

ARS MORIENDI

THE ART OF DYING WELL

Outline

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- Hymns to sing while dying (to help you look at Christ)
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- Getting earthly life and possessions in order for the sake of your family
- The historic Christian practice of Christian Burial (as opposed to modern “celebrations of life”)
- Planning the funeral service

INTRODUCTION TO *ARS MORIENDI*

I. INTRODUCTION: A Pastor & A Funeral Director Walk into a Bar

How do we make sense of something none of us have experienced?

“It is in the interest of our eternal salvation that we should take time to study something that, properly speaking, we shall make use of only once. It is appointed for all to die; but to die with piety, to die in Christ, to die happily [well] is not for everyone.”¹

The Canaanite Woman – Matthew 15:21-28

²¹Jesus left that place and withdrew into the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²²There a Canaanite woman from that territory came and kept crying out, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! A demon is severely tormenting my daughter!”

²³But he did not answer her a word...²⁵But she came and knelt in front of him, saying, “Lord, help me.”

²⁶He answered her, “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to their little dogs.”

²⁷“Yes, Lord,” she said, **“yet their little dogs also eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”**

²⁸Then Jesus answered her, **“Woman, your faith is great!”** It will be done for you, just as you desire.” And her daughter was healed at that very hour.

¹ Johann Gerhard, “Handbook of Consolations,” preface, pgs. 3-4

To the world, what does “dying well,” or a “good death” look like?

David's Seven-Day Old Son Dies – 2 Samuel 12:17

¹⁸On the seventh day the child died. The servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, because they said, “Look! When the child was living, we spoke to David, but he did not listen to what we said. How will we speak to him now when the child is dead? He might do something harmful.”

¹⁹When David saw that his servants were whispering together, he understood that the child was dead. So David said to his servants, “Is the child dead?” They said, “Yes, he is dead.”

²⁰**Then David got up** from the ground, washed, put on lotion, and changed his clothes. He went to the House of the Lord and **worshipped**. He then went back to his house and asked for food. So they prepared a meal for him, and he ate.

²¹His servants said to him, “What are you doing? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept. But when the child died, you got up and ate food.”

²²He said, “**While the child was alive, I fasted and wept** because I said, ‘Who knows? Will the Lord be gracious to me and let my child live?’” ²³Now he has died. Why should I fast? Am I able to return him to life again? **I will go to him, but he will not return to me.**”

The Rich Man & Poor Lazarus – Luke 16:19-25

¹⁹“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen, living in luxury every day. ²⁰A beggar named Lazarus had been laid at his gate. Lazarus was covered with sores and ²¹longed to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Besides this, the dogs also came and licked his sores. ²²**Eventually the beggar died, and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³In hell, where he was in torment,** he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus at his side. ²⁴He called out and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me! Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in misery in this flame.’

²⁵“But Abraham said, **‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus received bad things. But now he is comforted here, and you are in misery.**”

The Resurrected Jesus Appears (Still Wounded) to Forgive and Restore – John 20:19-20

¹⁹On the evening of that first day of the week, the disciples were together behind locked doors because of their fear of the Jews. Jesus **came, stood among them,** and said to them, **“Peace be with you!”** ²⁰After he said this, he **showed them his hands and side.** So the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

The Seventh Petition of the Lord's Prayer (ELH pg. 34)

But deliver us from evil.

What does this mean?

We pray in this petition, **as the sum of all,** that our Father in heaven would deliver us from every evil of body and soul, property and honor; **and at last, when the hour of death shall come, grant us a blessed end,** and graciously take us from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven.

II. HISTORY OF ARS MORIENDI

14th century: Bubonic Plague - "The Great Mortality"

1st wave hit Europe from 1348–1352 and killed up to half the population of Eurasia.

Although the plague died out in most places, it became endemic and recurred regularly.

2nd wave hit in the late 17th century.

15th century: Ars Moriendi - "The Art of Dying"

A general mood of "live for the moment" swept through the majority of the population, popularized by things such as Giovanni Boccaccio's *The Decameron* ("the Ten Days of Humor") [1353]²

On the other hand, the Roman Catholic church tried to correct this by producing *Ars Moriendi* literature following on the heels of the Great Mortality. Most of this centered on one's ability to atone for past sins and make themselves right with God before they died. It advised the dying to not think about earthly matters at all, disparaging those who would make arrangements in a last will and testament. Other innovations around this time, such as the Rosary, directed people to their own piety or to the piety of the saints.

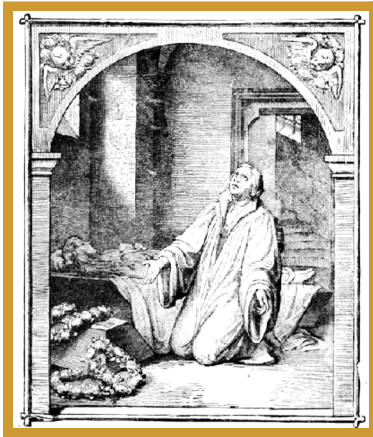
16th century: Lutheran Reformation

Lutheran *Ars Moriendi* directed the dying not to inner reflection or piety, but to the sure promises of the Gospel. Lutheran authors urged the dying to meditate on Christ's death and resurrection for the sake of their conscience, and at the same time to make earthly arrangements for the sake of their neighbor. Luther especially advises ministers and those with the vocation to care for the body to not abandon those dying with the plague, but to suffer death, if God calls them to it.³

² Dr. Sanjay Kumar, "A Handbook of Political Geography," (K.K. Publications) pg. 131

³ Martin Luther, "How Should a Christian Act During a Deadly Epidemic?" (Published and Translated by Asia Lutheran Seminary, 2020), pg. 3ff.

III. FACES OF DEATH: A FEW LUTHERAN AUTHORS OF ARS MORIENDI



Martin Luther

A Meditation on Christ's Suffering (1519); *A Sermon on Preparing to Die* (1519); *Fourteen Consolations* (1520); *Comfort When Facing Grave Temptations* (1521), *How Should A Christian Act During a Deadly Epidemic?* (1527).

† Magdalena Luther, Martin and Katherine's 3rd child, died September, 20 1542 at 15 years old, from a prolonged illness.

† Elizabeth Luther, had died the year before Magdalena was born, at the age of seven months.

† Martin Luther died February 18, 1546, Eisleben

"The death of Magdalena", Lucas Cranach the Elder, 1542

In 1531, as Luther looked back on his decade and a half of reforming efforts, he wrote,

"Now it has come, praise God to this: men and women, young and old, **know the catechism.** They know how to believe, live, pray, **suffer, and die.**"⁴

Luther wrote to his friend, the Rev. Justus Jonas after Magdalena's death:

"I and my wife should joyfully give thanks for such a felicitous departure and blessed end by which Magdalena escaped the power of the flesh, the world, the Turk and the devil; yet the force of our natural love is so great that we are unable to do this without crying and grieving in our hearts, or even without experiencing death ourselves. The features, the words and the movements of the living and dying daughter remain deeply engraved in our hearts. Even the death of Christ... is unable to take this all away as it should. **You, therefore, give thanks to God in our stead.** For indeed God did a great work of grace when he glorified our flesh in this way. Magdalena had (as you know) a mild and lovely disposition and was loved by all... God grant me and all my loved ones and all my friends such a death – or rather such a life."⁵

The Rev. Justus Jonas was with Luther in his final moments. Seeking a good confession from Luther, Jonas asked him: "Do you want to die standing firm on Christ and the doctrine you have taught?" Luther answered emphatically, "Yes!" After Luther died, found on a scrap of paper in his pocket were these words, now famously known to be Luther's last: **"We are beggars. This is true."** Perhaps Luther had 1 Timothy 6:7 on his mind: "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out." Fittingly, on February 18, 1546, Luther died within sight of the font where he was baptized as an infant. Although able to carry nothing into or out the world, through baptism, Luther gained all of heaven.

⁴ Handbook of Consolations, x

⁵ Hendrix, Scott H. (2010). Martin Luther: A Very Short Introduction. Very Short Introductions. Oxford University Press, pg. 76.



Johann Spangenberg

A Booklet of Comfort for the Sick (1548)

† June 13, 1550, Eisleben

Spangenberg, a friend of Luther's, was pastor of Nordhausen. His booklet was reprinted sixteen times from 1542 to 1597. He was called to Nordhausen to introduce the Reformation. After the local school system collapsed in May of 1525, Spangenberg taught students at home and rebuilt the school system by 1531. He wrote mainly catechetical materials. His Booklet of Comfort was dedicated **to the students**. "Life was as fragile and precarious in the sixteenth century as it was in the fifteenth and these pupils would have had an acquaintance with disease and death at a very young age"⁶



Johann Gerhard

Handbook of Consolations:

For the Fears and Trials that Oppress Us in the Struggle with Death (1611)

† August 17, 1637

As he is writing the handbook, Gerhard is mourning the death of his newborn son, Johannes Georg, who died at 17 days old, and praying for his young wife, Barbara Neumeier, whose health is failing.

He writes in his preface, "This handbook is also for my own private use as I too bear a sickly body and frail vessel. Moreover, death recently made a very grievous visit to my house, and there are other reasons why I should fear that my own life will not be long."⁷

His handbook was completed May 1, 1611. His wife Barbara died on May 30.

Gerhard says in his preface, "It is appointed for all to die, but to die with piety, to die in Christ, to die happily [well] is not for everyone...For if, at any time, our clever enemy conspires against our salvation and tries to rob us of it with all his might, it will certainly be at the last hour of our life."⁸

Lutheran Hymnwriters

- Martin Schalling the Younger ("Lord, Thee I Love with All My Heart"), † December 29, 1608
- Paul Gerhardt ("Why Should Cross and Trial Grieve Me?" and many more), † May 27, 1676

⁶ Carl L. Beckwith, Introduction to "Handbook of Consolations," xi

⁷ Johann Gerhard, "Handbook of Consolations," preface, pg. 5

⁸ Gerhard, *ibid.*

Psalm 90:12

*“Teach us to number our days,
That we may gain a heart of wisdom.”*