

The Prayer Book and Pandemics

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The Book of Common Prayer, in its successive editions from 1549 to 1662, was produced in an age of epidemics and pandemics. The worst of these contagions left enduring impressions in the text of the Prayer Book, which is not only a religious liturgy but also an historical record, retaining evidence of the circumstances in which it was created. I shall consider this evidence in the first part of this article. But the Prayer Book's provisions and prayers were never regarded as adequate for severe outbreaks of disease, any more than they were for other crises or great public events. My main purpose is to consider the reasons for this inadequacy, and to describe the alternative acts of worship which were ordered during these special occasions. Despite the requirements in successive Acts of Uniformity, royal proclamations, episcopal injunctions and church canons that ministers must adhere strictly to The Book of Common Prayer, the Prayer Book did not provide all the services and prayers that were read throughout the Church of England. In practice, the term 'common prayer' had a double meaning—not just 'common' in the sense of collective prayer, of services shared in congregations, but also 'common' in the sense of ordinary prayer, of services for normal use. For extraordinary occasions and sometimes for long periods, the prescribed services were supplemented by special prayers or superseded by special services: the Prayer Book was not the only authorised liturgy used in the Church. For epidemics and pandemics, extraordinary provisions were made for four centuries, ending in the 1860s, which was part of more general changes and an eventual decline in the long practice of national orders for special acts of worship.

The pandemic that chiefly left a mark on the original editions of the Prayer Book was bubonic plague, which had been endemic in England for two centuries, since the first appearance of the Black Death in 1348. Outbreaks of varying severity and regional incidence remained a common experience, to such an extent that Cranmer and his associates almost took them for granted. The plague was listed among several other minatory afflictions in a petition in the Litany published in every edition of the Prayer Book from 1549: 'From lightning and tempest, from plague,

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pestilence, and famine, from battayle and murther, and from sodain death, *Good lorde deliuer vs*'.¹

Plague was also mentioned in the preface to the Communion of the Sick, again almost as a matter of course. As people should be 'always in readiness to die', curates were instructed to encourage parishioners from time to time, 'but specially in the plague tyme', to be frequent in taking communion, a phrase changed in 1662 to 'especially in the time of pestilence, or other infectious disease'.² The exhortation in the Communion service contained a phrase which encapsulated what long remained the religious understanding of natural and human crises, drawn from the example of Old Testament Israel. These calamities were God's punishments for the collective sins of the nation or kingdom: 'We kindle Gods wrathe over us, we provoke him to plague us with diverse dyseases, and sondery kyndes of death'.³

Epidemics became a specific subject of prayer in the second edition of *The Book of Common Prayer*, in 1552. New provisions were prompted by an outbreak not of plague, but of 'the sweat' or 'sweating sickness', a viral infection that killed with startling suddenness and which had caused some 15,000 deaths during the previous year. One consequence was a new rubric in the Communion of the Sick, prescribing what ministers should do 'In the tyme of plague, swette, or suche other lyke contagious tymes of sicknesses or dyseases'.⁴ As these words remained unaltered in all later editions of the Prayer Book, this last English outbreak of the 'sweat' in 1551 has had a very long liturgical history. The chief change was a new 'occasional prayer', meaning a prayer for use at particular times. Prayers for rain and for fine weather had been placed at the end of Communion in 1549; now, in 1552, they were moved to the end of the litany and joined by new prayers for further periods of anxiety or crisis, including a prayer 'in the tyme of any common plague or sickenes'. After appealing to the precedent of God sending a plague to Israel under King David that killed 70,000 before he relented and saved the rest of the people (2 Samuel 24:15–16), the prayer asked for God's pity and for his withdrawal of infection.⁵ This expressed the prevailing belief about the remedy for all great crises: that God's punishments might be ended if collective prayers and collective repentance could evoke his merciful withdrawal of the punishment.

1 Brian Cummings (ed.), *The Book of Common Prayer. The Texts of 1549, 1559 and 1662* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 41, 117, 260.

2 *Ibid.*, pp. 79, 169, 449.

3 *Ibid.*, pp. 23, 133, 398.

4 F.E. Brightman, *The English Rite* (2 vols, 1915; 1921), II, 847; Cummings, *Book of Common Prayer*, pp. 170, 450.

5 Brightman, *English Rite*, I, 189; Cummings, *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 123.

The success of these petitions, as shown by the end of the crisis, rightly required thanksgivings to God and, as evidence that the lesson had been learned, promises of continuing repentance. But only in 1604 were the occasional petitionary prayers complemented by occasional thanksgiving prayers. These included—after a severe plague outbreak in 1603—two alternative prayers ‘for deliverance from the plague’.⁶ In the more thorough revision of the Prayer Book in 1662, following persistent plague outbreaks during the previous sixty years, the petitionary prayer ‘in the time of any common plague or sickness’ was revised and reinforced by reference to a second Old Testament precedent (plagues sent to punish ‘obstinate rebellion against Moses and Aaron’, Numbers 26: 41–50), and by an appeal for God’s acceptance of the people’s ‘atonement’.⁷ These prayers for particular times were now gathered into a separate section and entitled ‘prayers and thanksgivings upon several occasions’, with a rubric which allowed their use—as was surely already a common practice—towards the end of Morning and Evening Prayer as well as the end of the Litany.

How often and how widely the occasional prayers and thanksgivings were read is unknowable: the surviving records do not yield this type of information. Presumably their use was left to the discretion of ministers, or sometimes to directions by archdeacons or bishops, with the effect (as had perhaps been the intention) that they were read according to the varied geographical incidence of epidemics and other crises across the kingdom. As such, these types of prayer were permitted and flexible departures from uniformity, read as appropriate in different regions or localities as well as at differing times. Nevertheless, the occasional prayers were often regarded as insufficient for the most severe episodes or for the biggest public events that affected all parts of the kingdom, when repentance and supplication needed to be greater, deeper and broader, seeking mercy for the sins of the whole nation.

During the early years of the Reformation, the occasional prayers would certainly have been considered inadequate in comparison with Catholic liturgies. Cranmer’s intention for the Book of Common Prayer was to produce not just a Protestant, vernacular and uniform liturgy, but a less numerous, consolidated, and more convenient set of religious services, contained within one volume. He selected from, translated and transformed core elements from the separate books of the Catholic processional, breviary, manual and missal, and set aside much of the further material. This omitted material included special prayers and

6 *The Book of Common Prayer* (1604, STC 16327), sig. [B7]; Cummings, *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 270.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 266.

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special masses which had accumulated over the centuries for use during calamities or great public events. The Sarum Missal contained as many as four votive masses for human epidemics, including masses ‘in time of plague’ and ‘to turn away pestilence’, as well as a mass for epidemics among farm animals, ‘in time of murrain’.⁸ With the rejection of these special Catholic and Latin prayers and liturgies, what was to be done if the occasional prayers seemed insufficient during very severe national crises or for great national events?

The answer was being found even as The Book of Common Prayer was created. During the ten years after the break with Rome in 1533, the royal supremacy over the new Church of England was exercised to order special acts of worship for several national events and crises, including drought, dysentery and other diseases in 1540. These at first made continued use of existing processional texts, still in Latin. But military campaigns against France in 1544 and again in 1545 gave Cranmer the opportunity to issue his first liturgy in English: the Litany began as a special service, before it was integrated into the first Prayer Book as a regular service. Then, during the sweating sickness in 1551, the Act of Uniformity and the Prayer Book were set aside with the issue of another English liturgy, a special service that was quite distinct from the services in the Prayer Book.⁹

This practice of temporary suspensions of the prescribed church services and substitution of new texts was developed further during the reigns of Elizabeth I and the early Stuart kings. Special acts of worship settled into three kinds: prayers, services and religious days. *Special prayers* were simply added to the existing daily services. For more serious or greater occasions, *special services* substantially changed these daily services. For the most serious or the greatest occasions, special services were read on *special religious days*, appointed either as fast days or as thanksgiving days, which were appointed in the middle of the week and required suspension of ordinary employment, in the same manner as on Sundays

8 The Sarum Missal in English, ed. F.E. Warren (2 vols), II, 122–4, 202–7, 208–212, 213–7, and for murrain, 124–5.

9 The special liturgies for particular occasions of special worship ordered for all churches in England and Wales can be found, with commentaries, in Natalie Mears, Alasdair Raffie, Stephen Taylor and Philip Williamson (eds), *National Prayers: Special Worship since the Reformation*, volume 1, *Special Prayers, Fasts and Thanksgivings in the British Isles, 1533–1688*, followed by Philip Williamson et al. (eds), *National Prayers ... volume 2: General Fasts, Thanksgivings and Special Prayers in the British Isles, 1689–1870*, and *National Prayers ... volume 3: Worship for National and Royal Occasions in the United Kingdom, 1871–2016* (Church of England Record Society, Woodbridge, 2013, 2017, 2020). Special acts of worship were also ordered in the established churches in Ireland and Scotland (following their distinctive practices), and with increasing frequency from the 1650s, for the same or similar dates in all parts of the British Isles. From the 1680s to the 1950s, some were ordered or encouraged for observance throughout the British Empire.

and holy days. All these special acts of worship, with their insistent appeal to the Old Testament, assumed that, as was shown by the history of the Jewish people, divine providence had a national operation and national effects. England and later the United Kingdom were spiritual bodies, judged and punished or forgiven as a nation, as a modern Israel. Accordingly, special worship was ordered by the nation's rulers for observance by all adults in all churches on the same day, in the belief that collective and simultaneous worship would intensify the force and effect of prayer and repentance.

From 1559 to the 1640s, sixty-seven special acts of worship were ordered in England and Wales, almost all of them observed more than once and some for several weeks or months—not counting special services for royal anniversaries.¹⁰ During these eight decades, The Book of Common Prayer was modified or supplemented for an average of perhaps ten days a year, although this average disguises prolonged periods in which it was effectively superseded. Twelve of the sixty-seven orders were for plague outbreaks, some of which led to the longest replacements of regular with special services, for up to 6 months in 1563–4 and 10 months in 1603–4.¹¹ During the civil wars and Interregnum, special acts of worship became still more common, though now conducted in most churches without the Prayer Book, by extempore prayer and sermons. After the Restoration and after the re-adoption and revision of The Book of Common Prayer in 1662, the practice remained a common act of state, although fast and thanksgiving days were now normally just for single dates. From 1660 to the 1980s, over 440 special acts of worship were appointed—again not counting the anniversary state services, which were increased in number during the Restoration and annexed in 1662 to The Book of Common Prayer.¹²

Except during the 1640s and 1650s, the texts for these special acts of worship were provided by special forms of prayer, published by the royal printer and sent to all places of worship in the Church of England. In contrast to the special prayers and votive masses collected in the earlier Catholic liturgies, the texts of these extraordinary Anglican prayers and services did not become standardised and gathered together within volumes. Each special act of worship had its own form of prayer,

10 For the special liturgies for these anniversaries, see Philip Williamson et al. (eds), *National Prayers ... volume 4: Anniversary Commemorations* (Church of England Record Society, forthcoming).

11 See Natalie Mears, 'Special Nationwide Worship and the Book of Common Prayer in England, Wales and Ireland, 1533–1642', in *Worship and the Parish Church in Early Modern Britain*, ed. Natalie Mears and Alec Ryrie (Farnham, 2013), pp. 31–72.

12 Commemoration of the Restoration (29 May) and the execution of Charles I (30 January) were added to 'Gunpowder treason Day' (5 November) and the varying accession day of the sovereign. Most were abolished in 1859, leaving only the service for Accession Day.

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either a single sheet for prayers or many pages for services. These several hundred special forms used to accumulate in parish chests, and many are now found in county record offices or in research libraries. Collectively they provide a parallel history of worship in the Church of England, alongside The Book of Common Prayer.

These special forms of prayer did not wholly replace the texts in the Prayer Book. For *special prayers*, the forms simply printed the text of the new prayer or prayers, with a rubric stating at which point they were to be read within the daily services, in similar manner to the occasional prayers. *Special services* used much of the daily Prayer Book services, but modified them in sometimes complex and lengthy ways: rubrics, lessons, suffrages, collects and psalms were changed, and new prayers, psalms, collects and sometimes homilies or exhortations were added. From 1625 to 1685, the forms for special services printed the whole text of the service—the retained material from the Prayer Book, together with the modifications and the new material—with the result that such forms could be over a hundred pages in length. In other periods only the modified and new texts were printed, and from the 1680s the forms usually stated that the special service ‘shall be the same with the usual office ... except where it is in this office otherwise appointed’. In these cases, ministers had to use both the prayer book and the special form of prayer, alternating between one and the other while conducting the service.

Special services and special religious days were ordered for numerous causes, including good and bad harvests, earthquakes, royal occasions, plots, invasion threats and, the most common cause, wars.¹³ But the model was established during the severe plague outbreak of 1563, which eventually killed about 80,000 people, including nearly a quarter of the population of London. Special services were held on Sundays, Wednesdays and Fridays, most extensively on Wednesdays, the weekly fast day. A choice of special lessons was given for Morning Prayer. On Wednesdays, this service was followed by fifteen minutes of private prayer. On both Wednesdays and Fridays, the Litany was extended by a selection of new prayers, each several hundred words long, and on Wednesdays by a new composite or ‘cento’ psalm drawn from verses in the Old Testament and Apocrypha, beginning ‘O come let vs humble our selues and fall downe before the Lord with reuerance and feare’.¹⁴ Also

13 See also Alasdair Raffe, ‘Nature’s Scourges: The Natural World and Special Prayers, Fasts and Thanksgivings, 1543–1866’, in Peter Clarke and Tony Claydon (eds.) *God’s Bounty? The Churches and the Natural World*, ed. (Studies in Church History, 46, Woodbridge, 2010), pp. 237–47.

14 For comments on the quality of this special psalm, see Michael Sansom, ‘Liturgical Responses to (Natural) Disaster in Seventeenth-Century England’, *Studia Liturgica* 19 (1989), 179–96.

on Wednesdays, there was either a sermon or one of seven homilies, including a new homily on 'the justice of God', nearly 6,000 words in length. The form of prayer also contained an 'order for the general fast', setting out how people were to spend Wednesdays. All persons aged sixteen to sixty were to eat just one simple meal; the wealthy and comfortable were to increase alms-giving to the poor; all labour was to cease; the day was to be devoted to church services, family prayers and study of scriptures and other godly works, with no plays, pastimes, nor idleness or 'lewd, wicked and wanton behaviour'. As the plague subsided during 1564, after some six months of this weekly regime of services and fasts, thanksgiving services were appointed on Sundays, Wednesday and Fridays, with changed psalms in Morning Prayer and a new composite psalm and a new collect of over 700 words in the litany.

Special services and fast days were ordered during further severe plague outbreaks in 1593, 1603, 1625, twice during 1640, and in 1665. Except in 1640, the forms of prayer borrowed extensively from the form for 1563, including the instructions for observance of fast days, but with the emphasis shifted from the Litany to the other services. In 1603, Morning Prayer took material from the earlier special litany, and the composite psalm 'O come let us humble our selues' replaced the *Venite*. Evening Prayer was now modified as well, taking elements from the special morning prayer, with the composite psalm replacing the *Magnificat*. Four new optional prayers were provided, and a 4,000-word exhortation as an alternative to a sermon or homily. Further innovations followed in 1625. Fast and thanksgiving days were from now onwards ordered by royal proclamation, and only weekly fast days were appointed, without special services on Sundays and Fridays. In Evening Prayer, the composite psalm now followed the *Magnificat*. The Communion service was also substantially changed, with addition of the special prayers for the day and insertion of prayers from elsewhere in the Prayer Book, stressing the penitential aspect with the collect for Ash Wednesday and prayers from the Communion service.

Fast days required remarkable stamina. There are descriptions of congregations spending as many as six or nine hours in church, with several sermons as well as the full series of services. To modern minds, ordering people to gather for long periods in churches has an obvious risk; what was intended as the remedy for an epidemic could make it very much worse. Early modern governments and churchmen had some understanding of these risks. The order for the fast in 1563 stated that in infected places, ministers should keep infected people apart from the rest of the congregation. In 1593 and 1603, ministers were instructed

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to shorten their services, because it was ‘dangerous’ to keep people for the whole day in ‘thicke and close assemblies’. In 1625 royal orders to the clergy stated that church services should be held only in places which were ‘free and safe from danger of infection’, that any persons coming from infected areas should be excluded from the services, and that within the infected areas the fasts and prayers should be observed in private houses—anticipating by nearly 400 years the recent constraints on public worship. Other remedies than prayer and fasting alone were acknowledged. In prayers and the exhortation in 1603, God was praised for the provision of ‘other necessary and profitable’ measures: medicines, advice from physicians, and other ‘means of auoiding, remoouing and repressing’ contagion, including ‘good and wholsome orders, and decrees’, meaning the quarantine orders which governments had been publishing during plague outbreaks since the 1570s. During the plague in 1665, the frequency of fast days was reduced, to the first Wednesday of each month, with only a special litany on Wednesdays in other weeks. While the services retained substantial elements from 1563, including much of the composite psalm, they underwent further revision and there was now more systematic attention to material relief. As ordered by the royal proclamation, collections were to be taken at all church services and paid to the bishop, primarily to assist plague victims in their dioceses, but with any surplus sent to the epicentre of the English epidemic, in London, in effect creating a national relief fund.

The epidemic of 1665 was the last serious English outbreak of the plague. But it was not the end of special acts of worship against this disease. From 1720 to 1723, these were ordered to avert the spread of a plague epidemic from France to the British Isles. Two prayers from the Communion service and two special prayers were added to the Litany for use every Sunday, Wednesday and Friday for as long as forty months, over three years; and two fast days were appointed in 1720 and 1721, now held on a Friday, and with completely new special services. From the first fears of a new outbreak, the government imposed a forty-day quarantine on all ships from affected foreign ports followed by further effective preventative measures, so that the thanksgiving day in 1723 marked a genuine success, with a negligible number of deaths in contrast to over 100,000 in France.

For the next hundred years, no human epidemic was so severe as to prompt orders for special worship. But in a still largely agricultural society, diseases in farm animals could have very serious effects for the food supply and economic life. As already noted, the Catholic missal had included a votive mass for use during murrain or cattle plague.

A panzootic of this disease led to the longest-ever period of special worship in the Church of England: a special prayer used in the Litany or at the end of Morning or Evening prayer for almost eleven years from 1748, ending with a thanksgiving prayer in Morning and Evening Prayer on a Sunday in 1759. A further epidemic of cattle plague in 1865 and 1866 was marked by two issues of petitionary prayers added to Morning and Evening Prayer on Sundays, ending after twelve months with a thanksgiving prayer.

The final human pandemic to cause changes in Prayer Book services was cholera, which spread from India to Europe from the late 1820s. The special acts of worship relating to successive outbreaks of this disease have particular significance, because they were marked by changes and decline in the practice. During the first English outbreak from 1831 to 1833, which affected hundreds of thousands of people and killed over 20,000, as many as five orders for special worship were issued. Special prayers for protection from arrival of the epidemic were added before the Litany or towards the end of Morning Prayer, using material from the service that had been read in similar circumstances for plague in 1720. After the government quarantine failed, these prayers were replaced with prayers for use during the epidemic, read for perhaps fourteen months. Only a single fast day was held, on a Wednesday, with the services yet again using parts of the composite psalm from 1563 and again using material from 1720. Later, a thanksgiving prayer was added to Morning and Evening Prayer, in a new style of use in local parishes as they became free of infection, before a general thanksgiving day for the whole kingdom was ordered to mark the end of the epidemic, now held on a Sunday rather than in midweek.

The frequency of these orders for special worship derived not just from fear of the infection, but from wider political and religious crises caused by Catholic emancipation, parliamentary reform, popular protest and pre-millenarian evangelicalism—conditions which provoked new degrees of controversy about special worship. Petitions were organised both for and against a general fast, the subject was raised in Parliament, and radical protests took place on the fast day, which was lampooned as a ‘farce day’ and challenged by calls for a ‘feast day’ to celebrate political reforms. The texts for the special worship continued as they had since the 1560s to present mortal infection as God’s punishment for national sins, and prayer and repentance as the principal remedy for contagion. But political and public attitudes towards special worship were now changing, with some becoming sceptical or critical. This was still more evident during the most severe outbreak of cholera, in 1848–9, when

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around 50,000 died. Only with great reluctance did the government order special prayers and it refused to appoint a fast day, which caused such outrage to religious opinion that at the end of the outbreak the government reverted to the traditional practice of a thanksgiving day in the middle of the week. In 1865 and 1866 a further cholera epidemic coincided with the outbreak of cattle plague; but the government again rejected appeals for a fast day and ordered only special prayers, for both cholera and cattle plague in tandem.

The reasons for these changed attitudes are complex.¹⁵ Orders by the state for special acts of worship had become less acceptable among the religious public, certainly to Nonconformists and Roman Catholics who now had full political rights, but also to high-church Anglicans, uneasy with such conspicuous Erastianism. Liberal and philanthropic opinion criticised fast days as depriving poor families of a day's wages. Prevailing religious beliefs were shifting. There was now less emphasis on God as judge and on special providences—on periodic divine interventions in the natural and human worlds—and more emphasis on a benevolent God and on a general providence, which had given humans the intellectual and moral capacities to mitigate, control or avoid crises. Religion, it was now commonly argued, should embrace scientific and medical advances, which were successfully providing natural and medical rather than supernatural explanations and remedies for epidemics. During a cholera outbreak in 1853, which killed around 10,000 people, the home secretary, Lord Palmerston publicly rejected proposals for a fast day because, he argued, the truly providential remedy for infections was improved sanitation and better cleanliness. Queen Victoria, who as sovereign was ultimately responsible for state orders for special worship, held similar opinions. In 1849 she privately dismissed the belief that a general fast would end the epidemic as 'superstitious' and instead urged better health measures. Thereafter she criticised all proposals for fast days and most types of special prayers and services, and in some cases prevented their appointment.

These changed attitudes affected special acts of worship in general, and those for epidemics in particular. From the 1870s state orders for special worship became rare, and appointment of special acts of worship became increasingly a matter for decision by the archbishops. National acts of special worship did not cease altogether. During the First World War, as closer relations between the various British churches developed, new types of interdenominational occasions of special worship were

¹⁵ Philip Williamson, 'State Prayers, Fasts and Thanksgivings: Public Worship in Britain 1830–1897', *Past and Present*, 200 (2008), 121–74.

created. These included the creation of 'national days of prayer'—national because involving all religious denominations, and because publicly approved (not ordered) by the sovereign and, during the Second World War, facilitated by the government. But state involvement in nation-wide acts of special worship eventually ended in the 1950s, for two reasons.¹⁶ Divine providence was now regarded as truly universal, without favour towards particular nations; and as church attendance and public belief in God seemed to be in sharp decline, the archbishops as well as the government concluded that it was no longer realistic to ask the whole nation to join in prayer. Special acts of worship were now narrowed to regular church attenders, and even when these occasions were sometimes called 'national days of prayer', as recently, they were national only in being interdenominational occasions with a wide geographical spread of observance.

National calls for petitionary worship during epidemics ended earlier. When governments had been reluctant during the nineteenth century to appoint special prayers and fast days for cholera and cattle plague, the bishops had been prepared to act alone. Before the government conceded special prayers in 1849 and 1866, many of them instructed their clergy to use the occasional prayer 'in the time of any common plague or sickness', or issued their own prayers. Many also appointed mid-week days of humiliation in their dioceses, in 1866 usually recommending that during the services the clergy should use the Litany, the Communion service and the special prayer which the government eventually conceded. These occasions of independent action by the bishops became the precedents for coordinated appointment of special prayers and services by the archbishops after the decline of state orders, and which became common during the early twentieth century for numerous types of crises, causes and celebrations. But these occasions no longer included epidemics. During a severe flu epidemic in 1892, the archbishops wanted to appoint a national day of humiliation but were discouraged by the Queen, even though her eldest grandson, the Duke of Clarence, had been a victim. No coordinated appeals for special prayers were issued during the influenza pandemic of 1918–19, which killed over 200,000 in Britain. In part this was because pandemics were now regarded as having medical rather than religious causes, and although much more severe than usual, influenza was a familiar illness. But the chief reason was almost certainly because the pandemic was eclipsed by the crisis of the First World War, with over three-quarters of a million

16 Philip Williamson, 'National Days of Prayer: The Churches, the State and Public Worship in Britain 1899–1957', *English Historical Review* 128 (2013), 323–66.

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British dead, for which the archbishops had already multiplied the issue of special services, including prayers included for doctors and nurses.

These wartime special services were increasingly independent of the structure and text of the Prayer Book, and bishops also began to encourage ministers to extemporise their own prayers. The First World War was decisive in the long departure of the Church both from uniformity and from conformity to The Book of Common Prayer,¹⁷ contributing to the movement that led to the revised prayer book of 1928, *The Alternative Service Book* in 1980 and *Common Worship* from 2000. Calls for special prayers during epidemics in recent times—for example, foot-and-mouth in 2001, and the Covid pandemic in March 2020—have been distinct from the special acts of worship of earlier centuries. They were not appeals for divine intervention to end the disease, but for support for those affected; and they no longer, of course, include directions for modifying the use of The Book of Common Prayer.

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17 *National Prayers* 3, pp. xcii–xcix.