

Dear all

I have just seen a post from one of my favourite Christian writers, Philip Yancey. His piece starts *It's my own fault. Because I've written books with titles like Where Is God When It Hurts, Disappointment with God, and The Question That Never Goes Away, my phone starts ringing when there's a mass shooting, a tsunami... or a rogue virus that spreads across the world. Would I please comment on this radio show, or that podcast? I've done little else this frightful week, as a tiny virus from the other side of the world has brought modern civilization to its knees.*

If you would like to read his post in full – and it is a very good theological reflection on where God is in all this – the link is

<https://philipyancey.com/living-in-plague-times?fbclid=IwAR2956bDPJLYMa7VmzUCouxlf2tmKzADEpN0gb7CUCXcFb-G6AOURWSX78>

Also, an interesting coincidence in church history...

24 March 1208: After King John opposed his choice for Archbishop of Canterbury, Pope Innocent III places Britain under an interdict. Innocent had all religious services cancelled, churches closed, and the dead were not given Christian burials until John surrendered. Soon after, the king signed the Magna Carta, in which the first article affirms "That the Church of England shall be free..."

At least, we can continue to offer Christian funerals!

On a more uplifting note, this from Richard Coles' Facebook post today...

It is the bicentenary of the birth of Fanny Crosby, Queen of Gospel. If that makes you think of Aretha Franklin, she was not quite that sort of queen and not quite that sort of Gospel. She was in fact the most prolific hymn writer in history, with more than eight thousand hymns to her name, and sales calculated in the tens of millions. Born in a shack in upstate New York on this day in 1820 to a family of puritan heritage descended from the spy Enoch Crosby, she went blind as a baby after her mother applied mustard-poultices to her eyes to cure an inflammation. Blindness seemed to open the door to formidable creativity and her first hymn was written at the age of eight. She never looked back, producing such classics as *Blessed Assurance* and *To God Be The Glory*, rousing pieces, notable for a cheerfully unnuanced penal substitutionary atonement theology. They became especially popular with Moody and Sankey, evangelical preachers and musicians who played such an important role in the history of Protestant America. Fanny became a household name, the first woman to address the Senate, and an advocate for the blind as well as an evangelist of the gospel. She was also rather an unsettled Christian, moving from congregation to congregation usually frustrated with what she thought of as a lack of zeal. Her marriage too was unsteady, and she lived separately from her husband, her accompanist, for twenty years. She was hopeless with money, earning fortunes but giving them away and taking no interest in business so that others profited enormously from her and she had to be rescued from poverty by her supporters when she was in her eighties. She died in 1915. Her hymns are still sung today and are tremendously popular with the ladies (mostly) and gentlemen at the home. One Easter when I canvassed the residents for their favourite hymns to sing, *To God Be the Glory* was the winner (although a number of renegades voted for YMCA).

Stay safe

Love & blessings

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