

Preaching during Plague Epidemics in Early Modern Germany, c.1520–1618

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This article considers preaching during plague epidemics in early modern Germany, tracing how preachers and priests engaged with the crisis that befell their towns. It does so by discussing three important features of preaching during plague epidemics to illustrate the arrangements made during outbreaks of plague and what they can tell us more broadly about preaching during times of crisis. First, it shows the changes and continuities in personnel during plague epidemics. Second, it considers the contents of the sermons and how plague was a continuous feature of many early modern sermons. Third, the article discusses spaces and how they were used for preaching during outbreaks of plague. The article shows the malleability of sermons and how Protestants and Catholics adapted recurring themes to illustrate divine punishment and mercy.

In 1527, plague broke out in Wittenberg.¹ In his recommendations following this epidemic, Martin Luther (1483–1546) started by exploring two possibilities. When plague strikes a town, he wrote,

[S]ome people are of the firm opinion that one need not and should not run away from the deadly plague. But rather, as death is God's punishment, which he sends to us for our sins, we must submit to God and

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¹ See Lyndal Roper, 'When plague came to Wittenberg', *London Review of Books blog*, 6 July 2020, online at: <<https://www.lrb.co.uk/blog/2020/july/when-plague-came-to-wittenberg>>, accessed 31 January 2021. For a later outbreak of plague in Wittenberg, see also Rudolph Zaunick, 'Ein Neuer Melanchthon-Brief. Zugleich ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Pest in Wittenberg in den Jahren 1538/39', *Archiv für Geschichte der Medizin* 14 (1923), 114–24.

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with true and firm faith patiently await our punishment. ... Others take the position that one may properly flee, particularly if one holds no public office.²

The reformer makes distinctions in terms of those who flee and those who stay, but seems to leave some leeway in his assessment of the two options, writing that ‘but since amongst the Christians there are few who are strong and many who are weak, one cannot simply place the same burden on everyone’.³ He applied the same logic to himself, affirming that he was willing to take medicine, air rooms and avoid places where he was not needed, but if God called on him to help, he would not avoid any person or place.⁴

However, while Luther recognized the weakness of some, he argued that ‘those engaged in preaching and pastors must remain steadfast in the face of death. We have a plain command from Christ, “a good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep”’.⁵ These instructions meant that preachers in particular had to stay in towns, even if plague broke out, an assessment that was also shared by many Catholics.⁶ Luther expanded on this idea by including groups of people whom he thought should also stay in the towns. Fathers and mothers should help their children, and children their parents; those with sick neighbours and ‘paid public servants such as city physicians, town scribes, constables, or whatever their titles,

² ‘Auffs erste stehen etliche feste drauff, Man musse und solle nicht fliehen ynn sterbens leufften, sondern weil das sterben ist eine straffe Gottes, uns zugeschickt umb unser sunden willen, solle man Gott stil halten und der straffe gedüliglich erwarten ynn rechtem festen glauben ... Die andern aber halten, Man muege wol fliehen, sonderlich die, so nicht mit empten verhafftet sind’: Martin Luther, ‘Ob man vor dem Sterben fliehen möge’, *WA* 23: 321–86, at 338–41. All translations are mine unless otherwise stated.

³ ‘Aber weil es unter den Christen so gethan ist das der starcken wenig und der schwachen viel sind, kann man fur war nicht einerley allen aufladen zu tragen’: *ibid.* 340–1.

⁴ See also Luther’s 1519 sermon, ‘Ein Sermon von der Bereitung zum Sterben’: *WA* 2: 680–97; and his letter to Spalatin during the period of plague: *WA*, Br 3: 191–2; Johannes Brenz, ‘Die erst sermon von bereyttung zu dem sterben’ (1529), in *idem, Frühschriften Teil 2*, ed. Martin Brecht et al. (Tübingen, 1974), 67–79; Andreas Osiander, *Wie vnd wohin ein Christ die grausamen plag der pestilentz fliehen soll* (Nuremberg, 1533).

⁵ ‘Desselbigen gleichen, die so ym geistlichen ampt sind, als prediger und seelsorger, sind auch schuldig zu stehen und bleiben ynn sterben und tods noten. Denn da stehet ein öffentlicher befelß Christi: ‘Ein guter hirt lest sein leben fur sein schaff’: *WA* 23: 340–3.

⁶ See, for example, Jakob Hornstein, *Sterbensflucht: Das ist, Christlicher vn[d] Catholischer Bericht von Sterbensläuff der Pest: Sampt angehengter frag vnd antwort, ob man derselbigen Zeit fliehen soll oder nit* (Ingolstadt, 1593).

should not flee unless they provide capable replacements who are acceptable to their lords'.⁷

Outbreaks of disease, and responses to them, always reveal much about a society and Luther's comments are no exception.⁸ This article looks at preaching as a particularly important feature of early modern clerical provision to trace how Protestant pastors and Catholic priests engaged with the crisis that befell their communities. As indicated by Luther's advice, there was no clear behavioural norm defining whether someone was supposed to stay or leave during a plague, as even Luther added the caveat that officeholders should be allowed to leave if they provided a suitable replacement. This article explores these dynamics by showing the difficult line early modern clerics had to negotiate when it came to preaching during outbreaks of plague.⁹

It does so by discussing three important features of preaching during plague epidemics to illustrate the arrangements made during outbreaks of plague and what they can tell us about preaching during times of crisis more broadly. First, the article considers the preachers themselves and introduces the figure of the 'plague preacher', a preacher employed specifically during plague epidemics to supplement preaching and pastoral provision in a town. Second, it looks at a selection of sermons, either specifically on the plague or delivered during plague epidemics, which focus on disease and its prevention. This section shows how malleable sermons were when it came to admonishing the urban community, and how preachers used plague to illustrate both divine punishment and mercy.¹⁰ This part is based on a selection of plague sermons and other texts related to the plague,

⁷ '[W]as gemeine personen sind, auff sold und lohn gedingt, als ein stad artztz, stad diener, soldener, und wie die mogen genennet werden, mugen nicht fliehen, sie bestellen denn andere tuchtige und gnugsame an yhre stat, die von den herren angenommen werden sollen': *WA* 23: 344–5.

⁸ See Neithard Bulst, 'Krankheit und Gesellschaft in der Vormoderne. Das Beispiel der Pest', in idem and Robert Delort, eds, *Maladies et Société (XIIe–XVIIIe siècles). Actes du colloque de Bielefeld* (Paris, 1989), 17–47.

⁹ For a long-term view, see Franco Mormando and Thomas Worcester, eds, *Piety and Plague: From Byzantium to the Baroque* (Kirksville, MO, 2007).

¹⁰ On urbanity and religion more broadly, see Jörg Rüpke and Susanne Rau, eds, 'Religion and Urbanity: Reciprocal Formations', *Religion and Urbanity Online* [online database], 2020, at: <<https://www.degruyter.com/database/URBREL/entry/urbrel.13230336/html>>, accessed 21 October 2021; Susanne Rau and Jörg Rüpke, 'Religion und Urbanität. Wechselseitige Formierungen als Forschungsproblem', *Historische Zeitschrift* 310 (2020), 654–80.

which are recorded in the *Verzeichnis der deutschsprachigen Drucke des 16. Jahrhunderts* and *Verzeichnis der deutschsprachigen Drucke des 17. Jahrhunderts*. This focus on printed sources results in a bias towards major political and administrative polities. Further archival research is required to establish whether manuscript sources point in a similar direction to that of the printed works discussed here. Finally, the article considers whether the spaces where preachers delivered their sermons changed during plague epidemics, and explores what other unique factors can be detected when preachers gave sermons in these extraordinary times. Looking at plague epidemics through the lens of preachers and their sermons allows us to better understand how clerics had to adapt and how plague fitted into broader theological patterns.

The article focuses on towns in the Holy Roman Empire, a loose collection of territories, bishoprics, imperial free cities and other polities, which was nominally ruled by an emperor, appointed by seven electors.¹¹ There was great diversity in the empire, politically, culturally and from the mid-1550s also confessionally; Lutheranism was officially recognized alongside Catholicism under the Peace of Augsburg in 1555.¹² This article considers the period from the introduction of the Reformation in German-speaking Europe around 1520, to the beginning of the Thirty Years' War (1618–48).¹³ This period witnessed a number of local outbreaks of plague, though none as widespread as those of the Middle Ages, nor as catastrophic as later ones, such as the London plague of 1665–6.¹⁴ This focus makes it

¹¹ For an overview, see Peter H. Wilson, *The Holy Roman Empire: A Thousand Years of Europe's History* (London, 2016); Joachim Whaley, *Germany and the Holy Roman Empire (1493–1806)*, 2 vols (Oxford, 2012).

¹² The Peace of Westphalia (1648) would later recognize Reformed towns and regions.

¹³ For a discussion of a later period, see Jörg Zapnik, *Pest und Krieg im Ostseeraum, Der Schwarze Tod in Stralsund während des Großen Nordischen Krieges (1700–1721)* (Hamburg, 2007); Otto Ulbricht, 'Gelebter Glaube in Pestwellen 1580–1720', in Hartmut Lehmann and Anne-Charlott Trepp, eds, *Im Zeichen der Krise. Religiosität im Europa des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen, 1999), 159–88.

¹⁴ A. Lloyd Moote and Dorothy C. Moote, *The Great Plague: The Story of London's most Deadly Year* (London, 2008). See also the works of Vanessa Harding, for example her 'Plague in Early Modern London: Chronologies, Localities, and Environments', in Lukas Engelmann, John Henderson and Christos Lynteris, eds, *Plague and the City* (London, 2018), 39–69; 'Reading Plague in Seventeenth-Century London', *SHM* 32 (2019), 267–86.

possible to explore individual responses to plague epidemics, and to see how urban magistrates and preachers responded to the challenges posed by outbreaks of plague in a period that has received little scholarly attention in terms of outbreaks of disease.¹⁵ The time-span, from the early 1520s to the Thirty Years' War, shifts the focus away from the main epidemics of the Middle Ages and later seventeenth century.¹⁶ The dramatic outbreak of the Thirty Years' War is a suitable endpoint, as the developments the war brought about also changed how people perceived and wrote about the plague and related disasters.

As has often been observed, it is hard to say what exactly plague was in an early modern context, as exemplified in the London 'Bills of Mortality', which use various terms in connection to the plague.¹⁷ The first 'Bills of Mortality' were published in 1592 and they continued until the middle of the nineteenth century, using different words for plague over this period. Pestilence, plague or fever, and their German equivalents (*Pestilenz, Pest, Fieber*), or even just 'times of death' (*Sterbenszeiten*), could be used interchangeably.¹⁸ Rather than seeking to determine what exactly *Pest* was, this article focuses on early modern interpretations of plague and what that can tell us about theology and society more broadly.

¹⁵ Andrew Cunningham and Ole Peter Grell, *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse: Religion, War, Famine and Death in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge, 2000), 274–95. For research on a specific town during this period, see, for example, Monika Höhl, *Die Pest in Hildesheim. Krankheit als Krisenfaktor im städtischen Leben des Mittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit (1350–1750)* (Hildesheim, 2002).

¹⁶ There is a vast amount of literature on medieval plagues, see, for example, Samuel K. Cohn Jr, 'The Black Death: End of a Paradigm', *AHR* 107 (2002), 703–38; idem, *The Black Death transformed: Disease and Culture in Early Renaissance Europe* (London and New York, 2002); William G. Naphy and Andrew Spicer, *The Black Death and the History of Plagues 1345–1730* (Stroud, 2000); David Herlihy, *The Black Death and the Transformation of the West*, ed. Samuel K. Cohn Jr (Cambridge, MA, 1997).

¹⁷ Roy Porter, *London: A Social History* (Cambridge, MA, 2001), 2–4, 66–92.

¹⁸ It is now the consensus amongst historians and biologists that the plague of the early modern period was caused by the same pathogen as modern variants of the disease: see Monica Green, 'The Four Black Deaths', *AHR* 125 (2020), 1601–31; John Aberth, *The Black Death: A New History of the Great Mortality in Europe, 1347–1500* (New York, 2020), 10–13; Guido Alfani and Tommy Murphy, 'Plague and Lethal Epidemics in the Pre-Industrial World', *Journal of Economic History* 77 (2017), 314–43, especially 315–18.

PREACHERS

One of the most noticeable changes to clerical hierarchies during plague epidemics was the employment of plague preachers (*Pestprediger* or *Pastores Pestilentarius*) to support local clergy, especially those who had contracted the disease themselves, or to enable local clergy to leave the town. These preachers, who also administered the sacraments and (at least in Catholic areas) the last rites, would enter into life-threatening situations and many of them died quickly due to their exposure to the plague. People living in the early modern period realized that the plague spread rapidly among those in contact with victims, such as doctors and grave diggers, but also clerics.¹⁹ In line with Luther's recommendations, some urban magistrates and preachers wanted to stay safe while providing spiritual guidance for their congregations, and the employment of plague preachers was one way of doing so.

Many plague preachers were low down the clerical hierarchy and died quickly, so few sources written by or about them survive, making it hard to determine how widespread their employment was. The range of terms used to describe them adds to this difficulty, as some terms, such as assistant preachers (*Hilfsprediger*), were not used exclusively for plague preachers. Nineteenth-century lists of preachers composed by antiquarians and church historians, who had access to some documents which no longer exist, give us a sense of the short-lived nature of many of the plague preachers' appointments. Martin Schwarzbach, for example, was *Pastor Pestilentarius* for only one year in Zittau (1608), before he 'went mad' and had to be locked up, probably because he had contracted the plague.²⁰ Others were more fortunate. Adam Rodiger, or Radiger, replaced the deacon (*Diakon*), the lowest-ranking cleric in Bautzen, in order to take care of the citizens infected with plague. He was also called 'doctor of the soul' (*Seelarzt*), probably another term for a plague preacher, and was called to the quarantined houses of those infected along with a doctor. He held this position between 1612 and 1617 and his 'trial sermon' (*Probepredigt*) was simultaneously dubbed his 'farewell sermon' (*Valepredigt*), as people expected him to die. He survived, however, and became archdeacon of Bautzen

¹⁹ Cohn, *Black Death transformed*, 123.

²⁰ Karl Gottlob Dietmann, *Die gesamte der ungeänderten Ausg. Confession zugethane Priesterschaft in dem Marggrafthum Oberlausitz* (Lauban and Leipzig, 1777), 405.

(*Archidiakon*) from 1617 to 1621.²¹ Elsewhere, Lutheran preachers' decision to remain in the towns they served echoed Luther's choice to remain in Wittenberg when plague struck there in 1527 (although his later correspondence indicates that he left town during further outbreaks); however, in the examples I was able to find, and despite these Lutheran preachers' decision to remain in plague-stricken towns, their own works do not explicitly cite Luther's example as a motive for doing so.

The gradual development of the office of plague preacher suggests an increasing awareness by urban communities of the importance of providing care for victims of plague, not only to comfort them and their families, but for the continued functioning of their towns by providing medical as well as spiritual remedies during outbreaks of plague. While in the earlier sixteenth century, plague preachers could simply be the most junior members of the clergy or preachers employed quickly to fulfil a specific need, later plague ordinances suggest a slightly different picture. The increasing regulation of these offices indicate that, in the seventeenth century, the office of plague preacher received specific and more clearly defined tasks, relating to the provision of last rites and other deathbed rituals. A plague instruction from 1680, aimed especially at rural communities, recommended that preachers should keep medicine with them, provide opportunities for communion (especially in case victims were to die unexpectedly) and preach frequently and in the open, so that 'the wind [that is, the sound] of the preacher will travel to the people'.²² Once a preacher returned home, he was to take off and air his clothes in order to avoid infecting others.²³ Through such instructions, clergy became more differentiated, as fulfilling specific tasks. We know from the works of Liliana Górska and others that, in the eighteenth century, town councils appointed plague preachers to visit the sick, while regular preachers continued to deliver sermons, and that plague preaching was tied to strict quarantine rules, illustrating the increasing professionalization of the office of plague preacher, especially in urban settings.²⁴

²¹ Ibid. 76–7.

²² '[D]er Wind vom Prediger zu den Leuten gehe': Johann Georg Schiebel, *Pest-Apothecke Vor Einfältige Bauern und andere Arme Leute* (n.p., 1680), 20–1.

²³ Ibid. 21.

²⁴ See Liliana Górska, 'Das frühneuzeitliche Pestpredigeramt', *Barok* 16 (2009), 127–47, at 137–8, 140; see also eadem, *Theatrum atrocissimorum fatorum: Religiöse Pestbewältigung in Danzig 1709* (Tönning, 2010).

Most of the examples I was able to find come from such urban settings. While this could, in part, be due to the lower survival rate of sources from villages and the countryside, it is probably due to urban clergy being generally more differentiated, both in terms of their number and of the tasks they had to fulfil, making the employment of clergy specifically responsible for plague preaching more likely. Furthermore, the more regulated regimes of dealing with plague in towns would explain the greater importance of the office in urban settings. Indeed, the generally smaller number of clergy in villages suggests that, in these settings, a local cleric or his deputy – provided they did not flee from the plague or die of it – would be the ones to provide support for plague victims. While there are cases of plague preachers working in villages or the countryside, normally they came from a local town, once again explaining the stronger connection to urban locales.

The scarcity of sources also makes it difficult to detect specifically Catholic, Lutheran or Reformed trends in the employment of plague preachers. Major theologians of all confessions grappled with questions regarding the correct behaviour during epidemics. The few examples we have suggest that, in general, the appointment of plague preachers cut across confessions, but more sources survive from Lutheran territories, suggesting that the practice might have been more common in these areas. However, this might also be connected to the greater number of sermons delivered by Lutherans compared to Catholics.²⁵ As discussed above, the patchy record is also an indication of the short-lived nature of many of the appointments and many of the men who took up these posts had previously been employed in less favourable positions or not employed at all.

While it was possible for urban magistrates to employ a plague preacher, either on a short-term basis or on the understanding that he would stay in the town permanently if he survived, it was equally possible for regular preachers to stay in a town and preach there during outbreaks of plague. One of the most interesting examples of this is to be found in the Lusatian town of Görlitz, where Franz Rotbart was the principal preacher. The council initially employed him because they wanted a preacher who would not cause any trouble and would stick to Catholic doctrine. When plague struck the town, the councillors fled to the countryside, while Rotbart stayed,

²⁵ Górska, 'Das frühneuzeitliche Pestpredigeramt', 129–30.

introducing key Reformation changes.²⁶ No sermons by Rotbart are extant, but it is clear that the flight of the council enabled him to introduce services containing liturgical elements advocated by Luther, which the council would presumably have opposed. On their return, the councillors tried to roll back the changes, but in the end, they could not stop the introduction of some Lutheran elements. The decision of key protagonists to stay in a town or to leave during a plague epidemic could therefore have wide-ranging consequences for the religious outlook of the whole town.

However, regular priests or preachers could also stay with their congregations and preach if they were especially committed to providing for the sick. One especially striking example is that of Justus Zimmermann, the preacher of the hospital (*Spitalprediger*) in Bayreuth in Franconia, who delivered a sermon on the plague in 1602.²⁷ In it, Zimmermann mentions having contracted plague (*Pest*) himself, and how he had had to refrain from preaching for many weeks.²⁸ He had lost his wife and only son to the plague and almost died of it himself. He wrote in the preface that he longed to see his dear wife in heaven, where she was with Christ, but that instead, God had called him to continue doing his work. This theme of resilience and continuity has also been observed in English plague

²⁶ On Rotbart, see Martin Christ, 'The Town Chronicle of Johannes Hass: History Writing and Divine Intervention in the Early Sixteenth Century', *German History* 35 (2017), 1–20. On Lusatia more generally, see idem, *Biographies of a Reformation: Religious Change and Confessional Coexistence in Upper Lusatia, c.1520–1635* (Oxford, 2021). See also Johannes Hass, *Goerlitzer Rathsanalen*, ed. E. E. Struve (Görlitz, 1870), 16.

²⁷ Only two further sermons by Zimmermann are extant, neither of which discusses the 1602 outbreak: Justus Zimmermann, *Dialogus Dialogorum. Das ist: ein Gespräch über alle Gespräch / Unser Hochverdienten Herrn und Heilands Jesu Christi / mit Martha von Bethanien Von allgemeiner Auferstehung von den Todten am jüngsten Tag* (Bayreuth, 1602); idem, *Zu einer Christlichen Leichpredigt: Bey dem Volkreichen Leichbegänguß Des Herrn Conradi Paurschmids* (Bayreuth, 1603).

²⁸ '[M]ich dieses Predigstuhls unnd aller meiner Priesterlichen Amtsverrichtungen ertliche Wochen bißanhero enthalten müssen': Justus Zimmermann, *Eine Christliche Klag Trost und LehrPredigt Von der Wittib zu Naim vnd [und] ihrem durch Christum vom Todt erweckten Son*, 6. The printed sermon is unpaginated, so I follow the pagination of the digitized version: Universitätsbibliothek Erlangen-Nürnberg (shelfmark: H00/4 THL-(XVIII 201)-434), online at: <[urn:nbn:de:bvb:29-bv040630577-0](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bvb:29-bv040630577-0)>, last accessed 4 February 2022. See also Karl Hermann Zwanziger, 'Bericht des Spitalpredigers Justus Zimmermann über die Pest des Jahres 1602 in Bayreuth', *Archiv für Geschichte von Oberfranken* 24 (1909), 139–69.

sermons.²⁹ Sermons during times of crisis could provide a crucial sense of continuity for the congregation and town at large, something that Zimmermann also stressed when emphasizing that God had provided him with the opportunity to return to preaching.³⁰

In his suffering, Zimmermann found biblical precedents, to which his congregation could also relate. He quoted king Hezekiah as a biblical figure who had also lived through the plague.³¹ Zimmermann commented that Sirach 40: 1–4 was a particularly useful text, as were the verses he preached on, the raising of the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7: 11–17). He also compared himself to Job, having suffered the loss of his wife and son, as well as his own serious illness.³² Other sermons included passages, such as the raising of Lazarus and similar verses, linked specifically to divine grace and the raising of the dead. In most cases, these were understood to stand for the possibility of recovery from serious disease with divine help. For Zimmermann, these verses were especially relevant because he had been certain that he would die of the plague, and had already drafted his own epitaph.³³

For Zimmermann, the plague that had torn his family apart was especially painful because he had been unable to be with his wife, his treasure (*Eheschatz*), during her last moments. He deeply regretted that he had not been able to ‘close the eyes of my dear wife’, but also that, for eight weeks, he had been unable to enter the church despite wanting to preach and do God’s work. In the midst of the plague, Zimmermann wrote, he would have been glad to help his ‘little sheep’. He thanked his congregation and other citizens for praying for him, not only in the churches, but also in their homes.³⁴ Whether or not this was a rhetorical point, it shows that concern for a sick preacher transcended a particular congregation and was

²⁹ Olivia Formby, ‘“Woe unto us”: Divine Wrath and Godly Sorrow in an English Plague Sermon (1637)’, *SC* 36 (2021), 1–20.

³⁰ Zimmermann, *Eine Christliche Klag Trost und LehrPredigt*, 10.

³¹ For rhetorical tropes connected to plague, see also Rebecca Totaro and Ernest B. Gilman, eds, *Representing the Plague in Early Modern England* (New York and London, 2010).

³² ‘[Ich habe] unter dessen practiciret und erfaren / was König Hiskias in dergleichen Pestilenzischen seuch un[d] schwachheit [getan hat]: Zimmermann, *Eine Christliche Klag Trost und LehrPredigt*, 9–10.

³³ *Ibid.* 8.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 9.

discussed in many people's homes, illustrating how an outbreak of plague could also influence domestic settings.

Zimmermann, deeply affected by his own dramatic experiences, wanted to instruct his congregation in how to behave, both in times of trouble and if they recovered, showing them how to lead a pious life.³⁵ He wrote in his sermon about the loss of his wife and children and pointed out how much such a loss increased the suffering of the bereaved, clearly speaking from experience.³⁶ The publication of the sermon made it accessible to a broader public and, on the title page, Zimmermann presented the main elements of his story, mentioning the death of his wife and that he had not been able to preach for many weeks. The sermon was dedicated to Zimmermann's mother and mother-in-law, whom he praised for their steadfastness and pitied for their loss, which was also his.

Zimmermann saw his experience as exemplifying how God worked during plagues, arguing that the Lord had not only 'cast him into hell' (*in die Hölle gestossen*), but had also saved him. Out of mercy, the Lord had called him back into his house to do his work once again.³⁷ Zimmermann wrote that he survived thanks to divine mercy.³⁸ With this interpretation of divine punishment and redemption, Zimmermann's sermon was typical of early modern plague sermons.

SERMONS

The understanding of plague as a divine punishment was shared by preachers, regardless of confession, across Europe.³⁹ It included major outbreaks, such as the 'dancing plague' in Strasbourg in 1518 and the Great Plague in London (and England) in 1665–6.⁴⁰ Sermons were

³⁵ Ibid. 24–8.

³⁶ For a cross-temporal approach on suffering in religion, see John R. Hinnells and Roy Porter, eds, *Religion, Health and Suffering* (London and New York, 1998).

³⁷ Zimmermann, *Eine Christliche Klag Trost und LehrPredigt*, 9.

³⁸ 'Aber die Güte des HERRN ist / daß wir nicht gar aus sindt. So Gott ist meine Zuversicht und Sterck gewesen': *ibid.* 8.

³⁹ See, for example, Andreas Mühlhng, "Welchen Tod sterben wir?" Heinrich Bullingers "Bericht der Kranken" (1535), *Zwingliana* 29 (2002), 55–68, at 61.

⁴⁰ Lynneeth J. Miller, 'Divine Punishment or Disease? Medieval and Early Modern Approaches to the 1518 Strasbourg Dancing Plague', *Dance Research* 35 (2017), 149–64; J. A. I. Champion, ed., *Epidemic Disease in London* (London, 1993). This explanation for disease continued in sermons throughout the early modern period. See Sabine Holtz,

the primary way of reminding citizens of their sins and of stressing that this was a harsh, but ultimately justified, divine punishment. During a plague epidemic in Blomberg in Westphalia in 1580–2, the Lutheran pastor Justus Piderit delivered a total of eighteen sermons, which were published in Lemgo in 1582.⁴¹ According to Piderit, the plague was not only a punishment from God of sinful mankind, but also an admonition to repentance, providing the opportunity to receive God's grace. Piderit also wrote about the futility of fleeing from the plague, arguing that God's punishment would reach sinners anywhere.

This theme of death coming as it pleases God had been explored by Luther two generations earlier in his sermon on Mark 5: 21–43, where he wrote that he did not fear death through plague because if it was Jesus's will, the plague would harm him less than an attempt to flee. At the same time, he expressed the conviction that if it was God's will to call someone away from this earthly life, this should be accepted willingly.⁴² An interpretation of the plague as divine punishment was also shared by Catholics. In his 1593 advice on the plague, for example, Jakob Hornstein, a Catholic priest, wrote that war, pestilence and famine were all divine punishments.⁴³ The focus on penance was also taken up directly in the title of some sermons: D. G. Lehmann, superintendent in Leipzig in the latter decades of the seventeenth century, called his sermon a 'penitence and plague sermon' (*Buß- und Pest-Predigt*).⁴⁴ Reformed theologians similarly argued that disease was a form of divine punishment: in his instructions for the sick and dying, first published in 1535, Heinrich Bullinger argued that disease helped humans to better themselves

'Predigt: Religiöser Transfer über Postillen', Europäische Geschichte Online, 2 February 2011, at: <<http://www.ieg-ego.eu/holtzs-2011-de>>, accessed 8 June 2021.

⁴¹ Justus Piderit, *Tractat von der Pestilenz: in 18 Predigten abgefaßt* (Lemgo, 1582); Neithard Bulst, 'Die Pestpredigten des Justus Piderit', *Lippische Mitteilungen aus Geschichte und Landeskunde* 80 (2011), 99–116.

⁴² Luther, 'Predigt am 24. Sonntag nach Trinitatis', *WA* 5: 21–43. This is also articulated in early modern *artes moriendi*: see Volker Leppin, 'Preparing for Death: From the Late Medieval *ars moriendi* to the Lutheran Funeral Sermon', in Tarald Rasmussen and Jon Øygarden Flåten, eds, *Preparing for Death, Remembering the Dead* (Göttingen, 2015), 9–24; Herman J. Selderhuis, 'Ars Moriendi in Early Modern Calvinism', *ibid.* 109–22.

⁴³ Hornstein, *Sterbensflucht*, 14.

⁴⁴ D. G. Lehmann, *P.P. Buß- und Pest-Predigt auff Begehren zum Druck befördert worden Von Christoph Wilhelm Streng* (Leipzig, 1680).

and came from God's 'fatherly loyalty and love' (*vß väterlicher trüw vnd liebe bschähe*).⁴⁵

Since God was omnipotent and would punish sinners, Piderit recommended that his listeners stay in the town, pray and repent. 'Through the plague', he wrote, 'God took away many godless people so that the pious are protected and saved from their tyranny and evil actions'. But Piderit also recommended that his readers follow doctors' instructions and take the appropriate medicines.⁴⁶ Like Zimmermann after him, he also referred to Sirach as a particularly useful biblical book for those seeking to understand how to behave during plagues.

Piderit was not alone in discussing more practical measures to prevent plague as part of his sermons, at least in their printed form. Many preachers stressed that while it was good to pray and do penance for sins and past transgressions, if one was struck by plague, it was also important to take medicine, as all medicine ultimately derived from God.⁴⁷ In this way, many clerics followed the advice of Luther, who had made clear, as quoted at the beginning of this article, that he would take any medicine to ensure a speedy recovery. But while many preachers recognized that the sick should take medicine, they usually also emphasized that it was not sufficient to focus solely on these physical measures; those suffering also had to call on Jesus.⁴⁸

The priest Jakob Hornstein provides a good example of this in his recommendations on how to treat the plague in his 1593 *Sterbensflucht*, which discusses whether people should flee from plague:

The people should daily pray and attend service, do penance and repent: get rid of all earthly pleasures and desires, jumping, dancing and unnecessary drinking and excessive eating. Most importantly, all inns, houses, flats, streets and alleys should be kept clean and tidy,

⁴⁵ Heinrich Bullinger, *Bericht der Kranken* (Zurich, 1535), unpaginated [9].

⁴⁶ 'So nimpt auch unterweilen unser Herr Godt durch die Pest viell gotloser wegk / uff das de fromen für jrer Tyranny und bösem fürnemen geschutz und darvon erlöset': Piderit, *Tractat von der Pestilentz*, unpaginated preface.

⁴⁷ Heribert Smolinsky, 'Volksfrömmigkeit und religiöse Literatur im Zeitalter der Konfessionalisierung', in Hansgeorg Molitor, ed., *Volksfrömmigkeit in der frühen Neuzeit* (Münster, 1994), 27–35, at 32–3. This was also the case for Bullinger, who recommended taking the medicine doctors prescribed: Mühling, "Welchen Tod sterben wir?", 59.

⁴⁸ Hornstein, *Sterbensflucht*, 5–7.

all foul and bad-smelling filth and things should be moved away quickly.⁴⁹

In these recommendations, Hornstein combined an admonition against a sinful lifestyle with practical instructions on keeping streets and houses clean.⁵⁰ Many preachers reinforced the medical recommendations promulgated by town magistrates and physicians, linking them to spiritual advice on appropriate behaviour during plague epidemics.

One Danzig plague ordinance from 1565, for instance, lays down that ‘those who die of plague should not be kept in their houses over night, but should quickly be buried in a deep grave’.⁵¹ This time-frame was much shorter than that stipulated in previous ordinances, which called for the dead to be buried within three days or two nights. Just as preachers used recommendations by urban magistrates, so too magistrates invoked religious themes to justify their measures. The Danzig ordinance affirmed that the outbreak of the plague was a result of divine punishment. God had brought this plague onto the town because of the sins of its inhabitants.⁵² These connections between clerical and urban actors are also present in other towns. In 1521, the council of Augsburg instructed all town preachers to remind their listeners to give generously to the plague hospital.⁵³

Within this complex interplay of preachers and councils, physicians and apothecaries used similar methods, including elements normally associated with church rituals in their advice for the plague.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ ‘[D]as Volck zu täglichem Gebett vnd Gottesdienst / Penitentz vnd Buß gehalten: Alle Weltfrewd vnd Wollust / Springen / Tantzen / vberflüßiges Sauffen vnnnd Fressen abschaffen: Zuvorderst der Zeit alle Herbergen / Häuser / Wohnu[n]e / Strassen vn[d] Gassen / sauber vnd rein gehalten / aller faulender vn[d] vbelschmeckend[er] Unrath und Wust bey zeit hinweg geschafft werde’: *ibid.*, 57.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*; see also Smolinsky, ‘Volksfrömmigkeit und religiöse Literatur’, 32–3.

⁵¹ ‘Das auch die verstorbenen an Peste / nicht über eine nacht in den Heusern gehalten / sondern in zeiten zur Erden in tieffe greber’: Bartholomäus Wagner, *Von der Pestilentz / Nützliche vnd gründliche unterrichtunge wie man sich mit Gottes hülffe vor der vergiftung bewaren / vnd auch den krancken / welche eingefallen / wieder helffen soll* (Danzig, 1565). On the Danzig ordinances, see Edmund Kizik, *Die reglementierte Feier. Hochzeiten, Taufen und Begräbnisse in der frühneuzeitlichen Hansestadt* (Osnabrück, 2008).

⁵² Wagner, *Von der Pestilentz / Nützliche vnd gründliche unterrichtunge*, unpaginated (section entitled ‘Von ursachen der Pestilentz’).

⁵³ Mariusz Horanin, ‘Die Pest in Augsburg um 1500. Die soziale Konstruktion einer Krankheit’ (Ph.D. thesis, Georg-August Universität Göttingen, 2019), 142.

⁵⁴ See, for example, Andreas Ellinger, *Rathschlag Herrn D. Andreae Ellingers zu Jehna seligen/ wie man sich zur zeit der Pest praeseruiren* (Leipzig, 1587).

Thus the Lemgo doctor Konrad Heinrich quoted Sirach 38 in the frontispiece of his treatise:⁵⁵

The Lord created medicines from the earth, and a sensible person will not hesitate to use them. Didn't a tree once make bitter water fit to drink, so that the Lord's power might be known? He gave medical knowledge to human beings, so that we would praise him for the miracles he performs. The druggist mixes these medicines, and the doctor will use them to cure diseases and ease pain.⁵⁶

As already seen, Sirach was a favourite book for many plague preachers.⁵⁷ Heinrich used this Bible passage to justify his profession as a physician, and drew attention to the instructions that followed to determine proper treatment of the plague. In many cases, instructions for the sick included prayers or hymns which reinforced the content of the sermons preached by the clergy.

In their plague sermons, preachers developed themes of sin and redemption further by adapting them to specific circumstances. These adaptations included biblical verses and their exegesis but also specific advice, for example, on appropriate behaviour or the uses of medicine.⁵⁸ Even passages that did not include direct references to disease could be interpreted in a way that made them more relevant for the audience in this time of trial.⁵⁹

Sermons could take on more distinctly confessional tones, especially in Catholic contexts. As well as being associated with other means of penance, such as good works, confession or

⁵⁵ Heinrich mentions Sirach 38 but without referring to specific verses (the relevant ones are verses 4–7 and part of verse 8). In some Bible translations, this passage is entitled 'Praise of the Doctor' ('Lob des Arztes').

⁵⁶ 'Der HERR lest die Artzney aus der Erden wachsen / vnd ein vernüfftiger [sic] verachtet sie nicht / Vnd er hat solche Kunst den Menschen gegeben / das er gepreiset werde in seinen Wunderthaten / Damit heilet er vnd vertreibt die schmerzen / vnd der Apoteker machet Artzney daraus': Konrad Heinrich, *Bericht von der Pest / so dieses lauffenden 80. Jars zu Soist im schwang* (Lemgo, 1580), frontispiece.

⁵⁷ For another example, see Simon Gedik, *Gülden Kleinod Für betrübte Hertzen / Oder Trostbüchlein: Auß den fürnembsten Hauptpuncten* (Leipzig, 1608), 384.

⁵⁸ Joachim Cirenberger, *Wider alle Pestilenzische geschwinde und giftige Fieber, Ein gründlicher volkömmlicher Bericht rath und hülfße* (Leipzig, 1564).

⁵⁹ See Sabine Holtz, 'Die Unsicherheit des Lebens. Zum Verständnis von Krankheit und Tod in den Predigten der lutherischen Orthodoxie', in Hartmut Lehmann and Anne-Charlott Trepp, eds, *Im Zeichen der Krise. Religiosität im Europa des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen, 1999), 135–58.

pilgrimages,⁶⁰ many Catholic sermons preached during plague epidemics featured elements such as the intercession of saints. In terms of pastoral provision, Catholic priests needed to administer the last rites, whereas Lutherans did not. Some Catholic plague sermons had confessionally distinctive elements, such as references to saintly intercession or papal authority, revealing different theological approaches.

When a town, whether Catholic or Protestant, was recovering from plague and its preachers thought that the worst of the outbreak was over, the tone of the sermons generally shifted. The overarching theme became one of divine mercy and even gratitude to God for teaching the town's inhabitants a lesson.⁶¹ There were still elements of penitence, and many sermons reminded parishioners to remember the divine punishment they had experienced and lead a good life in order to prevent further divine wrath. However, the overwhelming emphasis was one of celebration that the plague had been lifted. In Ulm, the council even decreed a festivity (*Dankfest*) to mark the end of the plague, which also included the delivery of a sermon which was subsequently printed.⁶² Preaching to mark the end of an epidemic continued throughout the seventeenth century. In Saxony in 1681, a series of sermons was delivered in Leipzig and Dresden to thank God for turning the plague away from the area.⁶³ Similarly in 1681, Johann Gottfried Lembacher thanked God for delivering Saxony from further punishment after the plague.⁶⁴

The ongoing threat of epidemics meant that the fear of plague and the memory of recent outbreaks were constantly on people's minds.

⁶⁰ See Neithard Bulst, 'Heiligenverehrung in Pestzeiten. Soziale und religiöse Reaktionen auf die spätmittelalterlichen Pestepidemien', in A. Löther, ed., *Mundus in Imagine. Bildersprache und Lebenswelten im Mittelalter* (Munich, 1996), 63–97. For a later example, see Franz Xaver Hallauer, *Pest-Predig Bey der, von einer Löblichen S. Michaels Bruderschaft zu Berg ... Von München nach Ebersperg, zu dem Heiligen Martyrer Sebastiano, Umb Abwendung der laydigen Sucht, auf den ersten Sonntag in dem Advent angestellten heiligen Wahlfahrt* (Cölln, 1720).

⁶¹ See, for example, Piderit, *Tractatus von der Pestilentz*, unpaginated preface.

⁶² Conrad Dieterich, *Ulmische Dancksagungspredig Wegen gnädiger Abwendung der grausamen geschwinden Seuche der Pest/ Auß dem 107. Psalmen* (Ulm, 1636).

⁶³ See, for example, Johann Georg III, *Anordnung / Welcher massen Für Die gnädige Erhaltung / und gänzliche Befreyung dieser Lande von der Pest* (Dresden, 1681); Christoph Zeisseler, *Lob und Danck Opffer Nach überstandener gefährlicher Pest-Zeit* (Leipzig, 1681).

⁶⁴ Gottfried Lembach, *O Herr hilf! O Herr laß wohl gelingen! Eine Christliche Dank-Predigt* (Dresden, 1681).

So, even when there was no plague, preachers might refer to it as an example of divine punishment. Rhetorical tropes relating to disease and healing were prominent in early modern sermons and preachers knew how to deploy these in order to call parishioners to repentance. In Johann Junghans's collection of sermons, each of which had a theme (such as roses, cold, fire or St Martin's goose) one sermon was dedicated to plague (*Pest*).⁶⁵ Junghans stressed that a pious and God-fearing life could prevent plague and that one should be grateful if God did not visit his divine wrath on a town. Andreas Richter's *Ancilis Christianorum*, delivered in 1611 in the village of Wülflingroda in the duchy of Hohnstein in the Harz mountains, was even more explicit in describing how God could protect a town from plague, if – and only if – the inhabitants behaved properly.⁶⁶ He told the congregation (and later his readers) about God's protective powers against plague, both real and metaphorical, and how, through a pious life, it was possible for people to prevent this kind of punishment, both for themselves and for the urban community at large. God, he wrote, protected his children from his punishment.⁶⁷ The plague thus played an important role in sermons during this period, whether or not there was a local outbreak.

SPACES

Outbreaks of plague also influenced urban spaces, for example when citizens were no longer allowed to leave their houses or had to quarantine in order to avoid infecting other members of the community.⁶⁸ Most of the sermons given during outbreaks of plague seem to have been delivered as regular sermons from the pulpit of the parish church. In some cases, the main sermons were delivered by the town preachers

⁶⁵ Johann Junghans, *M. Johann Junghanssens Gerani, Weiland Pastoris zu Cösteritz/ Sermonum De Tempore* (Erfurt, 1669).

⁶⁶ Andreas Richter, *Ancilis Christianorum. Gleubiger Christen Schildt und Wapen/ wider itzt schwebender Straffruthen Gottes* (Mühlhausen, 1611).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, title page. Processions in Catholic territories expressed a similar wish for divine protection from plague: see Susanne Rau, 'Canons, Councillors and Confrères: Changing Power Constellations in the City of Lyon (Late Middle Ages, Early Modern Times)', Religion and Urbanity Online [online database], 2021, at: <<https://www.degruyter.com/database/URBREL/entry/urbrel.13901209/html>>, accessed 15 December 2021.

⁶⁸ Paul Slack, 'Responses to Plague in Early Modern Europe: The Implications of Public Health', *Social Research* 55 (1988), 433–53.

and the plague preachers gave other sermons and provided pastoral care.⁶⁹ At least for the later seventeenth century, there were more listeners in the church, regardless of sickness or quarantine regulations.⁷⁰ From extant sermons, we know that preachers recommended that inhabitants of the towns attend church at least once a day.⁷¹

In certain cases, however, the spaces where sermons were delivered changed. Some parishes established plague pulpits (*Pestkanzeln*), for example in Weida in Thuringia or at St Bartholomew's church, Dresden, where it was attached to the outside.⁷² In the case of the latter, the pulpit was connected both to the parish church and to the hospital. It was mainly used when there was not enough space in the church for everyone wanting to attend.

While preaching generally took place only in churches or from pulpits, in extreme situations, certain aspects of sermon-giving could be transposed to places infected by plague. Clerics had to provide solace in bedchambers, for instance, and while they normally did not give sermons there, they did read biblical passages and say prayers, just as they would in a sermon.⁷³ Although this also happened in normal times, it was especially important during plague outbreaks.

There are also indications that preaching took place in plague cemeteries (*Pestfriedhöfe*).⁷⁴ Some of these had open air pulpits, as we know from surviving examples. Dead bodies continued to be buried in parish cemeteries and it was normally only when there was no alternative that dedicated plague cemeteries were opened on the outskirts of the town, usually outside its walls or gates.⁷⁵ In 1565, the Danzig

⁶⁹ See Górska, 'Das frühneuzeitliche Pestpredigeramt', 127–8, 130.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 127.

⁷¹ Piderit, *Tractat von der Pestilentz*, unpaginated preface.

⁷² Anton Weck, *Der Chur-Fürstlichen Sächsischen weitberuffenen Residentz- und Haupt-Vestung Dresden Beschreib- und Vorstellung* (Nuremberg, 1680), 272.

⁷³ On a Lutheran deathbed and the provision of solace, see Susan C. Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Feeling: Shaping the Religious Emotions in Early Modern Germany* (Oxford, 2010), 189–214. See also Benedikt Brunner, 'Madensack oder Tempel Gottes? Lutherische Bewertungen des Leibes im Angesicht des Todes', *Ebernburg-Hefte* 54 (2020), 9–31.

⁷⁴ Reiner Sörries, 'Leprosen- und Pestfriedhöfe und ihre Bedeutung für die nachmittelalterlichen Friedhöfe', in idem, ed., *Raum für Tote: die Geschichte der Friedhöfe von den Gräberstraßen der Römerzeit bis zur anonymen Bestattung* (Braunschweig, 2003), 53–62.

⁷⁵ Max Heitzer, *Vom Pestfriedhof 1636 zum Kolmsteiner Kircherl* (Haibühl, 1980); Josef Heinzmann, *Die Ringackerkapelle. Das barocke Marienheiligtum auf dem ehemaligen Pestfriedhof bei Leuk-Stadt / VS (Schweiz). Ihre Geschichte, ihre Sebenswürdigkeiten* (Leuk, 1968); Lorena Burkhardt, *Domat/Ems, Sogn Pieder. Vom frühmittelalterlichen*

plague ordinance instructed that ‘as many as possible should be buried outside the town’.⁷⁶ The focus on the area ‘beyond the city wall’ is striking; the same regulation stipulated that no ‘borrowed shrouds’ (*Leylacken*) should be sold inside the city, and that the clothes of the deceased should be washed outside the city gates.⁷⁷

The spatial separation of at least some of the preaching when plague broke out in towns speaks to broader concerns about hygiene and medicine, illustrating at least a rudimentary awareness of the causes of the spread of disease. According to early modern medical theories, polluted air spread the disease and, as such, plague victims had to be buried quickly. In the plague cemeteries, temporal aspects also came into play when the number of burials increased dramatically, so burials and any sermons associated with them had to take place rapidly. This concern to prevent the spread of disease was also expressed in treatises by town physicians, who provided guidance on remedies.⁷⁸

CONCLUSION: PREACHING DURING TIMES OF CRISIS

Although this article has focused on preaching during outbreaks of plague, similar patterns of change can be detected during other times of crisis. Serious fires, for example, elicited similar sermons about divine punishment. Moreover, once a town had survived a serious natural disaster, preaching revolved around gratitude towards God and repentance to prevent further catastrophe.⁷⁹ These trends

Herrenhof zum neuzeitlichen Pestfriedhof (Chur, 2020). For a medieval example, see Hansueli Etter and Jürg Schneider, *Die Pest in Zürich: ein Pestfriedhof des 14. Jahrhunderts im ehemaligen Augustinergarten am Münzplatz* (Zürich, 1982).

⁷⁶ On the movement of cemeteries during the Reformation, see Craig M. Koslofsky, *The Reformation of the Dead: Death and Ritual in Early Modern Germany, c.1450–1700* (London, 2000), 40–77; Wagner, *Von der Pestilenz*, unpaginated.

⁷⁷ Wagner, *Von der Pestilenz*, unpaginated. In Augsburg around 1494, the council employed a temporary preacher during epidemics, who was responsible for taking care of the infected in the ‘plague houses’ (*Pesthäuser*) and recording those who died of plague, so that the citizens could pray for them: Horanin, *Die Pest in Augsburg*, 130.

⁷⁸ See, for example, Rat der Stadt Elbing, *Kurtze Verordnung / Wie ein Jedweder bey dieser Zeit / wegen besorglicher Pest-Gefähr / Negst Göttlicher Hülffe sich präserviren / und in der Cur verhalten solle: Mit Zulaß E. Wol Edl. und Hochw. Rahts der Königl. Stadt Elbing* (Elbing, 1708).

⁷⁹ See, for example, Zacharias Rivander, *Eine Christliche Predigt Vom schrecklichen Feuer und grossen Brandschaden zum Forst in Niederlaussnitz* (Eisleben, 1590). On the intersections of war and plague, see Zapnik, *Pest und Krieg im Ostseeraum*.

show how preaching adapted to specific circumstances and, while many aspects remained the same (such as the structure of the sermon or liturgy), there was a significant degree of flexibility in terms of the personnel, content and space involved in the production and delivery of a sermon. As the example of Justus Zimmermann has shown, this could even include personal experiences of plague, which preachers used in their sermons. Sermons could therefore stand both for continuity, in that preaching was a regular feature of early modern life, and for change, by adapting to specific circumstances.

Some features of these sermons were shared by both confessions, including a focus on divine punishment and redemption, or biblical verses which seemed especially appropriate, such as those from Sirach. One recurring theme in plague sermons across the confessional divide was the question of whether one should flee or remain. We can also detect a joint effort between urban, clerical and medical actors when it came to the prevention and cure of plague. Sermons contained recommendations on how to behave and admonitions to use appropriate medicine, while urban magistrates and physicians used biblical justifications for their instructions.

But there were also important differences, such as the Catholic emphasis on the intercession of saints. There are some indications that Catholic plague sermons were also preached in the New World during outbreaks of serious disease. However, the only example I was able to find comes from the mid-seventeenth century.⁸⁰ These missionary sermons, which were supposed to demonstrate divine power to indigenous populations and illustrate key concepts connected to Catholic doctrine, may form an interesting counterpart to the European examples discussed in this article, but further research is needed to determine whether there are enough such sermons to enable a meaningful comparison.

Preachers and parishioners were clearly influenced by disaster. In the case of the clergy, they could draw on their theological knowledge and personal experiences to relate to the members of their congregation and offer advice. These made their sermons more relevant by using points of reference immediately applicable to the situation. Plague was so important that preachers could even invoke ideas about the disease when a town was not immediately affected by it.

⁸⁰ See Heinz Willi Wittschier, ed., *Antonio Vieiras Pestpredigt* (Aschendorff, 1973), for an edition of this 1649 sermon.

Preaching during Plague Epidemics

Many of them focused on three features, depending on when during a plague epidemic the sermons were delivered. At the outset, they emphasized that God was punishing a town or region for its sinful behaviours. In a second stage, the clergy sought to provide a remedy, emphasizing the importance of repentance and the saving power of divine grace. Here, the preacher might also offer more practical or medical advice as part of his sermon. They could also comfort their flock by emphasizing the hope of salvation. Finally, when the plague was over, many of the clergy thanked God for his mercy, arguing that God provided both punishment and cure, and that he ruled supreme over life and death.