.  
For I am Thine.

My pains increase;  
Haste to console;  
For fear and woe  
Seize body and soul.

Death is at hand.  
My senses fail.  
My tongue is dumb;  
Now, Christ, prevail.

Lo! Satan strains  
To snatch his prey;  
I feel his grasp;  
Must I give way?

He harms me not,  
I fear no loss,  
For here I lie  
Beneath thy cross.

My God! My Lord!  
Healed by thy hand.  
Upon the earth  
Once more I stand.

Let sin no more  
Rule over me;  
My mouth shall sing  
Alone to thee.

Though now delayed,  
My hour will come.  
Involved, perchance.  
In deeper gloom.

But, let it come;  
With joy I'll rise,  
And bear my yoke  
Straight to the skies.

here we advise, on the occasion of a plague, to stir up all the public and private exercises of godliness, especially even for sympathy and charity towards our brethren and especially to a neighbor destitute of other help."

The public remedy included the frequent celebration of fasts, the removal of scandal, the repression of sins, such as extravagance in banquets, clothing, buildings, funerals, theatre, and the pursuit of righteousness and justice where there had been violence and oppression. The spiritual antidote, according to Voerius, especially centered on the public preaching of the Word and the celebration of the sacraments.

X With respect to God and natural causes, Johannes Hoornbeeck<sup>2</sup> (1617-1666), a practical theologian and mission-minded pastor who served in Germany and the Netherlands, authored *A theological treatise on the plague* (*Dissertatio de peste theologica*), in which he emphasized that God can act with, without, or contrary to natural causes. If God can create life and inflict death with or without means, then why not disease and pestilence? (Second, Hoornbeeck puts plague in perspective by asking if it is the worst punishment God can inflict. It is certainly among the gravest afflictions in this life as it spreads secretly, despite the best efforts of men and their doctors. His third question is a more pastoral and spiritual issue, as there is an important theological point as to whether the plague should be considered a punishment or a chastisement. A punishment would be the result of God's wrath as a judge, whereas a chastisement is a display of his fatherly discipline. Hoornbeeck responds that materially and objectively the plague is a general punishment upon mankind, but subjectively, that is in the experience of individuals, it depends. Here Hoornbeeck leans directly on Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215 AD): "Like children are chastised by their tutor or father, so are we by providence. God however does not punish, because punishment is a retaliation for evil: He chastises however for good to those who are chastised, collectively and as individuals." (*Stromata*, 7:16) Hoornbeeck elaborates, "so often what is a good in itself becomes evil due to the wickedness of the subject, whether bodily blessings, like food and drink, or spiritual ones, like the Word of God. So conversely evils tend to the good when they fall upon

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good people." Here Hoornbeeck reminds Christians that the trials and tragedies that enter into a Christian's life are catalysts both to form Christlike character as well as reveal it.

With respect to the plague considered on its own, the Reformed emphasize that it is an evil in itself, and as an evil it must not be wished for or desired. Therefore, just as in the case of any evil, a Christian must intercede against it in prayer and intervene against it with all appropriate and lawful means. Hoornbeeck, in the late 17th Century, pointed out that we avert and avoid other evils—famine, war, and disease, which plague frequently accompanies—with lawful means, why would we not avoid plague too? Furthermore, if one were to neglect the lawful means of avoidance, it would be imprudent, rash, and even ungodly, as it tests the Lord God. Not all means of avoiding the plague are lawful: Christians do not abandon the poor, sick foreigners are not driven out of the city, the sick cannot be slain or starved or ignored. Plague calls for intentional prudence and wisdom through love of God and neighbor.

? There was not always agreement among the Reformed on what the plague was biologically or what the proper civic policy was. But there were those who sought theological consensus. André Rivet (1572-1651), a professor of theology at Leiden, in his 70 page *Letter to a Friend* (1636), considered how to think about God's sovereignty and goodness in the face of secondary causes like the plague, as well as practical considerations for pastors:

Certainly there are quite a few godly men who fear God and question whether one ought to take [any] precaution for that malady, either

by withdrawing or abstaining from visiting those who have either been infected or who have visited infected places. Others, who are likewise godly and prudent men, assert that taking precaution can be done, and even must be done, yet with many requirements put in place and suitable distinctions observed. I am not the one who thinks he can compose a case in favor of or in dissent from either side, such that everyone should follow one view . . . But first and foremost I would require from you and all good men that we all agree on this, that these deadly epidemics and that plague-bearing pestilence, which has caused such ruin and in these times causes many flourishing cities to have been miserably depopulated, has been inflicted by God who has ravaged us for our sins. And, there is no more outstanding and ready remedy than earnest and sincere repentance among all members of the commonwealth, public and private.

And in this regard, Rivet urges not only words, but deeds. Plague, according to Rivet, is an opportunity for widescale deep repentance, publicly and privately, individually and corporately, for offending God through disobedience to both tables of the Law, for sins against God and against neighbors. Rivet observed that the "sons of the doctors teach—with not one excepted that I know of—that the plague is contagious and spreads like some kind of poison, which infects the air that we breathe." Furthermore, argues Rivet, since from the beginning of the world every animal has been granted the right to protect itself, its body, and its life, "one must not think that God has granted less to human beings, who can predict what will harm them, so that they can take precaution by all lawful means."

Some in Beza's time in Geneva had argued that the plague was not infectious or grave, as not everyone was affected equally and to the same extent. Furthermore, some argued theologically that "if the plague results in the punishment of sins, testing our

faith, driving to repentance, and the uncovering of hypocrites, who . . . can deny that they that flee, flee something good when they flee the plague?" Others even argued that avoiding the plague caused people to forsake Christian duties to their neighbor; namely, whatever you would want people to do for you, so you should do for them. To the first point, Beza, in his *De peste quaestiones duae explicatae* from 1579,<sup>3</sup> responds,

it has not been proved that the plague is not infectious nor that avoiding infection is without exception to be condemned, since avoiding infection is one of the chief natural remedies and provisions against infectious diseases, which Reason and Experience itself teach . . . What would someone say then, that they therefore do not avoid other dangers and perils? Therefore, ought we scoff at, as pointless, not only medicine but also all prudence and wisdom, which is employed in avoiding all kinds of dangers? Then there would be no difference between temerity and discretion, between bravery and audacity. But the matter is far otherwise, because just as God by his everlasting and unchangeable decree has appointed the course of our life, so he has also ordained mediating causes, which we should use to preserve our lives.

Rivet cites Calvin, from during a prior plague in Geneva. In his usual direct way, Calvin answered the question of whether one can change their residence in order to flee the plague:

This question seems to arise from the stupidity of those who have not been endowed with even a bit of humanity. Therefore, will it then be impermissible to choose healthy air? Therefore in tenement buildings will it also be impermissible to prefer an opportunity for health? Therefore will it be impermissible to watch out for noxious excrement? Therefore one ought not fear any contagion?

Thus they hand us paradoxes, the result of which is to strip us of all sense. Meanwhile, our counsel is not to indulge the cowardice of those who abandon their calling at the first hint of danger... Provided no duty is neglected one can flee the contagion of the plague no less than the danger of fire or sword.

On one side of the issue, some claimed that love of neighbor would preclude avoiding plague in any circumstance, since that would leave the most vulnerable forsaken, rupturing all human, natural, civil, and Christian ties. Beza noted that the commandment "You shall not murder" means "that one's own life, or the lives of any who belong or depend on them, are not to be rashly put in danger of deadly infection." One must take all wise precaution.

On the other side, Beza said "let those who intend to flee the plague know that no one ought to have such great regard either for himself, or his family, that he forget what he owes his country and fellow citizens; in short, what he owes to another, whether they are bound by the common bond of humanity and society, or by any other kind of friendship, for love does not seek its own." In a similar way, according to Rivet, provided that masters did not abandon their servants, but made provision for their health and livelihood, private persons could withdraw from the company of those infected by plague, or they could withdraw from even the city itself that was being ravaged by plague.

Regarding the duties of love of neighbor, Beza asserted that within the duty of love, there are degrees of obligation. "Everyone must have regard to their station and calling; for some serve in public offices, either civil or ecclesiastical; the rest are private persons." Those in positions of authority and service then have a greater duty to perform their offices on behalf of others. Magistrates, especially Christian ones, have a duty, according to Beza, to provide "that those things which either breed or nourish the plague, so far as they can, be removed, and that there is consideration for those that are visited with this sickness." Magistrates ought to provide by all lawful means the prevention of the plague, and see to it that "those sick of the plague lack nothing needful."

Rivet echoed this point. The Church advances and must advance, even in time of plague. The lawful means included the response of the lawful authorities, that is, the magistrate and minister: "I do not think it lawful for anyone in a public vocation, whether in the commonwealth or in the church, to cast off all care for those suffering, and leave them writhing in danger to their body and soul, devoid of all necessary help. The public authority must take care, lest those groaning under the hand of God, however infected they be, lack the necessary aid." Here Rivet leans on another Reformed exegete, Jerome Zanchi's interpretation of Philippians 2:30. Zanchi had stated, "not even due to pestilence is the work of Christ to be deserted, and flight to be sought for oneself." In the case where duty called pastors to minister to the sick, but none responded willingly, Rivet suggested a gathering of pastors where, after calling upon God in prayer, lots would be cast for who would minister word and sacrament to the *Geneva* healthy, and who to the sick. Of course, this would only work in places like Geneva, where there was an ample number of pastors. A different tactic might be needed in a region with fewer pastors. Rivet still suggested to his Dutch friend that this Genevan custom should be considered for the Dutch in time of plague. This would protect the large majority of pastors and their families, and limit the spread of infection, he argued. Furthermore, he pointed out that Zanchi's instruction should not be taken simply for the individual pastor but must be taken in coordination with other pastors in the region. "For since ministers and magistrates are debtors to the strong and the weak, and to their own families, and they are devoted to the commonwealth and the church, the infected are neither the whole nor the largest part of the commonwealth or the church, why would they devote themselves entirely to only that part which suffers?" The duty and burden of the pastorate is shared in times of health, so also in times of plague. This is so that the body of Christ though divided by plague, would be united spiritually.

Beza noted that even private citizens have a duty to be good citizens in the promotion of the public good, which includes supporting the magistrates in their efforts for the common good, and the efforts themselves. Then there are the bonds of families: Husbands are not free to abandon

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their wives, nor wives their husbands; nor parents their children, nor children their aged parents, so the citizen is not free to abandon a plague victim devoid of any and all support. Beza even including the relations of masters of households and their servants in this paradigm. It is times of trial and challenge that elicit from the Christian not only the maintenance of all their ties and duties, but demands intentionality, even while exercising all good and godly measure. "I do not see how any who serve in a public civil office may flee their charge in the time of plague; and for faithful pastors to forsake but one poor sheep at that time when he most of all needs heavenly comfort, it is too shameful, indeed too wicked to even consider." Whatever measure one takes in time of plague, it must be done out of diligent love of God and neighbor, in consideration of one's duty and one's dependents, with a clear conscience.

Plague victims and those who care for the sick have a duty of love of neighbor as well, Beza observed. The sick must take heed that "they do not abuse the love of their kindred and friends, while they desire to provide for themselves." The caregivers must "while continuing in their duties, not cast themselves rashly into the danger of infection, which is done by some out of reckless audacity, rather than true and Christian judgment." Beza even gives a glimpse of his own experience of the plague, when he recounts that, out of love for them, he forbade his friends to visit him, friends who were eager to show love and kindness, because he refused to be the cause of their death.

For pastors and ministers, Beza offered this counsel in a time when there was great debate about the plague, its causes, its treatment, its infectiousness, and all manner of other questions:

"but this especially must be agreed upon, that as our sins are the chief and true cause of the plague, so this is the only proper remedy against it: if ministers would not debate about its infectiousness (which belongs to physicians), but by their life and doctrine, stir up the people to earnest repentance and love, and charity to each other."

### Conclusion

On the heels of a devastating time of plague between 1567 to 1572, Geneva held out open hands of hospitality to religious refugees in the weeks following Sunday, August 24, 1572, when the Catholic League, aided by royal consent and the mobs of Paris, butchered about 2,000 French Protestants in the city during the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, irrespective of age, sex, or station. The religious-political violence spread to roughly fifteen other major cities and towns in France, bringing the number of the slain up to about 10,000. French Huguenot refugees streamed into Geneva and the surrounding area. So generous were private citizens that it was a full month before the city councilors needed to assist with the public purse.

Where did the city of Geneva and its people learn such hospitality? I wonder if it was precisely through the time of plague after the ties of family, church, and state were tested almost to the

breaking point. How else can one comfort, except with the comfort with which they have been comforted (2 Cor 1:3-5)?

I wonder if Christians today will respond in a similar way through this global pandemic and beyond? Will this time of testing prepare us for more intentional and faithful service, or will we grow cold in the things of God? Will we grow or slow in the things of God? Will we reflect on God's sovereignty and arrive at a greater sense of God's faithfulness and care? Will we ponder and perform our duties or neglect and ignore them? Will Christ's cause advance, by God's grace, through you and with you?

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1 Pronounced "High-sbert Foot", or, in the Latinized Voetius, "Foot-sy-us", with just the softest touch of guttural on the G in Gijbsbert.

2 Pronounced "horn-bake."

3 While Beza's work does provide some insight into the medical thought of his day regarding the idea of infection, its greatest value is in his pastoral contemplation of God's sovereignty in relation to secondary causes, and, in light of these, the nature of Christian duty and love. This work was later translated during a 1665 plague in England as *A learned treatise of the plague*.

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